

**Parents' decision-making of primary school  
choice for their children in KwaZulu-Natal.**

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## Abstract

This study is located within the post-apartheid context of South Africa focusing on the shifting deliberations of parents as they make primary school choice decisions for their children. The exploration is based on interconnecting factors of a systemic, institutional and personal level that influence decision-making; set against a theoretical framework of Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory; his concept of field; and a history of the life course which predispose parent's own interpretations of their choices.

The study adopts a mixed methodology approach firstly with a survey questionnaire conducted with parents of Grade 3 learners from three schools in the Durban North region; leading sequentially on to case-study qualitative interviews. The narratives of 9 parents (3 from each school) are presented to capture the complexity of the intersecting time related factors that influence their decision-making, and their interpretations of these choices.

The quantitative data was analysed through a descriptive, statistical analysis. The construction of narratives detailing school choice life stories and chronological cross-case analysis resulted from a grounded, inductive approach to the qualitative analysis. Quantitative data was nested in the qualitative data to provide for a mixed-method analysis.

The findings offer insight into the different migratory patterns set up by working and middle-class parents across race and gender to access different types of schooling. Parent's own background, upbringing, and schooling strongly influence their expectations of what schools should be providing for their children. These expectations are further elaborated on during the course of their engagement whilst their children are 'in school;' the process of homework activities providing insight into school curricular matters.

Parents have aspirational expectations of their present chosen school, which are partially met or remain unfulfilled. They do not seem to prioritise early education or pedagogic matters when choosing schools, and reflect wholly on the sociological and economic value of schooling choices. School choice in post-apartheid South Africa has brought differentiations of familial migratory patterns.

*Key words: school choice; mixed-method study; parents; post-apartheid education*

## **Declaration**

I, Nadira Manickchund, declare that:

- (i) the research reported in this thesis is my own work, unless otherwise stated;
- (ii) that this thesis has not been submitted at any other university, for any degree or examination purpose;
- (iii) this thesis does not contain any other person's graphs, data, pictures, or any other relevant information, unless otherwise stated as acknowledgements from other sources;
- (iv) this thesis does not contain another person's writing, unless otherwise stated as acknowledgements from other sources. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
  - a) their words have been rewritten but the general information from the original source has been acknowledged;
  - b) where the exact words have been used, then these words have been placed within quotation marks and referenced;
- (v) this thesis does not contain graphs, texts or tables copied and pasted from the internet.

Signed: .....

## **Dedication**

To my parents,  
who educated their daughters,  
steeped in traditional values and duties,  
shaping their independence,  
so that they could extend their very expectations,  
to elevate themselves for the good of humankind.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you,

Professor Michael Samuel, for sharing your time with me. I am honoured to have been in the company of your greatness. It is an aspiration I would have never dreamed of. Yet, it came true.

To my challenging and adorable family- I spoilt you by being an at-home mum, yet when I took up the greatest challenge ever, you gave me the space to grow. Love you forever- Naren, Shulka, Tashmil and Milan;

and to my dear friend, Umang John, whose constant nagging demanded success. I thank you tremendously for being such a big part of our lives.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CAPS: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements

ECD: Early Childhood Development

SASA: South African Schools Act

COLT: Culture of learning and teaching

ANA: Annual National Assessments

UCT: University of Cape Town

USA: United States of America

UK: United Kingdom

ISASA: Independent School's Association of South Africa

SES: socio- economic status

IEB: Independent Examinations Board

KZN: KwaZulu-Natal

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# Ethical Clearance Certificate



07 April 2014

Mrs Nadira Manickchund (9802800)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/1207/013D  
Project title: Parent's decision-making of early education choices for their children

Dear Mrs Manickchund,

## Full Approval – Expedited

In response to your application dated 21 August 2013, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
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/ms

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## **PROLOGUE**

### *Losing my voice*

I was born in 1967. Having lived almost 50 years in South Africa, my life is a reflection of the changes occurring in a developing and rapidly changing country. How did I make sense of this shifting terrain from apartheid to democracy? Did I become the transformed new citizen of a promised new era? And how did my role as a learner, university student, parent, educator, and researcher shift my thinking over this period? Reflecting on the transformation that I have experienced in this country, what choices was I making, and how were these similar or different from my compatriots?

In apartheid South Africa, the White racial group had superior legal and economic status while Black people (comprised of the African, Indian and Coloured groups) were deliberately relegated to a lesser and disadvantaged status. Were these legal framings sufficient to completely suppress the aspirations of these separated communities? As a young Indian person in apartheid South Africa, I experienced first-hand the insidious tentacles of prejudice that infiltrated our everyday lives. We lived separate lives in demarcated residential areas, bounded by differential schooling and recreational geographies. We inherited the legacy of minority status. When our racial lines crossed paths, they confirmed ascendancy and relegation.

I vividly remember as a young adult taking my initial driving lessons from my dad. We chose the quiet suburbs of a White neighbourhood to practice. Proceeding slowly, my eyes were on the road, looking for potential danger. Suddenly, a swerving car drew alongside us. A White woman in the passenger seat rolled down her window, made direct eye contact with me and yelled at the top of her voice, “Stupid,” gesturing me to move over and let them pass.

The scars of this incident remain with me today. My dad believed it was a turning point which shook my confidence as an emerging young adult. My family wondered whether I would ever get into the driver’s seat again. Would I be able to traverse relationships across different racial lines? This became a recurring question in my

young adulthood as “Stupid, stupid, stupid” reverberated in my consciousness.

Our family social interactions with other racial groups, or even other cultural groups, were relatively non-existent. I attended school in a context which was largely uni-racial, but perhaps religiously diverse. The school was zoned to service Indian people in a separate geographical community. The fear of being barked at by people of other races resulted in me always treading carefully in social relationships across groups. The single act of the White woman chastising me for being in her way indicated my position in the then South African society. I was the underdog. I internalised the misbelief that White people in South Africa are indeed superior, and that one must never cross their paths or inconvenience them in any way. I was destined to be with small voice. For me, speaking out sparked the danger of being shut down. To avoid criticism and hurt meant treading the safe path, never causing an upset. Indeed, I was a model citizen of apartheid ideals.

I was 27 when we became a democratic country. By then, I had completed my first degree, was teaching in a primary school, married and had my first child. All these activities were rooted, however, in apartheid, separatist South Africa. The advent of democracy and the realisation of the right to exercise our political freedom to vote and elect our government for the first time in 1994 presented the opportunity for new beginnings. I naively thought that we could be whoever we wanted to be. This was an era of new choices: choosing to escape the boundaries of bounded geographies and spaces, and cultural and racial separation, and erasing the barking condemnations of “the other,” we could select the direction for ourselves and our children. I thought this meant exercising the standard actions of democracy.

I remember when I approached a school in a previous ‘White’ area to enrol my daughter in her first year of schooling. It was my first step into what I thought was “a democratic school.” These were the very early days of democracy. I expected change to be a difficult process, but I really under-estimated the levels of resistance. The female White principal simply refused to grant enrolment to my daughter, even though we had purchased land close to the school and were planning to build a house. It was within our rights to approach the school as we would be residing in its zoned area. However, the principal declared that she could not accept our application. She



said in a matter of fact way that her experience had shown that “other families” (by this I suppose she meant not White families) were buying property in order to secure access to her school, but once their children were enrolled they sold the property. She was adamant that the school was zoned for people already living in the residential area and that she would do whatever was necessary to protect the education policies of the new democracy. She kept our application on hold until we had built our house and moved in. Only then was she prepared to grant a seat to my daughter at her school. Her actions spoke volumes of the new democracy. Was she making enrolment in her school difficult in order to protect its inherent ethos? Did she hope to make it difficult for racial mixing to occur? Was she non-trusting of people of colour? Was my reading of White people itself prejudiced? These and many other stories make up the fabric of the schooling situation in the democratic South Africa.

Whilst I may not have directly experienced schooling as a learner post-1994, my children have. Democracy gave me opportunities to make choices for the education of my children. While I lost my voice growing up in apartheid and early democratic society, perhaps I could find it through the choices I made for my children’s education. What informed my decision to send my children to the kinds of schools that my husband and I selected? How were these choices understood by other parents (of different racial, cultural and class groupings) in a rapidly transforming society? Would the new opportunities for racially crossing over yield new patterns of school choices among parents? What were parents’ expectations of their “new schools”? These questions filled my mind as I began my doctoral study.

# Chapter 1: Background, Context and Rationale

*That school is a good school*

## 1.1. Orientation

For many, the school one attended during primary or secondary education was not a decision that one necessarily had much control over. These choices were often made by one's parents or guardians. In choosing schools for their children, parents are influenced by their own beliefs and value systems, their access to school marketing information, the goals and aspirations they set for their families, their economic situation and their methods of evaluating schools (Cooper, 2005). In addition to these school 'choicing' criteria, the process may be intensified when parents become immersed in education and the politics of their country, as in an emerging democracy such as South Africa. What opportunities and constraints do South African parents experience as they engage in school choices for their children within a new democracy? What influence does past experiences of living under and being educated in an apartheid regime, have on how they make school choice decisions? What, exactly, does school choice mean for the South African parent? Does it even exist? The circumstances influencing why certain choices are made are also relevant. How do parents interpret the goals of education then and now? What were, and are, the particular expectations and motivations that accompany educational options? School choice sometimes extends beyond merely selecting an institution. A child that is not academically successful in school might need alternative and additional educational services. In this chapter I explore how I came to research the phenomenon of parents making schooling choices for their children in a post-apartheid society (1.2). I outline the specific context in which this study is located and why I chose to focus on this phenomenon (1.3). The chapter also explores who would benefit from such a study (1.4). At the end of chapter 1, the overall structure of the thesis report is presented.

## 1.2. Background

This section traces the education pathways of firstly, myself, as a product of apartheid education, and my children, as examples of opportunities for a "democratic

education". In doing so, I am reminded of the quest for quality education and ruminate on whether my choices reflect my own conceptions of quality.

### **1.2.1. My education pathway**

I attended primary school during the 1970s in what was then known as Natal. Under apartheid rule, the races were legally separated and attended schools designated for different groups. Separate Departments of Education controlled the education of each race group (African, Indian, Coloured and White) (Fiske & Ladd, 2005). As a result school choice options were few or non-existent across racial barriers, and much of the choice that was available was pre-determined by apartheid laws. Therefore, I was destined to attend an Indian primary school within walking distance of my home in an Indian residential area. My school was relatively well-furnished with classrooms, books, and qualified Indian teachers. This was considered privileged, especially by the vast majority of the African population whose schools were severely under-resourced. I achieved an average level of formal education. My teachers were my sole source of formal education, as private tuition was a virtually unheard of in the average Indian household.

We belonged to middle-class Indian society. Having inherited his family's furniture manufacturing business, my father was the sole breadwinner while my mother worked at home taking care of her husband and three children. After completing primary school, my father joined the business under the watchful eye of his father. My mother completed secondary school and briefly studied nursing before foregoing a career to become a home-maker. While she had more education than my father, gender stereotypes and cultural demands determined their roles. It came as no surprise then that both my parents highly valued education, my father due to his lack of education and my mother because of her unrequited foray into it. We achieved well under their guidance. All three siblings studied at tertiary institutions in the province and went on to achieve economically successful lives. I became a teacher at a local school in Durban after studying for a Bachelor of Music at the former University of Natal, which was designated as a university chiefly for Whites. It was considered somewhat ground-breaking that I gained entrance to this prestigious institution. My younger sister studied Speech and Hearing Therapy at the University of Durban-Westville,

designated for the Indian and Black communities, and then moved to the UK to practice, whilst my brother, the youngest child, studied Electrical Engineering at the local technical school, and relocated to Johannesburg. Thus, within one generation, education enabled us to cross political and geographical borders. Fataar (2015) postulates that this was the life course of many of those oppressed by apartheid:

“Paths were carved out of the racially restricting discursive materials of the apartheid order. Aspiration was established out of people’s ability to engage these limitations and establish ways of getting by and getting on” (Fataar, 2015, p.14).

This suggests that individuals with particular means, such as my middle class parents were able to overcome the confines of apartheid and enter into previously uncharted territory. In post-apartheid South Africa such opportunities are in principle legally available to a wider constituency. Whether all parents and their children are able to successfully traverse these new terrains is the underlying subject of this thesis. The focus is how parents exercise school choices for their children.

The only subject that I excelled at in school was Music. This enabled me to study Music Education at a White university, register for a Masters degree in an Indian university, and conduct research for my PhD in a democratic university. However, my diverse educational path proved more detrimental than positive. My schooling did not adequately prepare me for Math and Science subjects, pushing me into very small choices for further study. I began teaching Music and then Foundation Phase children after my initial degree, filling in the gaps in my knowledge with further study in the field of pedagogy. It was much later, after a Masters and continuing doctoral study that I began to realise how shallow my education path had been in equipping me to teach. The theoretical, philosophical, and pedagogical pillars of education study were revealed to me sporadically, as I learnt only what was necessary when it was necessary. As I look back on the course of my life, I question the quality of my education choices. Did my education pathway prepare me for greater ambition? How has my South African education prepared me to survive in the wake of socio-political changes? How, then, do I assess quality in education?

### **1.2.2. Education choices for my children**

As a parent in a democratic South African society, I have the privilege of choosing from several schooling options for my children. My three children attend ex-Model C and private schools. In the early post-apartheid days, my husband and I decided that our two daughters should have a better education than we were exposed to. Whilst our intentions in seeking alternative types of schooling for our children stemmed purely from the disadvantages we had experienced in an apartheid society, as well as taking up the opportunities made available through democracy, we further delineated our choices to pursue options that were labelled as 'advantaged'. This was due to the fact that public education was fraught with problems. Ramphele (2008) notes that the legacy of the inferior education received by African people in the past, which resulted in low Math and Science achievement, and the fact that the majority of teachers are unqualified and under-qualified, is one of the major challenges of post-apartheid education. These problems further fuelled our decision to seek alternative schooling.

My husband and I relocated to a mixed race, middle-class residential area, so that our children could attend previously advantaged schools. When our son was born some time later, we looked for what we then deemed even more privileged schooling options, and decided on private education. In the schooling choices that we made for our children, we seem to have been under the impression that by taking advantage of democratic education policies, our children would receive better quality education than we were exposed to. But did we have a clear conception of what quality education meant? These issues troubled me.

As my children progressed, it became apparent that just going to school was insufficient. They each required extra private tuition for different reasons. This became a necessary part of our lives for three reasons: high academic achievement, remediation and health therapy. As a high academic achiever, my eldest daughter felt she needed private tuition to achieve high grades for university entrance in her chosen career path. Furthermore, all her friends in her Matric year were receiving such tuition. My second daughter needed private tuition to pass certain subjects. The personal assistance that she required when learning concepts was lacking in her public schooling. Having being diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) at the age of seven, my son utilised a different form of private tuition in the form of therapy

interventions from health professionals, such as a Clinical Psychologist, an Occupational therapist, and a Speech and Hearing therapist. Our experiences of private tuition made us realise that the choice of school was not the only major educational choice necessary for our children as they proceeded on their educational paths. “Educational choices” expanded beyond enrolment in a specific institutional schooling setting. This led me to further question the quality of schooling. In addition to school fees of up to R25000 (\$1745.68)<sup>1</sup> a year for public middle-class secondary schooling and around R67000 (\$4678.41) for private primary schooling, extra tuition had to be paid for. These additional, unexpected demands of the new types of schooling challenged my conception of the original reasons for the schooling choices I had made for my children. Have the schools presented what I had hoped for? Were my choices for quality schooling realised? Did the choice of schools work towards fulfilling my quest for educational quality? I wondered whether other parents had reservations about the investment they were making in their children’s schooling. These issues and questions became the foundations of exploration for my research study.

### **1.3. Context**

It is evident that several factors determine one of the most important decisions parents make for their children, choosing education pathways. The first choice is which institution their children attend. This could be considered the foundation phase of their children’s lives. However, several other factors influence school choices. These include the macro-contextual features of the education system of the country, education policies and the provisioning of education. I was interested to establish how parents derive their understanding of these issues and how that knowledge contributes to their school choice decisions. Secondly, schooling choices reflect expectations of early childhood education. What do parents expect should be taught and learnt in these early years? Furthermore, parents need to consider what they wish schooling to provide to their children. This is perhaps related to their personal backgrounds. Are such aspirations similar or different among parents from different geographic locations, histories, racial and class groups, and family structures? How do family aspirations for schooling emerge? Does gender play a role in decision-making about

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<sup>1</sup> Conversion rates as at August 2016.

school choices?

### **1.3.1. The education system in South Africa**

The government school curriculum in South Africa, known as the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12 (Department of Basic Education, 2011), was first implemented in 2012. Refinements were formulated in more specific Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for each subject. The South Africa curriculum has changed many times since the dawn of democracy and is aligned with an outcomes-based education philosophy. The NCS emerged in response to criticism that the curriculum lacked content specificity. Singh-Pillay & Samuel (2017) outline three phases of curriculum reform in South Africa. The Interim Curriculum (1995) involved large volumes of practical work and continuous assessment. The Outcomes-based Education curriculum (2006) required overarching conceptual and knowledge development, while the prescriptive CAPS curriculum (2011) reduced teachers' autonomy as developers of curriculum. If the curriculum changes required teachers to re-interpret their roles, how are parents supposed to make meaning of these changes and how do they impact on their role in education matters?

### **1.3.2 Education policies create school choice**

During the apartheid era, the race groups were separated in different living and schooling areas and were not legally allowed access to facilities designated for other groups. This determined where one obtained one's schooling. However, as apartheid crumbled, so too did racial segregation, opening up potentially new options for schooling choices. Woolman & Fleisch (2006) note that the National Education Policy Act (1996) advanced opportunities for school choice. Parents were now legally able to live in any residential area and could send their children to the schools zoned within that area. Even if their permanent family home was not within the schooling zone, if they lived and worked in the area, for example, as a live-in domestic worker, their children were eligible to attend neighbourhood schools. Schools were also compelled to allow children from other zoned areas to apply for any available spaces once the children from within that zone had been accommodated (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006, p. 41). Families that could afford to migrate to better residential areas

did so purely to allow their children access to schooling in more privileged schools than they were accustomed to. Ginsburg, Richter, & Fleisch (2011) acknowledge the positive learning outcomes achieved by some disadvantaged pupils who moved from Soweto and attribute this to possible improvement in living conditions (Ginsburg et al., 2011, p. 221).

School choice in the democratic South Africa thus largely became a need to secure better schooling opportunities for children in whatever loophole parents could identify, that would serve their needs as a family. While the intended goal of democratic education policies was to de-racialise schooling to provide equal opportunities for all, implementation of these policies limited school choice. Challenges included school fees, the medium of instruction, and admission policies. Firstly, the South African Schools Act (1996) empowered School Governing Bodies to set fee structures and control school funds to suit the needs of the school and community (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006, p. 43). This limited school choice as only parents who could pay the fees could consider sending their children to the school. More affluent schools set higher fees in order to hire additional teachers to maintain a lower pupil/teacher ratio; provide additional resources and facilities; and offer more extra-mural opportunities (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006, p. 43); or simply to maintain the privileged resourcing status they enjoyed in the past. The second limitation that constrained school choice was the medium of instruction. By choosing Afrikaans as the medium of instruction, schools immediately constrained access by African pupils who did not speak the language (Jansen, 2009, p. 35). Thus, opportunities for school choice were not as open as they may have appeared to be. I thus set out to investigate how parents from different backgrounds have negotiated the policy when making school choice decisions for their children.

### **1.3.3. Schooling choices in South Africa**

There are three distinct types of schools in South Africa: private schools; middle-class public schools; and working-class public schools. Traditionally, private schools existed in the more affluent, elite residential areas and are characterised by very high school fees and alternative curriculum choices; and target student outcomes that fit the profile of the modern world. Middle-class public schools, known as ex-Model C



schools were White schools under apartheid that follow the government curriculum but have the freedom to set class sizes. The fees they charge enable them to hire extra teachers. Their level of resources and extra-curricular facilities is also determined by their fee structure. Large classes characterise working-class public schools, where provisioning norms for large pupil/teacher ratios exist, and school fees are set according to the community's socio-economic status, making it difficult for these schools to charge high fees in the hope of hiring more teachers. Fiske & Ladd (2004) note that school fees led to the social sorting of learners between schools in the early stages of democracy and new education policies. By putting structures in place that maintained their quality, former White schools were able to allow learners from other race groups to attend, while also perhaps preventing their learners from being attracted to private schooling. However, the school fee policy did little to address the poor resourcing of historically underprivileged schools (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 81). It should be noted that, within this broad typology of schooling in South Africa, there are blurred boundaries which unfold as the discussion proceeds. The question is whether or not parents are seeking new and different types of schooling.

#### **1.3.4. Early Education**

When my children were younger, my husband and I were solely responsible for making education choices for them. As they grew older, they became part of the decision-making process. In South Africa, formal early education occurs from the ages of 6 to 9. Known as the Foundation Phase, it starts at Grade R and ends at Grade 3. However, the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase spans birth to the age of 9, and when parents choose schools for the Foundation Phase, in some cases, they have already made choices regarding early-care and pre-school institutions. I highlight school choice within the early education sphere as it is most likely the phase where parents are in total control of school choice decisions. In the higher grades, the child can influence the choices that are made. It is recognised that ECD is a vital and important part of a child's education and that their performance in this phase is an indicator of the level of performance that could be achieved throughout schooling (Gullo, 2013, p. 420). Therefore, parents are under pressure to make education choices that will provide the necessary grounding to achieve the outcomes they deem appropriate. Do all parents feel that primary schooling is “foundational”, or are some

more interested in secondary schooling which provides exit opportunities for entry into higher education, better life opportunities, and employment? Do parents from different backgrounds have different expectations of what foundation education can and should offer and does this influence their choice of educational opportunities?

### **1.3.5. Academic support systems**

Choosing education not only refers to the choice of institution, but, as reflected in my story, extends to other educational institutions that run parallel to the formal education system. At some stage, parents may need to move beyond simply choosing a school to fulfil their children's academic and social needs. Bumps occur along the road to academic success, and there may be a need to address academic underachievement. Flack's (2009) research on the experiences of children with learning disabilities found that all of her participants changed schools during their first three years of public schooling: one to a private school, and others to remedial schools and back to mainstream public or private schools, sometimes to the original school or another school (Flack, 2009, p. 225). This illustrates the uncertainty that may arise when parents have already made school choices, only to encounter problems that may challenge their initial decision. It also raises the question of what parents choose schools for. Do they choose them for academic superiority, or to manage remedial and learning problems, and are there other reasons for their decisions? Furthermore, when parents are forced to change their initial school choice decisions, there are financial consequences in the form of school fees, new uniforms, and additional transport costs, which implies that only the parent who can afford these changes can engage in them. Does this imply that school choice activities are a middle- to upper-class exercise?

### **1.3.6. Other contextual features**

The parents' background could play a major role in school choice decision-making. Some parents choose schools that perpetuate their privileged bloodline and social exclusivity, whilst others may choose schools in the hope of breaking through the poverty line in the future. Whilst I chose schools as opportunistic measures, another parent may choose them for aspirational outcomes. Thus, it is important to examine the parents' background which incorporates family composition, gender and social class.

#### *1.3.6.1. Families*

While parents' own schooling and the value their parents placed on education guide how they make decisions for their children, family composition also determines how these decisions are made. The number of children, their gender, and the order in which they were born may strongly determine how parents make school choice decisions for each child, be it the same or different decision. There are also different kinds of families. Parents may have their own, or adopted or foster children. They may be single, married or divorced, same sex or opposite sex. Children might live with both of their parents, one parent, one of their parents and a step-parent, or with a guardian. They may live with their own siblings or step-siblings. The type of family could impact educational choices. It is also important to consider who makes the decisions in each of these family types and structures. This study thus examined the extent to which these factors influence the kinds of schooling/educational choices made. Furthermore, a parent's life history, their family dynamics, views on the value of education, and where and how they were schooled influence their decision-making on educational choices for their children.

#### *1.3.6.2. Gender*

Cooper (2007) argues that whilst recent studies have foregrounded how gender influences the way in which school choice is made, the intersection of race, gender and class ultimately determines such choices. This renders decisions on school choice a complex phenomenon. How gender influences school choice is reflected in concerns about whether the mother or the father makes educational choice decisions, or whether it is a joint decision-making process. Parents' own educational qualifications impact their understanding of educational matters. A parent's educational qualifications or lack thereof often relate to their class and/or cultural positioning in society. Cooper (ibid.) suggests that people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds that have succeeded in life without formal qualifications are more likely to devalue formal schooling. The opposite is also true; parents that have succeeded as a consequence of schooling achievements tend to expect that schooling will provide the same for their children. The value placed on school/educational engagement could influence the decisions they make for their children. Perceptions of male and female

participation and success rates in schooling may also influence the way people value education and their expectations. This study therefore examined the impact of parents' qualifications, gender, and positioning in the family on education decisions for their children. This is especially pertinent in a context where many parents may have received inferior schooling and had differential access to education arising out of gender, race and class factors, but whose children have broader options in the post-apartheid context. Furthermore, a child's gender affects education decisions. Are better education decisions made for male children, or the eldest child, or are they equal for all children in the family? Variations in how family education decisions are made, powered by the gender factor, intersected with race and class were also explored in this study.

#### *1.3.6.3. Social class*

The affordability of education pathways is of major concern as parents need to be able to finance the education choices made. How do parents from different social classes choose schools? This requires an examination of class differentiation in South African society. The factors defining social class are varied and span cultural, economic, political, and ideological concerns. For example, it can be argued that social class is not simply a matter of individuals or families' earning capacity. It also manifests in the manner in which individuals or families act, behave and make choices about cultural values and practices. Thus, class is not a definitive categorisation based on a single factor, but a cultural sociological identification and acceptance. One does not belong to a social class; one is accepted into such. A person may be economically categorised within a particular social class, but might not necessarily be accepted as a member of that grouping by others who deem themselves to be custodians of that class' boundaries. In this study, I deliberately operationalised the categorisation from the point of view of earning capacity, since the focus of concerns about post-apartheid South African transformation has been mobility out of poverty for the majority of the population; the economic justice which was expected to accompany political liberation and freedom (Motala & Pampallis, 2002). I hope to show how "class positionings" and values are blurred and intersect with other factors with respect to school choice, demonstrating the complexity of the democratic society's reconstruction agenda.

In a newspaper article on the rising economic stature of Black South Africans Janice Kew (2013) cites statistics from the University of Cape Town's Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing, 4 Million and Rising project, to set the household income of a member of the middle-class at between R15000 (\$1047.41) and R50000 (\$3491.35) a month. For the purposes of this study, the monthly household income for the working-class was set at below R15 000, the middle-class at between R15000 and R50000 and the upper-class at more than R50 000 per month. In terms of how race is classified in accordance with social class, Wale (2013) notes that Africans dominate the lowest economic bracket; Coloureds the middle economic bracket; and Whites and Indians the higher economic bracket, with the highest economic bracket mainly populated by Whites.

While these intersecting categories of race and class provide a framework for analysis, it should be noted that they are not cast in stone. In the early days of democracy, Linda Chisholm (2004) spoke of an "expanded, mixed middle-class... internally differentiated by race but also increasingly by class" (Chisholm, 2004, p. 18), which suggests that objective class categories may be eroded, either physically or aspirationally, as parents make decisions on schooling for their children. What are the intersections between schools and the social classes of families that enter their domain? How do schools in areas with different social classes attract and interact with their clients? How do parents from different social classes feel about the school choices they have made? These intersecting and complex issues of race, social class, and gender in the context of school choice are illuminated in this study.

#### **1.4. Critical Questions**

When I reflect on what drives me to make education choices for my children, I ask the following questions: Was I clear on what I understood to be educational quality? Do the choices I make for my children stem from my own unfulfilled education needs? If so, how can I be sure that I have made, and am making the right choices for my children? In my story, education quality seemed present when, as siblings, our jobs, earning capacity and aspirations for upward mobility allowed us to transgress borders. At the time, the country was undergoing radical political transformation, seemingly

offering new opportunities for better quality schooling and life choices. However, did we as family members, or as aspirational members of a particular social class or gender, adequately understand whether we were indeed reaping our return of investment on the monetary commitments we made to obtain better quality education? This urged me to question more broadly the decision making of fellow South African parents and what drives them to make schooling choices for their children. Whilst I make choices as a middle-class parent, how do parents from the working-class and upper-class go about making such choices? And are our choices indicative of how we view educational quality? Parents are expected to engage (accidentally or intentionally) in schooling choices for their children not only in the selection of the school but in matters of governance and curriculum as stipulated by the South African Schools Act of 1996. Several factors may inhibit, promote, challenge and support such involvement, including how parents view education changes in post-apartheid South Africa, and/or how they view themselves in relation to the schooling worldview. Involvement in the school system may be influenced by parents' views on democratisation in an evolving society and/or the economic and social outcomes that they desire from schooling.

As the underlying themes of democratic schooling, schooling quality and parental expectations of schooling emerge from the preceding discussion, what kind of research problems can also be identified within this discussion? Democratic education has received much discussion in the past, however, whilst much of the discussion may have been centered around the intended changes of policy intentions (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006; Msila, 2009, Soudien, Jacklin & Hoadley, 2001), perhaps we need now to focus on the actual deliberations of people's choices. A focus on how much of what is happening on the ground that is actually feeding into the intended aims of democratic education policies should be a relevant research focus for this study. A further consideration can be located within the theoretical framework of social class categories. Class differentiations have been based on many factors such as social identification, cultural capital, etc. (Jenkins, 2002; Whitty, 2001; O'Donoghue, 2013). How class may expand or inhibit school choices will be the focus of this study. Does choice of school prominently mirror class categories or are the boundaries that determine social class groupings become blurred, in the present or in anticipation of future expectations, through the act of choosing different types of schools? A third research problem that could be discussed within this study is the placement of the

schooling worldview of parents. Is there literature that promotes the contextual positioning of the parent within the field of schooling and from what angles has it been hypothesised? This study will be identifying the agency of parents of different social classes as they engage with the fields of their local schools. From a political angle and with new choices that democracy offers in South Africa, what could be some of the hopes, anxieties, opportunities and constraints that these parents endure?

With this in mind, the following research questions guided this study:

- What are parents' decisions on primary school choices for their children?
- Why are parents' decisions on primary school choices for their children being made the way they are?

These questions foreground the interactive characteristics of parents (their intersected biographies, class, and race and gender positionings) and their worldviews, aspirations and conceptions of what schooling could offer. The study aimed to determine how these decisions emerge as part of the contextual fabric of post-apartheid South Africa, especially with regard to the early years of schooling. This required an understanding of the motivations and aspirations that influence decision-making on school choice, and parents' continued engagement (or not) with their children's schooling in these early years.

### **1.5. Rationale**

It became apparent that my underlying assumptions about schooling quality drove many of my decisions about my children's schooling. This influenced me to seek to understand the extent to which categorisations and labelling of schooling types influence what parents think they know about the quality of the school, how they define and expect certain services from the school, and why they believe it offers a quality curriculum or not. These insights provide a lens to examine the general public worldview and expectations of post-apartheid schooling, unfolding a picture of education through the eyes of the parent. This offers valuable information to foster and enhance collaboration and understanding between parents and education policy, schools, teachers, curriculum, and educational enterprises. Firstly, parents' views of education delivery, their expectations of education, and the way in which they understand and use the pillars of education policy to inform their decisions, could

inform education policy-makers as they seek to involve parents in education. What parents actually mean when they say that ‘that school is a good school’ will enable an understanding of what schooling quality means for different parents from different social standpoints. Secondly, schools will gain information on the reasons why parents choose, or do not choose, them, and this could be used to strengthen their institutions and their engagement with the community. Thirdly, awareness of parents’ strengths and shortcomings and the factors influencing their involvement and views on schooling and education, could sensitise teachers to the approach they should develop to foster communication and parent involvement.

From a Sociology of Education vantage point, parents will benefit from this study as it could inform them about the personal, institutional, social and curricular factors that pull and push one during decision-making. How these forces interact for different types of parents (in terms of gender, class, and social aspirations) was the focus of this study. It highlights the role and impact personal life histories have on making decisions for the lives of children. Furthermore, the study talks to the role of and creates awareness of social issues, such as class, gender, networking, and information dissemination. It also highlights parents’ important role in educational matters. Connors (1995) notes that as much as there are many opportunities for education policy and institutions to communicate information on educational matters to families, few opportunities exist for families to give feedback on such matters to the education authorities.

This study also traced the life trajectories of parents and their impact on their decision-making for their own children, in terms of early education school choices. It highlights the transitory adaptations certain parents may have experienced as they moved from apartheid to a democratic society and education systems. An analysis of these experiences could be valuable for political and contextual considerations of social and educational reform, as seen through the lens of the South African parent at this stage in our emerging democracy.



## 1.6. Synthesis of chapter

This chapter laid the foundation for this thesis, beginning with my own story of evaluating schooling choices for my children. The elements of that story were then related to the local context. The research questions that guided the study were discussed, as well as its contribution to research and development. Previous studies on schooling choices have tended to focus on single factors that influence parents' decision-making. This study explored several factors that influence how parents understand the quality of schooling and their involvement with the school as an educational institution. The following chapter reviews the literature on how parents choose primary schools for their children, extending the study's theoretical foundations by highlighting the intersected and contested factors that impact on such decisions. Gaps in understanding this phenomenon in the extant literature and research studies are also identified.

## 1.7. Overview of chapters

### **Prologue:**

In the prologue, I provide a route for the course of my life history, from my apartheid beginnings as a young adult in South Africa, to my professional origins and anxious choices for the futures of my children in a democratic society. I relay personal experiences of apartheid life that shaped future decision-making, both for my children and myself. In addition, I touch on the nuances of the positionings we, as the under-privileged members of apartheid society, experienced and the expectations we anticipated as our country turned from separatist to a culture of equality. I realised that change was not as easy a concept as what was expected to be. The purpose of this exploration is to suggest the personal genesis of my research focus on the issue of parents' school choices for their children. However, I was interested to know how resonant or divergent my personal experiences were on a more systemic level across other classes and contexts. This became translated into the design of my research project.

### **Chapter 1:**

Chapter 1 speaks of the background to the study, in which I discuss the prospect of parent's school choice opportunities as a product of post-apartheid movements. I question the pursuit of education quality as an exercise of post-apartheid expectations. In the context I discuss the post-apartheid fetish with curriculum policy changes and how this may impact on the role of parents in education, the availability of choice of several types of schooling, the importance of early education choice, and the impact of interventions to normal mainstream schooling and how this may affect the school choice of parents. I hint on the theoretical understandings of social class and how this may impact on other constructs such as race, gender, the family and personal biography. The critical questions and rationale then form the basis for the activation of the study.

### **Chapter 2:**

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on school choice and related concepts and research studies conducted in international and national contexts. It looks at how school choice is manifested in different countries around the world and talks about how school choice has become a phenomenon for South African society. Several socio-historical influences that impact on school choice in South Africa have been highlighted. The chapter speaks of systemic, structural and modern worldviews as potential sources of influence on school choice. Several players in the school choice field have been foregrounded in the discussion, both internationally and nationally.

### **Chapter 3:**

Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework to the study. It begins by foregrounding the choice of Bourdieu's theories of habitus, field and cultural reproduction to serve as a framework for the analysis of the impending data. The basic tenets of the theories as well as how they are linked to the study are discussed. The gaps from the literature review and the theoretical framework are then identified. Finally, a temporary theoretical framework is identified, discussed and presented in diagrammatic form. This theoretical lens formed the original framework which assisted in the design of the instruments used for this study.

**Chapter 4:**

Chapter 4 constitutes the methodological approach to the study beginning by locating the study within the worldview of the constructivist paradigm. It justifies the choice of a mixed-method research design and continues to discuss the intended and actual sampling and data collection experiences. The research instruments and data analysis procedures follow. It concludes by making a case for the inflation of a qualitative analysis framework over the quantitative analysis of the study. Ethical considerations underpin throughout the discussions of this chapter.

**Chapter 5:**

Chapter 5 represents the first level of analysis by foregrounding the constructed narratives of the nine participants. Each of the stories comprises of their past, present and future experiences and aspirations of schooling, whilst providing commentary on specific contextual features relating to the participants' association with schools. The chapter concludes by providing a summary of themes that emerge from these personal life stories.

**Chapter 6:**

Chapter 6 constitutes the second level of analysis that relates to the amalgamation of similar themes that have emerged from the previous chapter. These themes are represented accordingly as cross-case analyses of the three different schooling sites, embedded on a continuum of time. Here, the qualitative analysis is infused with relevant information from the quantitative analysis (Appendix xvi). In conclusion, 3 outlier cases with unusual themes are mentioned to strengthen the validity of the data.

**Chapter 7:**

Chapter 7 further concentrates the analysis process by juxtaposing the mixed-method analysis of the previous chapter against the literature review (chapter 2) and the theoretical framework (chapter 3). Here, the discussion ensues over what from this research accepts or refutes conclusions from extant research and pushes forward to the conclusion of the study.

**Chapter 8:**

The final chapter provides the answers to the critical questions and the key constructs that have emerged as contextual and theoretical extensions to existing research. These constructs are represented as a continuous diagrammatic movement of time and space. The chapter concludes by discussing the emerging elaborations from the study as well as the limitations. Recommendations and future research ideas arising from the study has a final mention.

**Epilogue:**

In the epilogue, I reflect on my personal journey as a patriot of South Africa. The overarching premise of tracking the processes of democracy reflects itself through the theme of schooling. I position myself as a product of the past, present and future of South African society.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### *The story of school choice*

#### 2.1. Orientation

The previous chapter presented the background on parents and their role in making schooling choices for their children, focusing on the South African context. It noted that a number of factors, including race, class, gender, and family structure impact such decisions. This chapter examines this phenomenon in more depth by reviewing the literature on school choice, parents' role in decisions on schooling choices, and the role played by different types of schools. This provides a conceptual framework to clarify the operational definitions of the phenomenon. The gaps in the literature that this study sought to address are also highlighted. The concepts that define the field of school choice begins with an overview of what school choice means in different countries around the world (2.2). The discussion then hones into the local context of the meaning of school choice in South Africa (2.3). This leads to defining the role parents play in making school choices (2.4). Since school choice does not only depend on the parent and the school, the impact of several systemic issues such as social class, networking, gender and race are discussed as influencers of the school choice decision-making process (2.5). What happens when school choices become contested is a further consideration (2.6) and so are the structural influencers to school choice such as the parent and the school (2.7). Finally, some of the more modern viewpoints of school choice are presented (2.8).

#### 2.2. What does school choice mean?

Internationally, school choice policies are adopted by governments to provide better schooling opportunities to disadvantaged children. Each country has its own interpretation of how parental school choice is mediated and managed. Permutations may also exist within countries, as different states, provinces or regions interpret policy goals and intentions in local contexts. Hill (2005, p. 141) notes that there is a range of school policy options in the US, which reflects different interpretations of how to regulate and provide opportunities for parents to make school choices. He discusses the political and ideological campaigns which impact the "No Child Left

Behind” policies that promote more equitable access to schooling across race, class and ability. Mechanisms such as the Private Voucher system were adopted to assist parents to cross into previously exclusionary schooling types, sometimes resulting in large-scale geographical mobility of children as well as into different social communities. Other strategies like the Magnet and Charter schools promote specialised schooling, which could either be interpreted as a protecting or generating particular cultural forms and educational goals. Hill (ibid.) argues that the aim is to offer diverse school choice options to parents. Whether or not these options indeed erode exclusivity and democratise school options, has been the subject of much research.

Some Magnet schools in the US are specialised public schools that offer subjects/disciplines such as the Liberal Arts, Sciences, and the Humanities, that attract parents from other public schools. School zoning is not applied. Charter schools are a form of public-private schooling as they are publicly funded private schools that offer a unique curriculum which attracts particular (usually small) groups of parents and their children. Some studies claim that the Charter schools could be considered conservative, liberal and/or radical, based on their mission and curriculum delivery. The voucher system awards parents financial certificates that support payment for private education (Lubienski, 2008, p. 31). Similar school policy models operate within some schooling contexts in the UK. For example, Whitty (2001, p. 289) evaluates the ‘Assisted Places Scheme’ that offers low-income children funding to attend private schools. This is seen as a deliberate attempt to promote class mobility among working class students with high academic potential to access better quality private schooling that due to its cost is normally reserved for middle- or upper-class learners.

However, school choice decisions are not only about providing financial assistance to pay school fees. Morgan & Blackmore (2013, p. 89) note that the Australian government funds bus travel for children travelling from rural areas to schools in more affluent areas. Altrichter, Bacher, Beham, Nagy & Wetzelhutter’s (2011, p. 230) study focuses on Austria’s policy that did away with zoning. In principle, parents are free to send their children to any school. However, some families might not be able to exercise this choice due to financial constraints.

These examples highlight that school choice and school access policies aim to engage with parents' beliefs about what school should be. The policies are linked to social and political agendas. Many promote egalitarianism, and seek to eradicate social segregation and marginalisation. They also reinforce parents' right to choose the kinds of curriculum and schooling experience they desire for their children. In taking advantage of school choice alternatives, parents are exercising "consumer choice". Forsey, Davies & Walford (2008, p. 11) describe consumer choice as a modern economic model where economics and markets drive the school choice agenda. Paradoxically, governments (in contexts such as the US, the UK, Austria and Australia) that understand the importance of schooling become heavily involved in ensuring that parents are able to exercise such choices. Driven by political backing, consumer choice is perhaps more pertinent to contexts with a relatively high degree of economic development. In developing world contexts (such as South Africa, and even in pockets within the developed world), access to schooling, rather than quality schooling, is the priority. These issues were relevant to this study as it explored school choice in the context of a socio-economic system that is fractured along class and race lines due to the apartheid legacy. The study thus investigated how parents from different backgrounds understand and exercise school choice for their children.

Some studies have focused on how school choice markets operate. Lubienski (2008, p. 29) notes that students are usually assigned to schools based on their geographical location. He argues that school choice is fully activated when parents (and their children) take up alternative options as a result of policies such as Charter and Magnet schools, and voucher programmes. Higher enrolment generates increased government subsidies. This fosters competition where schools see themselves as agents in a marketplace that seek to attract a larger share of the market, attracting students (as clients/ customers/ consumers) who will be reputational advertisements of the school's ability. They thus select students who will enhance their image. Poder & Lauri (2014, p. 449) argue that this amalgamates market forces with government transformational forces. Educational school choices are remote controlled by government in a 'quasi-market' operation. The neo-liberal notion of school choice promotes competition and privatisation that overrides the public agenda to promote access. The quest for egalitarianism recedes in the face of the market and competition.

“The idea of choice offers alluring promises of equality, freedom, democracy and pleasure that traverse political and social boundaries” that are challenged as parents makes choices in relation to what the schooling type will buy (Forsey, et al, 2008, p.10). Forsey et al (2008, p.15) argue that by allowing choice, autonomy and accountability among schools and parents, school choice policies have rearranged the way equality and quality schooling is understood. Whilst school choice reforms promote parental freedom to choose and enhanced opportunities for the disadvantaged and marginalised, they have perpetuated the commodification and marketisation of schooling. Poder & Lauri (2014, p. 448) comment that in order achieve social desegregation and quality, a school choice model should enhance equity. An equity model mediates competitive agendas of schooling while increasing opportunities for parental choice, and empowers parents to make informed choices.

### **2.3. School choice in South Africa**

There are no formal school choice policies in South Africa. However, families and pupils have attempted to access opportunities that were previously denied to disadvantaged groups. This desire for change was part of my personal endeavours as a parent. Whilst my place of schooling was dictated by apartheid prescriptions, I chose different options for my children when they embarked on their schooling in a democratic society. How did this happen? Woolman & Fleish (2006) note that while there are no official school choice policies in the democratic South Africa, such options emerged as “an unintended consequence” of the generic set of post-apartheid educational policies and regulations framed within the new constitutional architecture (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006, p. 52)<sup>2</sup>. Constitutionally, legalising access to all schools for all races provided an avenue for school choice. One form of school choice practices was migration to escape racially and class demarcated schooling. Soudien, Jacklin, & Hoadley (2001) argue that such migratory patterns occurred mainly among middle-class Africans as they sought access to schools outside of African townships. White working-class students (*ibid.*) arguably moved to private and advantaged former White public schools (if they could afford such), whilst the African working-class remained in underprivileged and under-resourced schools. As democracy progressed, migratory patterns for school choice became racially and socially divided

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<sup>2</sup> This discussed in chapter one.



into what Spaul (2013, p. 438) classifies as “bimodal school systems”, where historically disadvantaged schools remained African and disadvantaged and historically advantaged schools admitted all races. Another form of migration to exercise school choice has fundamentally re-arranged the way many South Africans live (Fataar, 2015, p. 65). Whilst people may still reside in racially bounded communities, school choice has resulted in mobility across living spaces. Fataar (2015, p. 66) refers to this as “school choice displacement” (Fataar, 2015, p. 66), where places of living become disconnected from places of schooling as children travel daily to schools in the city or sought-after schools within their townships but still a distance from home. For example, Fataar (2015, p. 66) notes that, due to the lack of infrastructure as the Cape Flats<sup>3</sup> emerged, schools were built some distance from residential areas, requiring children to engage in inter-community travel to access them. Msila (2009) identified internal migration within a township to access a school with a good academic reputation. Academic quality was defined as academic excellence, quality management and teaching and successful throughput rates. A good school was defined as one with a disciplined working environment that produced quality results.

#### **2.4. Parental role in school choice**

Much of the earlier international and local literature on school choice focuses on the measurable determinants that contribute to such choice. Bosetti (2004, p. 400) refers to this as a “mix of rationalities”, which suggests that parents exercise choices in relation to defined (oftentimes overt) understandings of the quality of education, their satisfaction with the choice of school and whether their choice meets their personal goals. Parents also look for a school that caters for their children’s needs. Parents that are dissatisfied with public education, look for a private institution that matches their social and educational aspirations for their children. Ball (1997, p. 9) refers to this as “child-matching”. It occurs in both prestigious sought-after schools and among rank-and-file public schools, where parents seek schools that pays attention to children who do not perform very well academically (Reay & Ball, 1997, p. 95).

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<sup>3</sup> The Cape Flats is a township in Cape Town.

Studies on school choice in developed countries, such as those reviewed earlier in this chapter note that it is the result of deliberate parental evaluation of the quality of the schooling, and conscious questioning of whether schools fulfil their child's needs. Such expectations, choices and reviews are often overtly expressed. Parents are vigilant in ensuring anticipated outcomes. This is not reported in the South African literature. Instead, research has shown that in the South African context (perhaps due to the enduring legacy of apartheid) school choice seems to be driven by external factors such as policy prescriptions. However, this should not undermine the fact that South African parents have firm views on what schools should offer.

Hoadley (1999) suggests that rather than seeing themselves as independent, assertive shapers of school choices, parents are driven by strategic interpretations of what is legally permitted and procedurally possible and what could feasibly activate new forms of equity and social justice. Maile (2004) argues that, for South Africans in a new democracy, choice is driven by a combination of competing influences, some more prominent than others in different contexts, and is unique to each individual. He suggests that contextual factors such as educational policies prefigure decision-making. Maile (2004) adds that parents are strongly influenced by the economic opportunities that schooling could offer in the local, and, by implication, the global economy. The desire for social justice (freedom of choice was deliberately curtailed in the past) underpins decision-making. Maile (2004, p. 102) concludes that school choice may be considered a utilitarianist agenda that aims to benefit the majority. Simultaneously, it promotes the prospect of equality as families opt for mobility to secure places at advantaged schools. This is considered to be an "act of liberalism" (*ibid.*). While their conclusions differ, Maile (2004) and Hoadley (1999) concur that parental school choice is underpinned by a rationality that uses strategic and procedural guides that promote their individual objectives. The non-overt manifestations of school choice among South African parents are thus underpinned by competing rationalities.

## 2.5. School choice and systemic influences

This section explores co-related factors such as social class, networking, gender, and race in affecting parental school choice decision-making. How these concepts interact with each other as reflected in the literature is reported here.

### 2.5.1. Social class

The social class parents belong to has implications for what drives their school choice decisions and the resources they have to engage with such choice. Families generally belong to (or are accepted into) the broad categories of upper-class, middle-class, or working-class<sup>4</sup>. Each has certain characteristics that make up the stereotypical constructs of its members, and the particular types of influences, and expected outcomes, that contribute to their relationship with education. Traditionally, families are part of the upper-class through hereditary, successful business enterprises, marriage, or privileged educational or economic pathways (Williams & Filippakou, 2010, p. 3). Pathways to elite status have recently led to the emergence of two different forms; traditional elites who are born with elite symbolic capital and the potential for elitism created through Higher Education (*ibid*, p. 19). The type of schools their children attend is therefore an important decision for the upper-class who wish to maintain their current status and for other classes who wish to use education pathways to achieve this status. Middle-class families are led by parents that are professionals with tertiary qualifications, have a certain level of assets, and are motivated to secure educational advantages for their children (Reay, 2001, p. 341). They do so by engaging in behaviour that gives them access to opportunities, such as moving to areas with high achieving schools or misrepresenting their physical addresses to gain access. Other practices include employing private tutors for extra lessons (*ibid*, p. 341). Brantlinger (2003) notes, that the middle class values competitive education and encourages academic achievement. He argues that they are knowledgeable about school matters, access information networks and control their children's futures (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 11). Similarly, middle-class students with resources in the form of networking, private tuition, and physical resources such as musical instruments usually turn their social benefits into educational rewards, further ensuring social mobility (Christie, 2008, p. 174). School choices for middle- and

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<sup>4</sup> The operational definition of earning capacity in relation to social class was discussed in chapter one.

upper-class parents thus indicate a need to make the best choices for the social outcomes they require. Does this mean that working-class parents do not share these aspirations? This was one of the foci in this study.

The literature suggests that working-class parents that lack educational and employment opportunities may have more negative educational experiences than middle-class parents. Since a working-class education is often associated with failure, when working-class parents choose working-class schools for their children, their children may face the same destiny (Reay & Ball, 1997, p. 95). Images of working-class education in the extant literature are steeped in failure. For example, reports on standardised test results make the low achievements of public schooling publicly known and marginalise the working-class (Reay, 2001, p. 343; Chisholm & Wildeman, 2013, p. 94). Indeed, Bloch (2009) refers to working-class schools as a “toxic mix” of negative factors that prevent success.

Although school choice is constitutionally and legally mandated for all social and economic classes in South African society, the working-class is disadvantaged by a lack of resources, location, and costs (Hoadley, 1999). This does not mean that they are unable to make school choices, but that such decisions are taken under certain constraints (Hoadley, 1999). For example, African working-class parents that cannot afford schools outside their residential areas, seek better schools for their children within townships, identifying good schools by measuring the culture of learning and teaching (COLT) (Msila, 2009, p. 96). School choice has changed traditional conceptions of race and class among South African families. “Race and class have been re-articulated or re-arranged by newer mobilities in the post-apartheid period” (Fataar, 2015, p.69). Fataar (2015, p. 15) notes that African families that gain access to privileged White, Coloured and Indian schools, do so as an investment in class aspirations. They also re-assess their traditional racial and cultural conceptions as they are assimilated into the dominant White culture of the school (Fataar, 2015, p. 69).

### **2.5.2. Social Networking**

Social networking in its many forms is another factor that contributes to school choice decisions. Those that can afford private schooling have more access to social networking and more opportunities for school choice (Goldring & Phillips, 2008, p.

220). Social networking entails the adoption of values, practices and beliefs through engaging with those who control and provide access to particular social groups/communities. It uses technological communication strategies formulated by those in power. Not all networking is formalised or codified in overt forms; it is subtly communicated as a way of distinguishing its in-house members and non-members.

Social capital is increased through social networking that promotes relationships, and shares information that influences opinions (Ball, 1997, p. 11). However, such knowledge is not always accurate (Bosetti, 2004, p. 395). Informal social networking plays a large role in parental school choice. While access to social networks is socially structured, it helps to allay parents' doubts and uncertainties. Advice via the network can make them feel confident in their choice (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p. 393). Social networking seems to benefit the middle- and upper-classes. While the credibility of the information transmitted might be questionable, it is rarely contested. The network creates a sense of comfort among parents as well as a sense of shared ideologies. Social networking thus has significant potential to influence school choice decisions (*ibid.*). This study therefore aimed to determine the kinds of social networking systems available to the sampled parents and their effects on decision-making in relation to school choice.

### **2.5.3. Gender**

Who are the parents that actively engage in school choice decision-making? Mothers seem to be at the centre of active decision-making with regard to their children's educational choices and social class affects the way they approach education issues. O'Donoghue (2013) argues that working-class women are aware of their lack of capacity to engage with education-related issues and structures and submissively accept the positioning assigned to them by the school as well as its authority (2013, p.205). Cooper (2005, p.175) notes that the race, social class, and gender positioning of working-class Afro-American mothers determines how they make school choice decisions. However, middle-class mothers demonstrate a form of narcissistic behaviour pattern as they use their success in child-rearing and in choosing educational pathways, to increase their agentic properties. This also influences how they evaluate their children's success in relation to others (Brantlinger, 2003). A

mother's academic qualifications also influence school choice decision-making. Poder & Lauri (2014, p. 469) conclude that social segregation is perpetuated when highly educated mothers choose education pathways that incorporate elite types of schooling. What agency do South African women across different races and classes exercise with respect to school choice? Given the paucity of research on this issue, this was another focus of the current study.

#### 2.5.4. Race

Race combines with gender and class to influence school choice decision-making. Cooper (2007) observes that “race, class and gender are interlocking aspects of Black women's identity, meaning-making and mothering” (Cooper, 2007, p. 494). While the dominant images of White women are as caring, mothering and nurturing, those of Black women are more about survival and power. It is assumed that the latter will strive to enable their children to succeed in the world (*ibid*, p. 494).

While family life histories and legacies influence parents' decision-making among race groups, research has found that symbolic and overt discrimination based on race affects Black woman more than White woman (*ibid*, p.494). Cooper notes that even low-income White woman do not have to deal with issues of racism (*ibid*, p. 494). The author (2007) refers to Black women's work as “mother work” to explain their particular parenting style borne out of the need to balance their oppression, their work to earn money, and their powerlessness in society (*ibid*, p. 493). This is contrasted with the more nurturing “mothering” role associated with White women. How Black women engage with school choice is affected by their particular backgrounds, their positioning in society, and their engagement with institutional demands.

Whilst issues of race presents itself in many different patterns around the world, racial integration has emerged as an amicable theme of post-apartheid schooling in South Africa. Vandeyar (2008) identifies that although racial integration exists on a physical level where actual integration of races can be seen in schools, there still are issues of whether integration has taken place on an affective level. She cites examples where Black pupils seem to be ignored by White teachers in the classroom, where Black culture is hardly recognised and there is pressure for the Black student to assimilate into the dominant culture of the school (Vandeyar, 2008, p. 291). Whilst

integration may not be occurring in the classroom, it is definitely an activity that is enacted between the students on the playground (Vandeyar, 2008, p. 291). As racial and cultural mixing is an activity inherent in post-apartheid schools, how do parents feel about this? Do parents choose schools for racial integration or are more concerned about other mitigating factors of school choice? As the years progress into deeper democracy, the literature is silent of whether early post-apartheid needs and wants translate similarly into later democratic ideals of people.

## **2.6. Contesting school choice**

As the school choice decisions for my son were severely contested, I was interested in examining the literature on school choice and academic underachievement. School teachers seem to favour children that are academically successful over those that struggle with curriculum issues (Flack, 2009, p. 221). Conflict may arise when a teacher reports a child's under performance and the parents feel that their child is being marginalised. How teachers approach this situation influences school choice evaluation and satisfaction. When the teacher lacks formal training in assessing learning disabilities as well as communication skills in interacting with parents, this might elicit anger and defiance in the parent (Naves, 2009, p. 77). Teachers thus need to be trained in relationship-building and conflict management. Furthermore, a lack of quality education sometimes compels parents to seek extra tuition outside school. This could involve remedial teachers, and health and health science professionals. Since this support system imitates or copies what is done in the classroom, it is known as "shadow education" (Byun & Park, 2012).

While shadow education might increase social inequality because some parents cannot afford it, it fulfils a parent's desire to ensure the best educational outcomes for their child. Improved academic performance will impact how they view the school, and thus, their school choice decision.

## **2.7. School choice and structural influences**

Structural (institutional) as well as systemic (sociological) issues influence school choice decision-making. The first factor is the parent's agency in choosing schools and the second is the type of schools available for school choice to occur.

### *2.7.1. The parent*

The parent stands at the centre of school choice decision-making. How parents construct themselves within the field of education affects the manner in which they make school choices. Knowledge of what comprises quality education and good schools should determine school choice. However, not all parents have access to knowledge on the types of school and curriculum delivery. This could prevent them from making informed choices (Bosetti, 2004, p. 400). Goldhaber (1999) argues that school choice decisions are based on two assumptions, that parents know how to choose good schools; and that good schools are actually providing competent education (1999, p. 16). When parents choose schools, they search for identifiable resources that they believe could ensure successful outcomes. A parent's socio-economic status as well as that of the school, the type of pupils in terms of age, gender, academic achievement and underachievement, teachers' qualifications and training, school resources, location and extra-curricular activities, safety concerns at the institution and the principal's characteristics contribute to parents' evaluation of the school (van der Berg, 2008, p.148). Evaluation of school quality is a strong influence in making school choice decisions, which rests on the agency of the parent. However, parents are also influenced by macro-systemic forces. The determinants of school choice decision making are thus a combination of internal and external factors and are also influenced by parents' biographical and educational background, their lifestyle, and future aspirations for their children. This study therefore aimed to probe whether or not specific factors or forces are likely to influence particular groups of individuals. Specific parent's narratives were used as a methodological strategy to explore this issue. This offered a more in-depth perspective than that provided by the abovementioned studies.

### *2.7.2. Schools*

While different characteristics can be used to describe the range of schooling types, Christie (2008, 177) suggests that they be grouped as "fortified sites" or "exposed sites". Schools as "fortified sites" are protected social institutions which reflect current divisions within society and in a capitalistic economy are thus demarcated along class lines. Parents are complicit in maintaining social structures in the kinds of schools they support. Parents with high economic status use their resources to maximise educational advantage by ensuring qualified and experienced staff, abundant and advanced facilities, and academic support structures. In contrast,



“exposed sites” (*ibid*, 2008, p. 177) are schools that serve the working-class. They lack essential facilities and their learners experience difficulties with the curriculum. Furthermore, they serve a community characterised by poverty and low levels of parental education (Teese & Polesel, 2003, p. 177). While exposed sites are dominated by the struggle for survival, fortified sites seek to maintain privilege. This study thus explored if and how this categorisation influences how parents engage with the school as an institution.

Luke (2010, p. 170) identifies four types of schooling, each of which serve people from a particular socio-economic backgrounds. These are working-class schools where basic skills and rules are emphasised, middle-class schools which show progression from rule-based rote learning to learning that promotes comprehension, affluent schools that construct knowledge through questioning, inquiry and experience and finally, elite schools where students are identified by their social standing (*ibid*, 2010, p. 173). In choosing a school, parents may be aware that their outcomes differ and that some choices offer better chances of success (Whitty, 2001, p. 289). However, as policies and regulations seek to make schooling more uniform and generic, these types may become blurred and overlap. While the types of schools are mainly associated with the socio-economic status (SES) of a child’s family, governmental policies are attempting to address disparities. These include the ‘Assisted Places Scheme’ under the Thatcher government in the UK in 1981, which assisted children from low socio-economic backgrounds to attend private schools (Whitty, 2001, p. 289). As private schooling, once the domain of the elite, opens up to a variety of parents, it complicates the decision-making process as they have to choose between private or public institutions. However, Motala & Pampallis (2009) argue that it is largely a myth that policy can resolve broader socio-economic inequalities and that attempts to erase class and economic differences in schooling are not yet evident in post-apartheid South Africa.

There are clear distinctions between public and private schooling. Public education is mandated to promote general social well-being and the public interest using government funds. In contrast, private education is considered to support specific interests, such as religious groupings. It could be argued that it is a form of social stratification, since in many cases it is very costly. However, in recent times the

distinction between private and public schooling in South Africa has become blurred. Firstly, both systems' exit level examinations are regulated and they follow the same national curricula. Secondly, numerous low cost private schools have emerged. Thirdly, some elitist private schools are attempting to generate a socially responsible citizenry which might serve the interests of "wider public". Many public schools are so caught up with redress of past inequities that "public interests" fall by the wayside (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004).

All these factors influence how parents understand the choices they make when they select the school in which they wish to enrol their children.

The specific factors that motivate parents to choose specific school types were also the focus of this study. For example, it examined the extent to which parents' aspirations for children influence school choice. Do parents monitor their choices to establish if their aspirations have been fulfilled? What happens when such aspirations are not fulfilled? Do parents' images of schooling shift over time? What influences these shifts? School choice is thus much more than enrolment. It goes to the heart of what parents define as quality education.

## **2.8. Modern influences to how choice is made**

Two newer approaches in theorising the way school choices are made come from Cooper (2005) and Fataar (2015). While school choice decisions can be seen as a reasonable decision-making process, the role played by a parent's background, their agency in gathering and using school choice information, and their cultural capital can also be seen as a societal phenomenon. Cooper (2005, p. 175) speaks of parents making "positioned school choices". Their choices are linked to who they are, and what they hope school will achieve for their children (i.e. their "positioning in society"). Cooper adds that parents' race, gender, class, and their social expectations influence the kinds of decisions they make. For her, school choice is strongly connected to the social context and the actors, practices and action within that setting. Cooper comments that "(p)ositioned choices are emotional, value-laden, and culturally relevant" (Cooper, 2005, p. 175). She elaborates that school choice decisions are made from a parental "standpoint", which necessarily links to specific

contextualised settings (Cooper, 2005, p. 175). School choice decision-making is argued to be more than just a rational process; it is a means of activating parents' agency. Cooper (2005, p.175) indicates that such agency extends further when parents survey the school possibilities (reviewing the market offerings). They examine what schools can or cannot offer, and whether their children would benefit from particular offerings.

Fataar (2015) suggests that parental decision-making is not limited to a review of schools within their immediate geographic setting. Given that schools in other areas might be perceived to offer superior education, parents may chose schools in other "lived spaces" (Fataar, 2015, p.12) outside their cultural and economic realms. These other spaces may resonate or conflict with their lived spaces and their children have to negotiate new spatialities. Fataar (2015) investigated the movement of children into Muslim schools within the Cape Flats region of South Africa. This offers insight into how learners negotiate schooling. For "migrating children", attending the school involves positioning and steering their identities and aspirations within the new context. Personal social identities have to be negotiated amidst possible marginalisation, the ascendancy of cultural worldviews and peripheralisation. For such learners, negotiating school is about negotiating power. Fataar (2015) argues that it also entails engaging with multiple conceptions of what defines their home, their city, and the wider community, and how they interpret their self. Parental choice of schools for their children therefore sets in motion a process of deep contestation and reformulation for learners.

Fataar (2015, p.10) also suggests that the theoretical construct of "subjectivities" assists in understanding the different tenets of city life, by examining how individuals and institutions interact with the shifting dimensions of the city, and what outcomes are anticipated. For example, Fataar (2015, p. 11) describes youth subjectivity as the interaction between youth and their changing world and how they negotiate understandings of these changes and adapt them to their existing lived spaces. This study therefore examined how parents' school choices influence the negotiation of their own and their children's subjectivities. Firstly, parents' subjectivities include how they interpret their own past and present situations, and how they choose to position themselves. It also entails dealing with matters of space and geography,

reflecting on how parents interpret their agency in a wider social context. School choice decision-making is one manifestation of exercising their subjectivities in a changing social context. Secondly, parent subjectivity shows the interaction between the school as an institution and the wider social community in which the parent may or may not reside. This offers insight into how parents (the community) view the purpose, functioning and value of schools to realise their expectations for themselves and their children. Schools are seen as gateways to this potential future.

## **2.9. Synthesis of Chapter**

In this chapter, the literature review has been presented. Several factors that impact on school choice decision-making from an international and national perspective has been reported on as it appears in research literature. These factors may be systemic as in social class, gender and race factors, or it may be structural as in schooling typology. As school choice moves along the continuum of time, objective views of the determinants of school choice evolve into more subjective views introducing issues of positionality and subjectivities. Embedded and foregrounded in the review is the particular locality of the South African landscape. Here, school choice is situated historically, socially and politically. Several silences and emerging issues that have emanated from the literature have been highlighted as aspects to lead the research process.

In the next chapter, the theoretical framework for the study shall be discussed with the intention of accentuating recurring theoretical conceptions related to the phenomenon of the study, namely parents' school choice for their primary school children. A temporary theoretical lens will also be presented to guide the methodological process forward.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1. Orientation**

School choice activities exist within a social arena of competing interpretations. Each society comprises of individuals and groups of individuals activating personal and combined theoretical worldviews that speak of their interpretations of placement in the immediate community terrain, how they view the wider interactions with other communities in the broader society, how they read their wider worlds, and how they perceive what the world should be (Jenkins, 2006). In a study of social behaviour, Pierre Bourdieu stands out as one of the major sociologists whose theories are relevant for this particular research undertaking. In this chapter, Bourdieu's understandings of space and time (3.2.), habitus (3.3), field (3.4) and cultural reproduction (3.5) shall provide a theoretical framework through which the data from this study will be viewed. The discussion will then draw on the strengths and weaknesses from the literature review (chapter 2) and this theoretical framework to provide a temporary theoretical framework (3.6) to guide forward the methodological process (chapter 4). Finally, a temporary theoretical lens (3.7) is presented in diagrammatical and discussion format.

### **3.2. Space and time**

The particular socio-historical legacy of South Africa has major implications for its people. The apartheid to democracy continuum has relevance for how people view themselves within South African society. This bears further significance for the expectations that people set for themselves. To understand how history of the past, present and future affects how social beings make and change their world, Bourdieu speaks of their practice as located in time and space (Jenkins, 2006). The key idea here is that the particular situation of any person is comprised of their inherent social status and material conditions. However, change can be effected through the goals and aspirations of individuals and as more possibilities exist for more alternatives, people can make choices that can bring their aspirations closer to reality (Jenkins,

2006). Such is the case with democracy and schooling in South Africa. Democracy was intended to bring about more schooling options to the disadvantaged communities than that which was available in the past under apartheid. How do we understand the manner in which people have understood and negotiated these choices? Bourdieu identifies that people have a strategy in negotiating social relations, rules, time and space (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2006). In order for any practice to be successful, Bourdieu says that the individual should understand their own positioning and resources; know of the rules, values, and cultural capital of the space they desire; and have an ability to manipulate their strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and constraints to their advantage (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2006). This also speaks to the level of agency of the individual in effecting a practice that will bring the desired outcomes to fruition. In most cases, parents choosing schooling do so with the intention of creating better or maintaining the social situations of their and their children's future lives. In this study, Bourdieu's theory of practice influenced through space and time will provide an understanding for how parents make schooling choices taking their positionality into account, for what purposes their choices are made, how do they understand the field of schooling choices, and how do they negotiate their decision-making processes. Using these frameworks to analyse the actions of parents as they make school choice decisions will also enhance an understanding of the agency of parents from different social positionings.

### **3.3. Habitus**

Whilst Bourdieu understood that practice involved individual positionality as well as the socio-historical-cultural practice of the society, he decided that the link between these two concepts be stated as the habitus (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2006). The habitus is a multi-layered concept consisting of the relationship between past and present social status positionings; and the combined and general concepts of society in interplay with the individual and the multifaceted concepts of the individual (Reay, 2004). Essentially, habitus refers to the values and nature of a person's breeding that carries them throughout life, adapting necessarily to relevant changes and helps them in responding to different contexts from their own cultural point of view (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2006). This "breeding" is not interpreted as a definitive biological categorisation or essentialising. Instead, it reflects the complexity of sources of influence that have sociological and personal biographical heritage

generated in the specificities of contextual settings. It also incorporates analysis of many opposites such as the relationship between agency and structure, and the macro and micro levels of sociological spaces. Several factors of the notion of the habitus can be used in guiding the process of this study.

Firstly, as the past is an important concept in determining the relationship between the habitus and school choice decision-making, it becomes important to research the past histories of individuals. People's backgrounds encompass personal experiences and practices, affected by the socio-political and cultural setting of the time. Reay (2004) states that the habitus is understood through the knowledge of personal history as this forms how responses are formulated in the present. For this study, looking into the background lives of parents can provide vital information for how they make schooling decisions for their children in the present. What were some of the schooling experiences that parents had that motivate them to choose similar or different schooling types for their children? What were some of the schooling experiences that parents have had, driven by the macro-political arena of the past, that influence how they choose schools on their individual capacities for the children now? And what aspirational desires exist from their present schooling decisions for their children that emanate from their social positioning of the past? These are some of the inter-related aspects that drive the main objectives of this study.

Secondly, the habitus exists as a juxtaposition of individual and society. How individuals engage with their own practice, how they interact with other individuals and with the rest of society, forms the basis of the existence of the habitus (Jenkins, 2006). Several ideas from Bourdieu's theories are relevant here to help us understand human nature and action. For example, he argues that people mirror the structures, culture, ideals and values of a society which makes them believe that that is reality (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2006). In this regard, social networking structures can be viewed as a system that make people believe in a certain type of reality. Relevant to this study are the social networks inherent with schooling. How parents negotiate the dominant thought of social network groups they belong to, with their own personal situations, will be interesting to view. This will shed light on the link between habitus and decision-making.

### 3.4. Field

The above discussion of habitus becomes further illuminated through the concept of the field. Bourdieu's concept of the field can be described as "a structured system of social positions occupied by individuals" (Almquist, Modin & Ostberg, 2010, p. 33) and include social structures such as the family unit, the schooling system or community spaces. They are not predetermined but are constructed as people interact with each other. Fields include individual actors (or groups), physical and spatial contexts, and are driven by what is at stake within the specific field. For this particular research, the pursuit of education quality would be an adequate description of the field under scrutiny. However, as different schools are defined by their own particular specificities, it shows that a myriad of different fields may exist (in different types of schools) within the broad field of schooling. What could be some of the rules, conventions and rituals that define different types of schools? An answer to this question would provide information that will help to identify schooling types. Further, in addition to describing particular schooling fields, parent's perceptions of the structures of these fields could also enhance the description of these fields. Jenkins (2006) identifies that Bourdieu recognises the different structures and reasoning of each field as being relevant to both the outcome and the people creating the outcome. This has relevance for how different schools create relationship structures between school and the parent that aid in their (the parent's) decision-making processes. Do schools attract a certain type of parent that fits into their defining structures? What do schools do to attract or defer their preferred type of clientele? These questions will guide the research process to attempt to identify how the fields of different types of schools are constructed.

A field is thus a structured system of different forces. However, inherent within the physical structure of the fields is also the issue of power relations. Power relations, according to Bourdieu, exist internally within the field and are structured in measures of domination or subordination depending on how the capital (3.5) of the field is afforded to others or not (Jenkins, 2006). This will have implications for how schools view parents in terms of the power they exert and what reaction is elicited thereafter. Power relations thus, also have an impact on the agency of parents. For example, working-class mothers (O'Donoghue, 2013) and Black mothers affected by racism



(Cooper, 2007) seem to be marginalised by the organised field of education. It is their positioning in the field and the agency with which they address it that has relevance. The hierarchies of race and class within and between fields in school settings therefore mediate how they engage with and between the field elements. O'Donoghue (2013) notes that an individual's past plays an important role in constructing the self and agency and this determines how a person engages with the field. This also has relevance for how the individual sees himself within certain fields. For example, when working-class mothers describe their relation to the field of education, they see themselves as distant and perceive a spatial separateness where they are positioned at the bottom rung of influence (their positionality) (*ibid*, p.201). Working-class parent's lack of appropriate knowledge, capital, and professional occupations (their agency) excludes them from being actively involved within the field of education (*ibid*, p. 202). By examining the relationships between and within fields, for example, between parent and school, within the school, and within the family and the wider society, studying these fields offers insight into the concept of power relations between these fields in the context of schooling.

### **3.5. Cultural Reproduction theory**

Economics play a part in the social life of humans and is therefore included in the study of social relations and behaviour. People are categorised into social classes by virtue of the position they hold within a field. Why and how do certain social classes have more opportunities than others, especially in relation to educational opportunities? Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) theory of Cultural Reproduction is based on the positioning of people within society and the significance of such positionings (O'Donoghue, 2013, p.191). People possess inherent cultural capital gathered from their educational achievements and social backgrounds. Thus, different families will have different levels of cultural capital. For example, privileged parents convey the family's cultural capital to their children and use education as a means to do so. As education favours children from privileged backgrounds with large cultural capital, the education system becomes a medium to enhance the cultural capital of these families, perpetuating educational and social inequalities (Almquist, Modin & Ostberg, 2010, p.32).

While families from the “lower” classes also transfer their cultural capital to their children, it may have less status in the broader society in terms of economic benefits. The education pathways that working-class parents can afford may perpetuate their current social positioning. This does not mean that the cultural capital of the “lower classes” is inherently inferior, but that it has different ingredients. Each group’s cultural capital is sufficient for its purpose, context and internal audience within the grouping, but the propositional content of the capital (social, behavioural, and linguistic) may not be similarly valued outside of the group. This constrains movement outside of the cultural group. Families’ cultural capital is enhanced by specific economic and social capital, comprised of financial wealth and place in society.

As noted earlier, the activation and use of shared cultural capital generates networks within a particular social context. Within the schooling enterprise, it is argued that middle-class networking of cultural capital dominates, enabling easier engagement and interaction. Middle-class families and their children acquire more opportunities to build on their cultural capital. Social networking and current social status guide school choice decision-making and are thus a mechanism to manage and accrue symbols of social privilege (Ball, 1997). School choice opportunities, whether in abundance or limited, therefore become a vehicle for the cultural reproduction of social classes. Thus, school choice and its attendant activation of various forms of cultural capital seems to be inextricably linked to social stratification (Hoadley, 1999).

### **3.6. Temporary Theoretical Framework**

The preceding discussions delineated a theoretical framework to guide the study. In this section, the gaps from the literature review (chapter 2) and the theoretical framework (this chapter) shall be identified to create the need for this study. The following issues shall be discussed: matters pertaining to early education of children, social class issues, a life history perspective, and the positionality of the parent.

### **3.6.1. Early education**

Much of the literature on school choice cited earlier focuses on secondary schooling, that is, the stage of exit from the formal schooling system. It therefore reflects the preoccupations of parents regarding this level of schooling. There is a paucity of research on the initial entry stages into this system. For this reason, this study focused on the Foundation Phase of education where parents choose the first formal school for their children. In the South African context, this encompasses ages six to nine, from the Readiness year to Grade 3. Furthermore, there is little research on the relationship between primary and secondary school choices. For example, do learners' (and their parents') experiences of underachievement at primary school influence decision-making for secondary school choices? Choosing the first school is important in promoting a positive start to school, taking into consideration diverse family backgrounds, the contexts in which families live, and the specific educational needs and living circumstances of the child.

It is also argued that early identification of learning challenges could be addressed by selecting appropriate primary schooling, if schools are attuned to the specific needs of the underachieving child. Remediation in the foundation phase could have a long term impact on children's long-term success even beyond school (Dockett & Perry, 2013, p. 166). Thus, parents need to be explicit about the goals of primary education and should value the foundational platform for further educational opportunities. This is particularly important given that children of this age are not able to determine what is in their best interests. Whilst Pallas (2004, p 169) argues that a child that sets his or her own position in an education system could significantly influence his/her future success, this is more applicable to more mature/adolescent learners. As the custodian of a young child's learning process, the parent is usually responsible for the choice of primary school. This suggests a deep sense of responsibility and perhaps uncertainty about whether or not the correct choice has been made.

### **3.6.2. Social class issues**

Much of the research described above was conducted in working-class, single race, middle-class contexts.<sup>5</sup> I chose to conduct a comparative analysis of different race

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<sup>5</sup> A notable exception is Fataar's (2015) study, which spans communities in different racial and socio-economic contexts.

groups and different social class contexts. In response to Bowe, Gewirtz, & Ball's (1994) conclusions on social class and school choice, Tooley (1997, p.219) notes that their terminology and data on class categories were unclear, compromising these conclusions. This calls for careful classification of social class categories noting the differences between aspirant class positionalities and uncontested, measurable indicators of class. To avoid vague classifications of social class, visible indicators such as monthly salary, place of residence, and assets such as type of dwelling, motor vehicle ownership, guided this study. As argued earlier, these overt measurements of class might mask the complexity of who is understood as acceptable/admitted within a particular class. Nevertheless, the econometric measures were used as a first means of generating a sampling frame for data production. However, the life history approach aimed to provide more insight into the shifting terrain of class positionalities and subjectivities.

A further anomaly that was tested in this study is that although schools may be located within specific largely homogenous social class classifications, parents and the children who attend the school may be drawn from a diverse range of class backgrounds. How this arises within the transforming schooling systems of post-apartheid South Africa, has relevance here. Of importance in this study was the focus on relationships between schooling and real and aspirant social class mobility as seen through parents' enacted decision-making choices.

### **3.6.3. Life History Research Approach**

A further gap in the literature on school choice is that the methodological approaches tend to focus almost exclusively on parents as they make or have made decisions to select particular schools. This tends to foreground the immediate factors influencing decision-making. There is a lack of research on how parents' past life experiences and histories influence their present choices. Life history seeks to demonstrate the fluid interaction and coalescence that occurs between the past, present and future (Samuel, 2014). The story of one's life is not limited to matters from the past; it includes how one makes choices in the present based on future aspirations. By focusing on a particular trajectory or pathway, the relationship between socio-historic contexts, past lived experiences and future aspirations offers a theoretical and methodological lens

to understand people's lives (Cohler & Hostetler, 2004, p. 556). Much school choice research relies on a pre-conceived list of the factors that influence such choices (Bosetti, 2004). This suggests "that we are dealing less with the reconstruction of choice and far more with the pre-construction of choice" (Bowe, Gewirtz, & Ball, 1994, p. 71). Bowe et al (1994) elaborate that these factors cannot be viewed independently (*ibid*, p. 71). Specific geographies and social framing provide further means for analysis.

Research on school choice should thus embrace these multiple intersections. Life history is not simply the story of the lives of individuals, but also the story of how different theoretical perspectives come to be shaped and developed in specific historical contextual settings (Samuel, 2014). This approach was thus considered appropriate for this study. Further elaboration of how this conception of life history research translated methodologically (in the data production and analysis) is provided in the next chapter. The choice of narrative inquiry as a representational tool of this research design is also motivated in the following chapter.

#### **3.6.4. The parent**

This study on school choice foregrounded the central actor of the phenomenon, namely the parent. The methodological approach employed sought to capture the rich tapestry of views that influence their decisions about the school choices they make for their children. This gave rise to the following sub-questions within the original temporary theoretical lens: Do parents hold stereotypical opinions and expectations of schooling? What are the possible influences that challenge their opinions? Do parents regret their school choice decisions for their children, and if so, how and when do they deal with such? Which of the parents in a household makes the chief decisions about school choice? Why? Why do other family members not have the same responsibilities with respect to the school choice? How are school choices linked to particular parents' past social class classifications, and their present or aspirational class positions? How do parents' biographies affect their school decision-making choices? These questions formed the backbone of this exploratory study.

### 3.7. A temporary theoretical lens

In relation to the above literature review, and the study's foci, the following figure represents the relationships between the factors that influence parents' decision-making approaches to school choice.

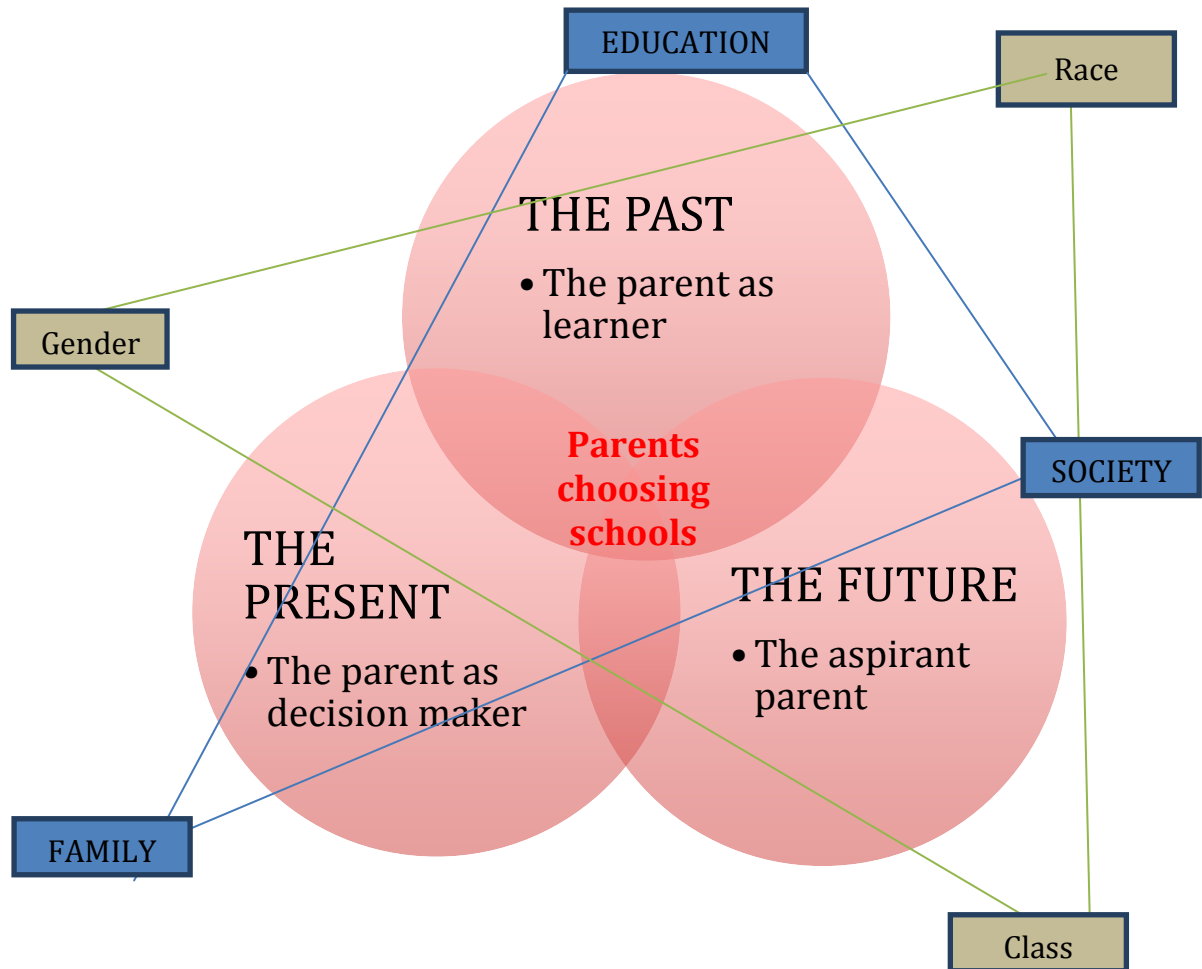


Fig. 1- Temporary theoretical lens

The literature review showed that various factors contribute to parents' decision-making on school choice. The above figure shows the temporary conceptual and contextual framework that guided the study.

- ❖ The circles illustrate that the **past**, **present** and **future** of the parents' life interconnect around the phenomenon of school choice.

- The parents' past involves reflections on themselves as learners during their schooling. Their own experiences of schooling, the impact of the political situation in the country on their schooling and their social class and race that afforded them access to particular types of schooling are seen as contextual and biographical factors which may have shaped their life trajectories and levels of understanding and engagement with education matters. These past factors nevertheless intersect with the present choices they exercise.
- In the present, parents could make school choice decisions based on the level of choice available to them. This is likely influenced by their residual cultural capital and their need for education to either reproduce or promote upward mobility between social class groupings.
- Parents' future aspirations for their children are the third dimension of these ambient forces affecting parental school choice. The interlinking dimensions of past, present, and future (time), set in historical and social contexts (space) suggest unique life trajectories for different people. Elder Jr., Johnson, & Crosnoe (2004, p. 11) refer to this intersection between personal, temporal and spatial matters as a "Life Course" trajectory which details how individuals "construct their trajectory of choices in unique choices and actions (that) they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance" (Elder Jr. et al, 2004, p. 11).

The life course trajectories of particular parents, from the past and present, with implications for the future, were examined to understand what leads them to choose particular schools for their children.

- ❖ These life courses do not however, occur in a vacuum. They are deeply connected to the social structures within the society in which individuals operate. Hence, the elements of the family and the wider society are important structures of the context which may influence decision-making. It is contended that the type of educational goals and the kind of schooling which framed the quality of these experiences and aspirations are also relevant factors that circumscribe particular worldviews. This triumvirate of **schooling, society** and **the family** are regarded as important social structures that influence parents' decision-making.

- ❖ The unique biographical and life history trajectory arising from particular perspectives of **gender**, **race** and **class** add yet another layer of co-existing factors that are possible sources of influence.

Some of the interlinking factors that influence parents' decisions emanate from the broad fields of education, society, and family and from the sub-contexts of race, gender, and class. Time, space and biography intersect in this temporary lens of factors influencing parents' school choices.

### 3.8. Synthesis of chapter

This chapter presented a link with the previous chapter. In chapter 2, a review of the literature on the phenomenon of school choice was presented. Conceptual factors such as social class, race, gender, schools and the conception of being parent were discussed in relation to school choice in the international and national contexts. A comparative analysis of studies on post-apartheid South African education was presented in relation to the extant international literature (largely in developed world contexts). It was argued that a South African perspective would add to the body of knowledge because of its unique, developing world transformative agenda which attempts to move beyond simply seeing school choice in relation to a single racial group or only affecting the middle class. The multicultural nature of de-racialising school contexts in South Africa also offers new dimensions to explore this phenomenon.

This present chapter (chapter 3) then set out the key theoretical constructs that underpinned this study on exercising school choice in a changing society. Commentaries on Cultural Reproduction theory, habitus and field were introduced as theoretical constructs that could influence our understanding of the factors affecting parent's decision-making. These theoretical constructs could also enlighten us in trying to provide explanations for the behaviour of parents as they engage in making school choices. The gaps from the literature review and theoretical framework were then identified leading in to the temporary theoretical lens that will guide this study. In particular, the focus on the long trajectory of construction of school choices delving into the parents' own past experiences of school, their present choices and their aspirant choices were highlighted. The focus on the selections at primary school



level, and the key agent of choice being the parent was also mooted in this chapter. The temporary theoretical lens represents the intersection of time, space and biographies as key elements in reflecting on parental school choices. Given the levels of complexity and the focus on the biographical and contextual factors affecting parental choices, a life history methodology was suggested. The motivation for selecting this approach was discussed in this chapter and the potential value and critique of this approach, as both a methodological and conceptual tool were explored.

The following chapter presents an in-depth discussion on the methodological approach employed for this study as well as the data production strategies adopted and the analytical approach.

## Chapter 4: Research Methodology

### 4.1. Orientation

The previous chapter presented a general theoretical framework and a temporary theoretical framework to guide the process of the study. This chapter focuses on the methodological approach employed to conduct and interpret the research. It begins with a discussion on my paradigmatic approach (4.2), followed by the methodological procedures used to gather data (4.3) and the research design. The chapter concludes with reflections on the data analysis procedure (4.4).

### 4.2. Paradigmatic Approach

This study was driven by a particular paradigmatic approach, which guided the researcher and research activities. This section begins with a declaration on the positionality of the researcher with respect to the subject matter (phenomenon) and the participants. A researcher's stance (Freeman, 1991) affects the decisions they make in relation to a study. The choice of an interpretive-constructivist paradigm is also justified.

The research process was “complicated”<sup>6</sup> by the multiple vantage points that I simultaneously adopt as a teacher, researcher and parent. However, these levels of complexity reflect the multiple fluid and shifting conceptions of self, other and society that constitute the worldview of an interpretivist constructivist approach. Rather than being seen as a challenge or impediment, in my opinion, these different perspectives enhanced the quality of my reflections and analysis. As a parent researching other parents with similar experiences, I could be *researching across* others to gain insight into their lives as well as my own. If I research parents at higher social levels with more power than me, I could be *researching up* from a level of less power. The perspective of *researching down* might refer to those who do not share my cultural worldviews or perspectives, and whose perspectives do not resonate with

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<sup>6</sup> This “complication” is indicative of the multiple levels of resources that I brought to the study.

my own. Patti Lather (2001) suggests that these simultaneously negotiated lenses of researching across, up or down, enable the researcher to constantly review their own interpretations of the data, the participants and the settings, thereby enhancing self-reflective validity.

This study did not aim to present glorified personal biographies (either of myself or the participants). Nor did it seek to generate an assertion of my personal power in which my prejudices might harm data production and analysis. Instead, my intention was to explore and understand the perspectives and forces impacting parental school decision-making choices as told and experienced from their perspectives. I therefore believe that my foregrounded role as researcher was the primary factor that affected how I approached the study. This does not mean that my perspectives as mother and teacher can be fully removed from the process.

The second consideration in relation to the paradigmatic approach selected for this study emanates from the hallmarks of the paradigm itself. The path that led me to this study is a personal journey that many other parents may have experienced (see Prologue). However, as noted above, I wanted to know how my personal reflections may or may not resonate with others' worldviews and perspectives. The interpretivist paradigm seeks to explore how people make meaning of the natural world around them, and how conceptions of reality are constructed from a personal viewpoint (Cresswell, 2009). This research study did not set out to establish incontestable truths. Instead, it aimed to determine how individuals make sense of their world, and interpret themselves, their actions and choices. These self-interpretations have broader implications as they influence how others' understandings, actions and practices are interpreted. As such, the intention was not to generalise the study's findings to the wider population. Instead, it aimed to gain insight into how truth-making is understood, and practiced based on who people are (their biography), where they are located (in time and space) and the wider social context in which they reside (society).

Interpretivism is concerned with creating understandings of phenomena rather than a single truth (Cresswell, 2009). Reflections on my own life experiences in dialogue with others offered opportunities to identify patterns of how meaning is created from our life experiences. These reflective interpretations are a means of exploring how

readings of the world and tools for understanding it are constructed. It is to be expected that such constructions evolve during the research process. This declaration on my orientation to data production reflects the location of the study within a constructivist epistemology (Cresswell, 2009, p. 8). In other words, historical and cultural backgrounds; and the particular contexts in which people live and are socialized, have meaning for a Social Constructivist enquiry.

### **4.3. Methodological Approach**

The ontological and epistemological stance outlined above guided the methodological approach selected. This section discusses the research design (4.3.1. and 4.3.2), how the study was activated (4.4), how data was produced (4.5) and the data analysis plan (4.6). This was a mixed method study that used a sequential design.

#### ***4.3.1. Towards a Mixed Method study***

Arising from my reflections on the possible influence of school choice on the long-term future trajectory of individuals, families and communities, the purpose of this study was to explore parents' decision-making processes in selecting primary schools for their children. I initially hypothesised that these choices could be demarcated according the school choices parents were making to access particular schooling types: a private, middle-class public, and/or working-class public school. This was one way of characterising the different school types parents might choose.

Furthermore, I decided to foreground the *exploratory* and *comparative* perspectives of different parents with different biographical histories. My original understanding was that this would best be established using a qualitative research design. However, the comparative dimension suggested that more definitive categorisations of the different perspectives of different kinds of parents would require a more systematic approach. I came to believe that the comparative elements would best be established using a quantitative design, yielding the specific targeted elements that would be followed in the qualitative data collection. Hence, the overall research design involved first conducting a quantitative analysis of key constructs, followed by an exploratory elaboration of the qualitative elements. The quantitative approach aimed to provide information on recent trends in the phenomenon under study. This was necessary in

order to gain deeper, more in-depth understanding of decision-making processes. This combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of data production is referred to as a type of “mixed methods research design”. The quantitative approach aimed to gather the statistical data required to compare variables, whilst the qualitative approach yielded more nuanced, complex and rich data. Different mixed methods approaches arrange different components in different sequences, and some elements are given more weight than others. It was not the intention of this study to triangulate the two approaches to provide insight into the phenomenon. Instead, the quantitative design was the precursor to the more weighted qualitative design, a deliberate focus which resonated with the study’s theoretical lens.

A mixed methods research design can be useful in providing explanations that reveal the intricacies of a societal phenomenon where comprehensive and precise information can be gathered and one instrument from one element of the study design can be used to enhance the development of the subsequent instrument (Cresswell, 2009, p.535). The mixed method research design adopted for this study can best be described as an “explanatory sequential design” (*ibid*, 2009, p. 542), with the quantitative part providing a general picture of the phenomenon and the qualitative part providing additional information and explanations (*ibid*, 2009, p.543).

As a novice researcher I soon became aware that the original, neat intended “explanatory sequential design” yielded specific field-based challenges. Specific contextual challenges included gaining access to participants, their availability and willingness to engage, and how accessible they were to me as the researcher. New challenges unfolded as I progressed. Several attempts to refine the set plans proved fruitless and I found myself embracing the unfolding methodological process. Each data collection process and analysis led to and informed the next. In an unfolding and sequential approach, the researcher has to decide which important findings from phase 1 will be privileged in phase 2 (*ibid*, 2009, p. 213). Vithal and Valero (2003) argue that challenges relating to the specificities of contextual settings are paradoxically sanitised out of research approaches. Researchers attempt to stay true to their original design, but fail to acknowledge that their specific contexts may offer unique insight into the everyday complexities of the phenomenon under study. They

argue that disruptions constitute data that the researcher must admit and respond to as part of in-depth engagement in the field.

In the final presentation of the study report, I chose to foreground those elements of the field work which yielded the most insight into the phenomenon under study. Whilst the quantitative study yielded interesting data, the qualitative aspects of the field work generated greater clarity. I thus opted to provide less analysis of the quantitative information, using it as a stepping stone to the more detailed qualitative research data. This explains the relative under-representation in the final report of the quantitative data that was part of the original research design. In numerical terms 20% of the research design was devoted to the quantitative data.

#### *4.3.2. The sequential design*

The advantages of a mixed method research design are that the quantitative analysis enables exploration of phenomena, while the qualitative procedure enables theoretical explanations to be developed. Concepts, relationships, and reasons are explained in the exploratory part, enabling the development of explanations as described by the participants. The experiences described in the exploratory section can be used inductively to develop theories (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006, p. 479). Mixed methods also offer insight into complex phenomena by revealing the multiple factors that impact on participants' personal lives, in combination with broader societal, community and institutional settings (*ibid*, 2006, p. 478). They thus allow for multiple interpretations.

Given the lack of research on school choice in primary schools within the local macro-context in the democratic South Africa, I believed that a broad survey of parents across a wider spectrum to gauge their conception of this phenomenon would be useful. I recognised that since school choice is not policy-driven (see chapter one), the survey would provide insight into how parents themselves make sense of school choice making. The survey was used to determine parents' assessment of the status of South African primary schooling. It was also a useful way to gain access to willing participants who could be included in the second, exploratory part of the study. Aware of my positionality as "parent researcher," I did not want to choose parents that I

already knew to make up the sample. As “teacher researcher,” I resisted asking principals to suggest possible participants for the case studies as I was aware that they might choose those that they favoured. One strategy could have been to solicit participation from fellow parents at the schools my children attended. I believed this was too close to home.

Instead, I opted to approach schools to explore the possibility of conducting a “non-invasive survey” with minimal disruption to teaching/learning. The survey was primarily a means to generate a sample to gather qualitative data from willing parents. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

#### **4.4 Activating the study**

This section describes the process of gaining entry into the field and administering the sampling procedure. The sampling occurred in three stages: firstly, determining the broad sample that represented the different social groupings that the study was concerned with; secondly, choosing the sample for the quantitative study and thirdly, locating the sample for qualitative data collection. I digress somewhat to discuss entry into the field for the different stages of fieldwork, as I believe that they were pivotal research design decisions that had to be made to operationalise and activate the study. These experiences highlight how the researcher is interpreted (or how research studies themselves are viewed) by the school as a bureaucratic and administrative unit. I raise these issues to reflect on what this may infer for the relationship between not only researcher and research contexts, but between the parents and school as institutional structures.

##### ***4.4.1. The sampling procedure***

As described above, the sampling process entailed three inter-related strategies: developing a sample of school contexts to probe, identifying respondents for the survey and selecting participants for the qualitative, in-depth exploration. Purposive sampling was used in all three cases as I intentionally selected specific sections from a broader population (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 153). Three schools were selected as the stepping stone to create the other two samples. They represented working-class and middle-class populations and are all situated in the north of

Durban. This region is cosmopolitan and multicultural in nature. Social class is particularly evident in the suburbs where people live. Those where the more wealthy live, are populated by professionals and business owners, while the suburbs in which poor people live are home to blue collar workers and the unemployed. Government schools exist in all these suburbs while private schools are located mainly in the middle-and upper-class suburbs. These intersections of contexts are a microcosm of broader sociological patterns within post-apartheid South Africa. The particular characteristics of the sample are discussed below.

#### *4.4.2. Entry into the field*

Entry into the field occurred on four different sites, viz., the Department of Education, the working-class school, the middle-class school and the private school. I named these schools in relation to firstly, where they are located for example, in a working-class or middle-class residential area and secondly, according to the type of school they represent, as in 'private' school. In some instances, private schooling may not indicate elite area of residence. The following sub-sections describe the process of gaining entry into the respective fields, with particular reference to the gatekeepers of the different institutions.

##### *Department of Education*

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Education. Although the unit of analysis is parents and they are not actually situated within school sites, access was obtained via their children in school and permission therefore had to be obtained from the Department of Education. Permission was also received from the principals of the three schools. The process of gaining permission from the Department makes for interesting reading and highlights the lines of communication and the views of people and their bureaucracies within the field of education in my local context. Firstly, obtaining permission to conduct research in schools falling under the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal took just over eight months, simply because the person tasked with this duty had left work, and unfortunately, the process ran into the December holiday period when it was impossible to find someone willing to grant permission. I made three trips from Durban to Pietermaritzburg, a good 80 kms away, to the Head Office of the Department of Education. I was sent away twice without having met with an



official who could assist me. On the third visit, I was granted permission by the Personal Assistant to the Head of Department. She asked no questions about the nature of my study and was happy to add information that I had originally omitted from my application. I reflected on the ethical issue of whether she had the capacity to grant permission to conduct research.

***Aurora Primary: Working-class school***<sup>7</sup>

Permission to administer and collect a survey questionnaire via the school was sought from the principals of the selected schools. The target was parents of children in Grade 3 (the reasons for selecting this grade are explained later). The working-class school is situated in Phoenix, a sub-economic residential area. I previously taught at this school for 14 years as a Foundation Phase teacher. The student population is Indian and African, with most of the African students coming from the informal settlements surrounding the school. The teachers are mainly Indian, with few African teachers, and an Indian female principal. Consent was received directly from the principal. As I had had a previous personal working relationship with the principal, I met with her, discussed the study, and received permission. She did not have many questions nor did she show any interest in the study. I offered her a copy of the questionnaire. Even though I had not yet received permission from the Department of Education, she granted permission subject to the proviso that I would send her the Departmental permission as soon as it was received. This process took one visit.

***Somerset Junior Primary: Middle class school***

Getting permission from the second school took over three weeks. It is situated in Durban North, a middle-class economic residential area. This school was traditionally labelled as a Model C<sup>8</sup> school. It was dominated by Whites and enjoyed an advantaged education system with resourcing. Now, whilst the student population is multicultural, the teachers in this school remain mainly White with a White female principal. On my first visit, I intended to inform the principal that I had selected her school for my research study, explain its purpose and methodology, and seek

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<sup>7</sup> All names used in this study are pseudonyms.

<sup>8</sup> Since both the private school and the (previously) Model C school are middle-class schools, hereafter the (previously) Model C school shall be referred to as such, in order to differentiate between the two middle-class type schools.

permission, either verbal or written. However, the secretary informed me that the principal was busy and would not grant permission for research without a letter from the Department. On my second visit, the secretary accepted my documentation from the Department and stated that the principal was busy and would attend to my request when she had time. Follow-up telephone calls yielded no response. In desperation, I visited the school weeks later only to be told by the secretary that she had received no response from the principal. Later that day, I received a call from the principal, agreeing to my request to administer the questionnaire. I made a fourth visit to pick up the consent letter.

### ***Westwood Independent: Private school***

Gaining permission from the private school presented more serious issues than the time taken to receive permission. I had initially chosen a very popular, elite private school situated in La Lucia, an upper-class residential area with a multicultural student population and mainly White teachers with a White female principal in the Foundation Phase. I approached the receptionist, stated the objective of my visit, and was asked to take a seat. The PRO of this section of the school approached me in the waiting area and I relayed my information and consent documents to her. She said that she would convey the request to the principal and then offered to find out if the principal would see me. However, the principal was busy. Later that day, I received an email to the effect that access was denied as parents had just completed another survey and the school did not want to burden them further. I replied that my survey would only commence in two months' time, and requested that they reconsider. This was denied.

At this stage I approached another elite, private school. Situated in Morningside, a middle- to upper-class area, this is a single-sex school with mainly White teachers and a White male principal. I relayed the information via e-mail to the Foundation Phase HOD. My request was denied on the basis of similar requests from parents that the school had not agreed to. It should be noted that my son had attended this school and that I had had a previous relationship with the HOD, which enabled me to send her a personal e-mail. However, she regarded my request as coming from a parent rather than from a researcher.

In desperation, I appealed to the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA) for advice on how to get permission to administer a survey in a private school. They advised me that approval could only be obtained from the school management or holding company, if it belonged to one. Since both school management teams had denied access, I set my sights on yet another private school.

The third private school that I approached was not a traditional elite private school, but a middle-class private school. Situated in Mount Edgecombe, a middle- to upper-class residential and business area, the student population is mainly Indian, with Indian teachers and an Indian male principal. This school was most welcoming and showed an interest in my research. My initial contact was with the HOD who requested information about the research via e-mail. I called three days later and was told that approval would be granted. I visited the following day to pick up the consent letter, only to be told that the principal would like to discuss the questionnaire with me but was busy on that day. The HOD was most interested in my studying for a PhD and admired me for undertaking the study. I went back the next day to see the principal who went through the questionnaire and discussed each question before granting permission. The principal expressed pride and interest in me, as a woman, engaging in this study. The process of obtaining permission from this school took a week.

The sampled schools therefore consisted of a public working-class school (with mainly African and Indian learners), a middle-class school (with a majority of White learners) and a mainly middle-class private school (with mostly Indian learners). The following table sets out the composition of the sample in terms of type of school, the social class of the area the school is located in, and the race of the principal, teachers and learners.

	Type of school	Class demographics where the school is situated	Principal	Teachers	Learners
<b>Aurora Primary</b>	Government	Working-class	Indian female	Mainly Indian	Mainly Black
<b>Somerset Junior</b>	Government-Model C	Middle-class	White female	Mainly White	Multicultural

<b>Primary</b>					
<b>Westwood Independent</b>	Private	Working-class; industrial site	Indian male	Mainly Indian	Mainly Indian

Table 1: Demographics of the quantitative sample

#### 4.5. Data Production Approach

This section discusses the approach to data production. In keeping with the mixed methods methodology, data was produced in two phases, first the quantitative, then the qualitative phase. The following discussion explains the instruments used; the nature of the sample, the pilot studies and the ethical considerations taken into account during each stage of the research design.

##### 4.5.1. Phase 1- Quantitative

A questionnaire was used to gather statistical data on recent trends in matters relating to school choice. It aimed to gather specific data to assist in choosing the sample and developing the instruments for phase two of the research process. The questionnaire consisted of a covering letter detailing the purpose of the instrument to the parents, instructions on how to fill out and return the questionnaire and details of incentives offered for return of the questionnaire. Since the questionnaire was distributed to parents via their children in school, I offered a sweet treat to all the children who brought back the questionnaire from home. In the majority of cases, this worked well, as seen in the rate of return discussed in the next chapter. The questionnaire included a request for parents to volunteer to participate in phase two of the study.

The questionnaire consisted of dichotomous and multiple choice questions where parents ticked their choice of answer, to be used in the statistical analysis and open-ended questions which parents answered in words, to be used in the narrative analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 384). For identification purposes, each school, every questionnaire, and all the questions were given different codes. The sample constituted Grade 3 parents from each of the schools. This grade was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, data was to be collected *ex-post facto*, that is after parents had already made the first formal school choice. The questionnaire therefore provided an opportunity to reflect on the school choices made. The second reason for using Grade 3 parents was that given that their children were three years into their schooling it was

likely that possible underachievement might have been detected (by parents/schools). I was interested in establishing how this might influence the parents' decision to keep their child at the school or change schools..

The questionnaire was labelled 'Parent Questionnaire'. Drawing from the temporary theoretical framework, parents' background and their life histories could influence their school choices for their children. Therefore, the first section focused on the biographical details of the parents as well as their current social and familial status. The second section concentrated on aspects that contributed to school choice decision-making for their children and the third dealt with their future aspirations as reflected in their current decisions.

#### *4.5.1.1. Ethical considerations*

The questionnaire solicited confidential data that had to be kept from the eyes of the children, teacher, and principal of the school. An envelope was stapled to each questionnaire with instructions that the completed questionnaire be returned, sealed in the enclosed envelope to enhance confidentiality and anonymity. While no names were requested at the beginning of the questionnaire, if the parent agreed to participate in phase two, I requested their contact details. Ethical considerations in phase two are discussed later in this chapter. As noted earlier, ethical clearance to conduct the research was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. See the appendices for evidence of all research instruments, gatekeepers' letters and participants' consent letters. The introduction to the study, letters, and research instruments foregrounded the explanatory sequential research design and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity (Cresswell, 2009, p.554). Hence, in phase 2, pseudonyms were used for the participants to remove any links between the two phases of the research. The names of the schools were also changed to protect their identity.

#### *4.5.1.2. Pilot Study*

I secured the participation of an Occupational Therapist who works with a range of children attending different types of schools and who has access to their parents to assist in administering the questionnaire to these parents. Together, we identified three of her patients from each of the schools that typified a working- and middle-class, and private school. The parent filled out the questionnaire while waiting for her

child to have his/her therapy session, sealed it in the enclosed envelope, and handed it back to the therapist, from whom I collected all the completed questionnaires. The pilot study yielded six completed questionnaires out of nine handed out. Based on an evaluation of the results, I refined the instrument further. The pilot study revealed that there were too many open-ended questions. Many participants either did not answer them or answered in one or two words which indicated superficial engagement with the question. Furthermore, the socio-economic status (SES) of the parents was not identified in this questionnaire, making it difficult to form a holistic picture of the participant and allow for a range of participant selection. Finally, some of the questions were repetitive, eliciting similar responses. I used this information to redesign the questionnaire, adding the SES of the participant, reducing the number of open-ended questions and refining the quality of the questions to yield better quality data. The report on the findings of the main study questionnaire is presented in Appendix xiv.

#### **4.5.2. Phase 2- Qualitative**

The qualitative phase of the research followed on from the first phase. The instrument used was semi-structured interviews comprising of e-mail interviews, face-to-face interviews and telephonic interviews. When the transcripts of the initial few interviews were analysed, it emerged that some issues required further clarification. This was obtained through further engagement via e-mail or recorded telephonic conversations.

#### ***Interviews***

The purpose of the interviews was to collect narrative data detailing the personal biographies and schooling experiences of participants as they encountered school choice as learners themselves and, later, as parents. To create a comfortable and conversational atmosphere, open-ended interviews with guided, leading questions were used. Open-ended and conversational interviews are designed to enhance the bond between the researcher and the participant (Cooper, 2007, p.498). There were three separate interviews. The topic of Interview 1 was ‘School choice and Family History’; it explored the relationship between choosing schools and family units of the past and present, and future aspirations. Interview 2 titled ‘School choice and the Institution,’ explored the parents’ relationship with the school of choice with respect

to its geographic location, reputation, image and facilities. Interview 3, 'School choice and the Curriculum,' explored the relationship between school choice and the curriculum with regard to the official curriculum, the enacted curriculum and the extra curriculum outside formal schooling hours. Two interview schedules were prepared for middle-class and working-class parents. For the middle-class, the two schedules had nine main questions each, with each containing leading sub-questions. The interview schedules for the working-class consisted of 18 questions in interview 1, 11 in interview 2, and 13 in interview 3. The questions were similar to those for the middle-class interviews. However, the language of the questions needed to be adjusted to facilitate translation (see discussion below on the language medium adopted for working-class African participants.) Each interview took approximately 45 minutes, with a total of around seven hours of data collection.

### ***Process of data collection***

The plan of action for data collection in this round was to choose possible participants from the 'yes to participation' response in the questionnaires, make contact via e-mail or telephonically, obtain further permission to conduct the interview, and set up appointments to do so. Participants were given a choice for the interview to be conducted at their home or at the school where, with the assistance and permission of the principal, I would secure a room for the interview. The third option was to meet at a coffee shop. However, things did not go as planned, as the parents' busy lives prevented their participation in this research project. A second plan of action had to be adopted. I offered the participants three options. The first was to meet for face-to-face live interviews that would be recorded, while the second was an e-mail interview and the third was a telephonic one. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in three sessions, one session for each interview. Questions for the e-mail interviews were sent to the participants, at intervals of a week, with the proviso that they could fill them out at their leisure and return them via e-mail. This method required the sending of many reminders to return the interviews. When the third interview took a very long time to be returned and I investigated why this was so, a parent divulged that it was difficult to answer questions on education policies when she knew very little about them. I decided to make these questions optional for fear of participants dropping out at the eleventh hour. Finally, the telephonic interviews worked well for the working-class group as this group, although willing to participate, had problems in getting to a

venue for face-to-face interviews and did not have e-mail facilities. This plan evolved, with specific appropriate data production strategies for each of the targeted groups as follows:

**(i) SCHOOL A: Private school: (Westwood Independent)** Responses were the most difficult to obtain from this school. Seventeen parents indicated on their questionnaires that they would be willing to be interviewed, however; only two finally participated. This followed several efforts to make contact to get them to commit. A third parent was initially committed until he decided that he could not go through with the interview. His company was doing a roll-over procedure and he had to work nights. In all 17 cases, the parents were working, and this, together with their home commitments, made it difficult for them to commit to something outside of their daily routine. I finally secured another “third participant” after many e-mails to the entire group. These challenges were reproduced across the three school types. However, the other sample groups were more forthcoming than the first. I settled on three participants per group, and not four as originally planned.

The final sample from Westwood Independent consisted of three participants: two opted for e-mail interviews and one for face-to-face. Whilst I had hoped to hold three face-to-face interviews, this did not go as planned. I met participant 1, a business manager, at his place of work. He allowed me time until he had to leave for a meeting. In retrospect, the workplace was not the ideal place to conduct the interviews. We were frequently disturbed by telephone calls and other members of staff dropping in. I therefore had to make a quick decision and conduct all three interviews in one meeting, for fear of losing the participant through repeated incursions on his time. However, despite the three set interviews being conducted at one time the data was analysed separately as the three interview schedules were administered. All three participants from this sample were Indian, two mothers and one father.

**(ii) SCHOOL B: Middle-class public school (Somerset Junior Primary)** This school recorded the most favourable response to e-mail interviews. Out of 12 possible participants, four completed e-mail interviews and one agreed to face-to-face interviews. From this batch, I chose three participants to be included in the sample,



two e-mail and one face-to-face. Here again, the face-to-face interview was conducted at the participant's place of work during her lunch break. As with participant 1 above, all three interviews were conducted consecutively as she was not available to meet again. However, these interviews were analysed in relation to the specific foci of the three different interview schedules. Of the three participants, two were White mothers and one an Indian mother.

**(iii) SCHOOL C: Working-class school: (Aurora Primary)** The working-class group of participants required a totally different approach, both in terms of the instrument and the method of data collection. Since this school is largely comprised of African students and to a lesser extent, Indian students, more African parents were available. Two Indian mothers agreed to participate in the interviews. However, both chose not to participate further as I began setting up the process. The final participants were African mothers. On initial contact, I quickly realised that there was a language barrier. Since I am not sufficiently fluent in isiZulu, and it was obvious that the participants felt more comfortable conversing in that language I enlisted the support of a person who was proficient in both English and isiZulu, is literate and could mediate the on-going interactive processes of data production, clarification and negotiation of meaning making. My local housekeeper was willing to assist and I saw this as an opportunity for us to open up dialogue on changing schooling contexts. She was familiar with African parents who had chosen to select schools outside the township. In initial meetings with potential participants, my helper displayed her rapport with them and this augured well. I was inspired and fulfilled by her active engagement and enthusiasm as a novice interviewer. She felt equally responsible for the data produced and enjoyed the training I provided on conducting and transcribing interviews with me from isiZulu to English. The interviews were conducted in isiZulu and she translated and transcribed them in her own handwriting which I then typed.

We decided to conduct telephonic interviews as several attempts to make a time to meet proved fruitless. The initial four participants were domestic workers with unusual working hours. We called them at specified times via my cellular phone, and with their consent placed it on speaker mode, and recorded the interviews. While this process worked, it must be acknowledged that this data set has some limitations

emanating from the back and forth translating of the interview transcripts. Furthermore, mention should be made of the structure of the interviews. Whilst I kept to the original schedules, I had to simplify the questions for this group of participants. Thus, elaborated schedules were drawn up for them. Three participants eventually constituted this sample. Despite the difficulty in securing participation and scheduling times for interviews, the transcripts revealed rich, authentic data in response to the interview questions.

#### **4.5.2.1. Sample**

The sample was originally chosen from the analysis of the questionnaire, based on the following criteria: willingly agree to participate, have interesting stories about schooling in the past and present that warrant more probing, present a range of social class groupings and family compositions and should be parents of children with a range of academic abilities. As noted earlier, this purposive sampling strategy was confronted by problems of access. A variation of snowball sampling emerged as participants vacillated about their participation in the full study. The methodological approach relied on parents who were most willing to participate and represented the three sampled types of schooling. The sample was eventually made up of nine participants, three from each school type. The following tables (Tables 2, 3 and 4) classify the participant case studies using the collective data from the survey and the interviews, whilst table 5 details the types of interviews per participant. Much of their biographical details were information taken from the questionnaires and in instances where information was vague or absent, it was gleaned through the level 1 analysis iterative approach during the setting up and follow up of initial interviews. All relevant additional data was recorded in my reflective journal.

#### **(i) Classification of participants**

	<b>Rashina</b>	<b>Pranil</b>	<b>Beena</b>
<b>Position in family</b>	Guardian	Father	Mother
<b>Age Group</b>	20-30	30-40	30-40
<b>Type of school attended</b>	Public	Public	Public
<b>Type of residential area lived in</b>	Urban	Township	Urban
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	Married	Married
<b>Number of children</b>	3 step children	1	1
<b>Qualification</b>	Degree	Matric	Degree
<b>Occupation</b>	Accountant	Bank Manager	Medical Professional
<b>Social Class</b>	Middle	Middle	Upper
<b>Race</b>	Indian	Indian	Indian

Table 2: School A- Middle-class private school- classification of participants

	<b>Priya</b>	<b>Jane</b>	<b>Anne</b>
<b>Position in family</b>	Mother	Mother	Mother
<b>Age Group</b>	30-40	20-30	20-30
<b>Type of school attended</b>	Public	Public	Private
<b>Type of residential area lived in</b>	Township	Urban	Urban
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	Married	Married
<b>Number of children</b>	2	2	2
<b>Qualification</b>	Matric	Matric	Degree
<b>Occupation</b>	Self-employed	Self-employed	Financial Director
<b>Social Class</b>	Middle	Middle	Upper
<b>Race</b>	Indian	White	White

Table 3: School B- Middle-class public school- classification of participants

	<b>Lindiwe</b>	<b>Nokuthula</b>	<b>Hlengiwe</b>
<b>Position in family</b>	Mother	Mother	Mother
<b>Age Group</b>	30-40	30-40	30-40
<b>Type of school attended</b>	Public	Public	Public
<b>Type of residential area lived in</b>	Rural	Rural	Urban
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	Married	Single
<b>Number of children</b>	5	3	3
<b>Qualification</b>	None	None	None
<b>Occupation</b>	Domestic Worker	Domestic Worker	Domestic Worker
<b>Social Class</b>	Working	Working	Working
<b>Race</b>	Black	Black	Black

Table 4: School C- Working-class public school- classification of participants

<b>School A</b>	<b>Rashina</b>	<b>Pranil</b>	<b>Beena</b>
<b>Type of Interview</b>	e-mail	Face-to-face	e-mail
<b>School B</b>	<b>Priya</b>	<b>Jane</b>	<b>Anne</b>
<b>Type of Interview</b>	Face-to-face	e-mail	e-mail
<b>School C</b>	<b>Lindiwe</b>	<b>Nokuthula</b>	<b>Hlengiwe</b>
<b>Type of Interview</b>	telephonic	telephonic	telephonic

Table 5: Type of interview per participant

#### 4.5.2.2. Ethical considerations

In keeping with standard ethical procedures, I fully revealed my identity as a doctoral researcher, either telephonically or by e-mail. I outlined the background to the study

and its purpose as well as the research procedures. An informed consent form was presented and signed by the participants for the face-to-face interviews. I assured participants that all sources and information would be treated as confidential, and that the names of sites and participants would be changed in the final representation of the data. However, negotiation of identity in the working-class school was entirely driven by my assistant. She introduced herself by name, then proceeded to refresh their memories about the questionnaire they filled in, sent by me (name given), via the school (identified by name). This familiarised the participants with the agenda and they consented to telephonic interviews. The initial narrative constructed was sent to the participants to check, providing feedback as a form of triangulation of the data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 103). Once the narratives were written, copies were e-mailed to participants from Schools A and B. The narratives for the parents from School C were translated into isiZulu by my assistant. She then called them one by one, and read their transcripts to them, while I recorded the feedback for later reference if changes needed to be made.

#### **4.6. Data Analysis Approach**

A two stage data analysis approach was adopted: firstly, to analyse the surveys through quantitative analysis; and secondly, to engage in a more intense qualitative analysis of the interviews. Each process included cleaning of the data and coding. While the quantitative data was analysed through a descriptive analytical approach, the qualitative data was analysed using a narrative analysis approach.

##### **4.6.1. Phase 1-Quantitative Data Analysis**

Once collected from the schools, the questionnaires were kept separately in their school batches. I opened all the envelopes and placed them in order of the numbers coded on each questionnaire, for example; school A, participant number 5. These codes became the participants' identification code. The next step was to clean the data and interpret the reasons for missing data. Cresswell (2009) notes that missing data must be assessed as it affects the quantity of the data received (Cresswell, 2009, p. 182). Cleaning of the data was done through visual scrutiny and revealed five questionnaires returned that were not filled in at all. These were left out of the data set. Furthermore, missing data was apparent in the questionnaires from the working-class school, particularly in the table that requested the number, gender, and type of

school attended by all the children in the family. I realised that this was probably a little confusing to parents and because this information could be generated in phase 2 of the research process, I concluded that the missing data would not affect phase 1 analysis. Consequently, these questionnaires were included in the data set. A further question that yielded missing data was establishing whether children were attending private tuition and health professional interventions. Here again the data did not impact on the quantitative analysis but could be generated in phase 2 of data collection. Consequently, it was not deemed necessary to include it in phase 1, but it would be used as a stepping-stone to develop the case studies in phase 2. However, silence on extra tuition was quite glaring in both the number and word data and prompted further probing in phase 2, to establish the reasons and explanations. The next step in the analysis process was coding the single item closed questions. Numbers were already assigned to the answers in the questionnaire and a coding book was drawn up. It lists all the questions and all the answers, with each answer assigned a code, and it is an indication of how the researcher will code the responses (Cresswell, 2009, p.176). The code for each response was circled on the questionnaire. Next, all codes were manually entered onto a spreadsheet. This process was done three times for each of the different schools. Thereafter, the descriptive analysis could commence.

#### *4.6.1.1. Descriptive analysis*

**(i) Number data:** The scores were analysed according to statistical measurements firstly, through descriptive analysis which studies the statistics of the single variables separate from one another, to review trends in the data (Cresswell, 2009, p.183). Each school analysis was done separately to indicate the trends in each type of school. This was done through measurements of central tendencies, and in particular the mean of each variable was determined. As the mean scores were calculated, I began to group them into categories such as background, family dynamics, parent agency and the institution. Secondly, to show how parents from each school fared in relation to one another, a comparison was made of sample means, firstly of single variables, and then of dual or multiple variables. The comparisons of sample means are represented on bar graphs.

**(ii) Open-ended responses:** The open-ended questions in the questionnaire sometimes yielded lengthy written responses. All these responses were represented on a table separating those parents that indicated willingness to participate in phase 2 and those that did not wish to participate. This enabled the formulation of questions or issues to follow up in the subsequent interviews. I paid particular attention to copying the open-ended responses verbatim which I intended to use in the representation of the final constructed narratives. The open-ended data were also probed for further analysis.

#### **4.6.2. Phase 2-Qualitative Data Analysis**

As the research design was sequential, the quantitative analysis provided leads for further exploration of the phenomena identified in the first part of the mixed-method design. It was at this point that the more qualitative data generated by the interviews offered insight in answering the study's research questions. The 20/80 design split in the weighting of the research design meant that the bulk of the methodological processes occurred during the second phase of data collection and analysis. My interest was in foregrounding the past, present, and future lives of the participants, and how their lives are influenced by the historical and social milieu. This focus on lived experiences and stories drew directly from the tradition of life history research and narrative inquiry (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). Polkinghorne (1991, p.138) argues that in using a narrative approach to represent the told stories of participants and their life stories, the narrative researcher assembles events that occur across time, place and person. Such assemblage is the responsibility of the researcher who arranges the raw data produced in the field into an organised body of events, shifting them from mere recalled events into analytical forms referred to as "narratives". She argues further:

“(The) narrative is the cognitive process that gives meaning to temporal events by identifying them as parts of a plot. The narrative structure is used to organise events into various kinds of stories” (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 136).

The narrative analysis was conducted on three levels: firstly, the construction of the participants' narratives or stories; secondly, the grouping of themes emanating from both the quantitative and qualitative data; and thirdly, the theoretical or conceptual analysis, which either coheres with or extends or refutes the baseline theoretical and contextual framework. This iterative process of narrative construction and analysis is

referred to as a narrative inquiry analytical process which I deemed appropriate to yield the best insight into the study's critical questions on the lived experiences and reasoning of participants as they made school choices for their children in a changing contextual landscape. How the past, the present and the future coalesce could also be captured in the representational form of the stories/narratives created and analysed.

#### *4.6.2.1. Level 1 Analysis: Constructing the life stories*

The first level of analysis included the preparation and open and axial coding of the data followed by the writing of the narratives of each participant. Cohen, Manion & Morrison(2011, p. 553) note that in writing up narratives it is not possible to report on all events and a focus should be chosen, for example, a chronological sequence of time reporting on key issues of relevance. Therefore, the narratives focus on the past background of the participants, their present experiences with schooling and their future aspirations. The critical research questions were thus the lens through which the narratives were constructed and reported.

#### *Preparing the data*

The e-mail interviews were received in print, downloaded and each question was copied and pasted onto an excel sheet. The face-to-face interviews had to be transcribed and the telephonic interviews were translated and transcribed. These transcriptions were done verbatim, taking into consideration and recording all pauses, emotional utterances, and tone and strength of voice. Each participant had three interview transcriptions, for which each question and answer was copied onto a table with space alongside it for recording notes. Each transcript was coded for the number of the participant, the type of group (School A, B, or C), the number of the interview (a, b, or c), and the type of interview (e-mail, telephonic or face-to-face). A separate coding sheet was kept with the details of the codes used. Once the 27 interviews had been prepared in this way, the data was ready for intensive reading and the analysis could commence. Table 5 (p. 64) shows the types of interviews per participant. Note that the participants were assigned pseudonyms which were culturally or linguistically resonant with their personal names.

#### *Open-coding*

The next step was open-coding on each individual transcript, where the data was organised according to the themes and sub-categories emerging from the verbatim record. The first interview transcript of the first participant was read through thoroughly and recurrently to familiarise myself with the details. Secondly, I did a line-by-line analysis, jotting down words and/or phrases of exactly what the data was saying. These sub-categories were noted on the space provided on the transcript sheet. Thirdly, as I began noting down sub-categories, I also noted down, in a different coloured pen, any items that required clarification and going back to the field. This was done immediately via e-mail or telephonically. The responses were transcribed and attached to the original transcript and the process of open-coding was applied to the new information. This iterative process enabled me to clarify any open areas which could harm the consistency of theory development. Once the information on the transcript was saturated, it was set aside and the process commenced on the first transcript of the next participant. Once all the first interview transcripts were completely open-coded, I moved on to the next step of axial-coding the first interview transcripts of all the participants.

### ***Axial-coding***

This involved grouping the sub-categories from the transcripts into broad categories or concepts. This was done by colour-coding similar and related sub-categories and grouping them under a broad category. The formation of the axial codes was driven by the related phenomena declared, the trends in causality links. These axial codes were linked to show patterns across particular contexts, actions and consequences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 106). The axial coding was represented on separate sheets but diagrammatically represented showing all the sub-categories that culminated in each broad category. It also showed the links and relationships between the categories by means of connecting lines (Goulding, 2002, p. 125). Cross referencing to the study's critical questions was inserted alongside the emerging categories and sub-categories. Only after the first interview transcripts were open and axial coded, did I proceed to the second and third interview schedules and their coding processes. The first interview focus provided the lens to refine the analysis of the second and third interview transcripts.

### ***Representation of Level 1 analysis: Constructing the narratives***



From the axial coding diagrams, an architecture for the narrative was established which guided the construction of a narrative for each participant. It was decided that a third-person narrative would be constructed, with the researcher as the narrator, detailing and offering a vantage “stitching together” of the events from the axial coding. The process of writing the nine participants’ life stories focussed particularly, at the root, on one topical issue in their lives, the factors contributing to their school choice decisions, presented in a linear, chronological manner. The overall temporal and contextual sequencing of the data production of the interview schedules provided another device to organise the telling of the narrative stories. From the first interview, data outlining the participant’s biographical details, social positioning, age group, gender, family composition, and situational educational experiences was represented in temporal dimensions of the past, present, and future. The second interview expanded the biographical life story to focus on the central decision points of the physical determinants of school choice such as location, reputation, and facilities. The final interview broadened the focus further to secondary decision points of significant educational determinants of school choice such as policy, curriculum, and education outside the school. All these themes constituted small plots that became the foundation for the construction of the participants’ narrative stories. Each story has a beginning, middle, and end.

The narratives were constructed according to the criteria for writing life stories outlined by Polkinghorne (1995, p. 18). Each story included the cultural and racial context of the participant, their cognitive development and emotive responses to phenomena, the relationships that affect them on levels of significance, the impact of historical circumstances on the individual and the choices made in working towards achieving personal outcomes. Representing the voice of the parent also acknowledged Clandinin & Connelly’s (2000, p. 147) concern that representing another’s voice, and telling their experiences in the form of a research text, poses a dilemma to the researcher. Sensitive to the lived experiences and told data, I chose to represent the participants’ stories using as many of their own words as possible from the raw data, representing their main ideas as their own rather than the “researcher’s story”. However, as Samuel (2004) notes, the production of such a narrative embeds both researcher and researched.

- (i) **Length of narratives:** The length of narratives was determined by three factors. Firstly, the social groupings determined the amount of data received. The middle-class groups (Model C and private schools) produced sufficient data, and were available for further probing through electronic means of communication, which meant that there was no urgency in their responses and they replied in their own time. These two groups were good subjects for exercising the grounded theory approach. However, the working-class group had very little to say in terms of their relationships with and to the school, which sadly, speaks to their agency in managing relationships within an institution; or perhaps they prefer to refrain from critiquing the school in any way. There were also issues of availability with this group, as their work responsibilities prevented regular contact and cellular phone contact was not possible at night.
- (ii) Secondly, the type of interview determined the length and depth of the narrative. The face-to-face interviews yielded the most data per question as respondents could speak at length on the topic and were encouraged to elaborate with questions from the interviewer. The e-mail interview responses were short and to the point, depending on how responsive and chatty the respondent felt at the time he/she answered the questions. I noticed that when emotional issues were under the microscope, such as the relationship between teacher and child being a challenge, the data became rich and vocalised. However, the telephonic interviews yielded the least amount of data as respondents took calls at different times during their work day. External distractions such as being in transit and work pressures which disrupted the flow of the interview, determined the amount of data yielded.
- (iii) Thirdly, the language medium played a significant role in the yield of data from the working-class group. I acknowledge that simplifying the interview schedules, and translating them from English to isiZulu and translating the data back to English, could have compromised the authenticity and amount of the data received. However, I believe that the degree of comfort afforded the participants by being interviewed in their home language in which they could freely express themselves, provided a rich set of data.

#### *4.6.2.2. Level 2 Analysis: Making sense of the narratives*

Level 2 analysis consisted of three procedures. Firstly, the nine narratives were representative of a relatively newly constructed “data set” and were subjected to another form of data analysis. After the participants had agreed that the constructed narrative captured their life story, the narratives were again analysed using open and axial coding. Axial coding was used to construct recurring themes across the narrative data set. Themes with commonalities and relevant relationships were grouped to enable greater levels of abstraction of the data to answer the research questions. Chronological grouping of the themes was the most appropriate way to identify shifts in terms of past, present and future influences. The representational analysis of the narratives thus reflected an unfolding decision-making process over time. Secondly, similarities in thematic analysis across the cases were grouped to reflect consistencies across the seemingly varied participants. However, a third form of analysis was conducted to search for additional information from cases that presented with stories outside the norm. Lieberman (2005, p. 440) argues that the identification of outlier cases can yield a widening of the theory or perhaps, new theories with broader relevance. Represented together with the cross-case and outlier-case analysis was a deliberative form of data analysis. The influence of the original quantitative data which framed the sampling process could also have added value to the quality of the data produced in the analysis of the narratives. Nesting of data, embedded in each other, occurs when the analysis of qualitative case studies, which are taken from the large scale survey, are combined with the statistical analysis (Lieberman, 2005, p.436).

#### *4.6.2.3. Level 3 Analysis: A comparison with extant literature and theoretical frameworks*

In the final analysis process, the themes were juxtaposed in relation to the original theoretical lens (presented at the end of chapter two). This provided an opportunity to identify new identities of phenomena at a more abstract level set against the extant literature. I then decided whether the new constructs of comparative analysis either confirmed what the literature was saying or extended it. This led to the construction of appropriate conclusions on the phenomenon under study that illustrates its

contribution to knowledge and its contextual, methodological and theoretical offerings and insights.

#### **4.7. Validity**

Several measures were adopted to ensure the credibility of this study. Firstly, on-going commitment to data collection was made possible by multiple re-entries into the field to check and extend the scope of the data produced. This allowed for more in-depth and detailed examination of the data. Secondly, as the constructed narratives were sent back to the participants, they were able to check my interpretations and either refute, confirm, change or extend information, thus informing the validity of the initial narrative data analysis process. Thirdly, identifying cases that did not fit into the categories further enhanced or refuted the strengths of the emergent category classifications. Finally, triangulation involved the testing of data, theory, and method from different angles to ensure validity (Bitsch, 2005, p.85). Here, the use of different data instruments, such as the survey and many interview schedules, showed data triangulation. The use of quantitative and qualitative methods reflected triangulation. As the different analysis processes commenced after a literature review and the adoption of a theoretical framework, the trustworthiness of theory development was enhanced by many angles of interpretation.

#### **4.8. Synthesis of chapter**

This chapter presented an in-depth discussion on the methodological process followed for this study. I declared my paradigmatic and methodological approaches as the basis for the practical elements of the research process. I also discussed my actions, successes and failures in activating the study, which led to the data production plan and execution. The data analysis approach was extensively dealt with, noting the engagement of many types and processes. Finally, the validity of the research process and results were highlighted. The mixed methods approach and the privileging of the narrative inquiry were foregrounded as choices that were made in the execution of this data production process. The rigour adopted in analysing the data was discussed to show the messiness of the research process, in which the researcher must constantly engage.

The next three chapters present the qualitative analysis. As the quantitative analysis carried little weight in the research process, and the chief aim of this phase was to identify participants and leads for a qualitative study, the quantitative analysis is included as Appendix (xiv): Quantitative analysis. Whilst this in no way undermines the importance of the quantitative phase, this thesis privileges the narrative methodology which yields in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. This is in accordance with the weighting of this 20:80 quantitative to qualitative mixed method study.

## **Chapter 5: Level 1 Analysis**

### **LIFE STORIES OF SCHOOL CHOICE**

#### **5.1. Orientation to the chapter**

The presentation and analysis of the quantitative data, as well as a discussion on emergent themes from phase 1 of the research process are contained in Appendix (xiv). This first stage of data production focused on the quantitative dimensions of the data and provided the platform to refine the instruments and select issues to discuss with the parents that participated in qualitative fieldwork for this study. The decision to locate this in the Appendix reinforces the sequential nature of the stages of the data production, with the first part of the study (quantitative) serving as a platform to launch into the subsequent detailed analysis (qualitative) from the field. This chapter presents the findings of Phase 2 of the research process, the qualitative phase. They are presented in narrative format for each case study within each group. The three groups were constituted from the type of school the survey was administered in, viz. the middle-class private school, the middle-class public school (known as the Model C school) and the working-class public school. Details of the process of constructing these narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995) and how they draw from the grounded theorising of the raw data were provided in chapter three. Each of these narratives was sent to the relevant participant to verify my synthesis of the interviews conducted with them. The parents' stories of school choice for their children are presented below.

#### **5.2. Representing the narratives**

Each of the narratives follows a template which begins with the participant's biographical details and family situation. These background details emanated from the survey the participants filled out in phase 1 of data collection. The story moves on to the participant's experiences, evaluation, and aspirations for education of the past, present and future. Finally, the participant's comments on certain contextual features

relating to school choice (such as location, facilities, reputation, policy, curriculum and extra-curricular activities outside formal schooling) are described. It should be emphasised that the data in these narratives reflect the worldviews, with all the levels of complexities, personal prejudices and nuances of contradiction and coherence that are part of everyday life. As a researcher I have attempted to reflect these prejudices and interpretations as they have emerged from the field. The analysis of these views is presented in the subsequent analysis chapter. This present narrative form in this chapter aims to stay as true as possible to the story told by the participants. Sentences in inverted commas reflect the actual words from the transcripts, modified for flow of the narratives. However, so as not to interrupt the narrative telling, these direct quotations are not explicitly referenced. The emphasis is on maintaining the sequential flow of the story. It also aims to capture the nuances of how the story was told in particular dialectic variations of use of language/s unique to each of the participant's dialect. Only in the subsequent level of analysis are these worldviews expressed by the participants analysed. At this stage of the analysis reported in section 4.3 below, the intention is to stay as close as possible to the field and the data yielded there to celebrate participants' voice.

### **5.3. Life stories of the middle-class choosing private schooling**

The following three life stories are those of middle-class parents who chose private schooling for their children. They are all Indian parents as this school mainly serves the Indian community. Their names are Rashina, Pranil (the only father in the sample) and Beena.

#### **5.3.1. Rashina's life story on school choice: 'My unusual family.'**

Rashina is an Indian female, between the ages of 30-40, married and guardian to three children. She and her husband are part of the middle-class and present a rather complicated family composition. Rashina's husband was married before with one child. The child, a son, now resides with his mother in an upmarket residential area and attends a Model C boys' high school. The two younger children are from Rashina's late sister who passed away in a tragic accident leaving them with an alcohol-dependent father. Rashina and her husband fought for and won custody of the children and now raise them as their own. Rashina's sister chose the school for her children before she died, and Rashina keeps them there simply because it was chosen

by their late mother. The family is also racially mixed as Rashina is Indian and her husband is White. Both make school choices as both pay for school and transport the children to and from school. Their school choice decisions are based on affordability, location, and convenience. Rashina lived in an urban residential area as a child and attended a public school. She has a degree and works as an accountant. Rashina's parents considered education as a compulsory and mandatory part of their children's lives. The only way they knew how their children were performing in school was by reading their reports. They sent their children to the local public school that was within walking distance of where they lived. "They didn't really have much choice. We were definitely not going to a private school, which was never a consideration. We went to schools within walking distance from home." Rashina feels that the education she had was exactly the way it should be. "I think we had it right. It was about getting the best out of your student. Teachers did their work with such a passion." Education brought out the best in students; there were rules and values were taught. She felt that her teachers were friendly, and very good at what they did. They valued her as a student. She believes that the teachers then were passionate about their work and listened to them. Her high<sup>9</sup> school made a lasting impression on her as it was here that she learnt about equality, how to voice her opinion and extend her capabilities. Rashina's views on good schooling in the present are equated to cost. "Decent schooling is too expensive. The schools we can afford to send our kids to are run down and don't offer any facilities. We are forced into debt by choosing a school that we can't afford." Even though her children attend a private school, it is a medium-quality, relatively low fees school with very few facilities. However, she is happy to pay for the privilege of the smaller classes as it guarantees that the teacher knows her child. She says that her children will not cope in a public school with crime and drug related problems. She also believes private schooling will give them more exposure to the world. Rashina considers the expected outcomes of schooling to be that they teach good morals and values, equip children with skills for tertiary education and recognise children's talents that have not been identified by parents. She thinks that teachers should be passionate about the success of their students, and bring out the best in them. She does not expect primary schools to produce results, but

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<sup>9</sup> The term "high school" was the apartheid appellation. Today schools that cover Grades 7-12 are referred to as "secondary schools". However, the participants used these terms interchangeably.



high schools will be more destined to live up to her expectations of what she wants for her children.

Rashina says that schooling will determine the type of life a child will have. Unfortunately, for her to afford the best for her children, she will either have to get another job, or rely on credit. She would like her children to secure professional jobs as such jobs pay well. She believes that they should have better lives than what she has had. Rashina believes that schools of the future should offer more sport, career experiences in terms of setting children up for their futures and have more teachers so that there can be smaller classes. The government, she reflects, should focus more on education because “an extreme makeover of education needs to happen. Complacency should go out ....” Schools must be better equipped to give children a better foundation and teachers should be employed based on their skills and passion. Buildings need to be improved, more creative subjects need to be offered and schools should be modernised in line with societal trends.

How much has geographic location influenced Rashina’s present school choice? Rashina believes that no good schools are available in her residential area. They have big classes where the child is lost. The teachers do not know the children individually due to the sheer number in the class. Teacher strikes interrupt schooling. She would not choose to send her child to the local school. She prefers to travel out of her area for good schools. This is where private schools are situated. In the private school, there are no strikes, there is better security, and the children get more exposure to the world. The school that her children go to, however, has very little to offer in terms of facilities. There is no library, pool, and school grounds. While there seems to be high staff turnover, the teachers are friendly and approachable. However, the principal determines the productivity of the teachers. “I think they (the teachers) have a good heart but the principal and the running of the school steals their joy and that’s why they don’t give off their best.” Rashina considers that, in view of the fact that the school has no physical facilities the fees she pays are not justified. She pays about R21000 (\$1466.37) a year in basic school fees. Rashina accesses information about the school via internet searches, word of mouth, school visits, online articles about the school, and school newsletters and notices. The school has an open-door policy so she can visit at any time if she has any queries and there are also parents’ meetings once a term. Rashina believes that given the school fees she is paying, she should have the

right to visit the school as and when required. However, she feels that there is not much opportunity to ask questions at school meetings as the Board of Directors has already taken all decisions. She feels that the school's policies leave no room for parental involvement. While Rashina does not follow the education policies of South Africa, she is aware of basic human rights. Her school choice decisions are not driven by her knowledge of these policies. She supposes that education policies are put in place to control the equality of education and educational opportunities. She believes that if no such policies were in place, this could have negatively influenced her future life and career. With regard to the school's policies, she says that they are put in place only to protect the school. She is aware of the school's policies because they are given copies every year.

The children get very important homework to do at home and some of it is for assessment purposes. Homework affects Rashina in the following way:

“Some of the work is really hard to teach as there is a big gap since I was last in school and lots has changed. It also sometimes shows me that the teacher isn't aware that not all children are understanding the lesson as we are forced to teach methods at home.”

She feels that not all the credit needs to go to the school for the children's good reports, as she puts pressure on them to perform well in school. The school also does not incentivise and reward pupils sufficiently. If her children require extra tuition in the future, Rashina hopes that the school would be able to recommend choices that are convenient, as it does not offer extra tuition services. She is also not prepared for the cost of extra tuition and feels that, since the school fees are so exorbitant, she would not be happy if she had to seek extra education facilities.

### **5.3.2. Pramil's life story on school choice: 'It's a private school with no facilities.'**

Pramil is the father of one child, a son, who attends this upper middle-class private school. Pramil attended public school and lived in a township type Indian residential area while he was growing up. He is now married, is between the ages of 30 and 40, and lives in an upmarket residential area close to the school. He has a Matric qualification and is in a senior managerial position at a popular local bank. Pramil and his family belong to the middle class. For Pramil's parents, education was very important and they felt that their children should go to school and get an education.

As they lived in residential areas segregated by apartheid laws, their children went to the local Indian primary and secondary schools. Pranil remembers that discipline was the most important aspect of schooling, and that the teachers were dedicated, took more interest and sacrificed their personal time for the children. He feels that his schooling moulded his future very well. Pranil feels that the public schools of today lack discipline and that the teachers are not dedicated and will only do extra work for extra pay. This is why he has chosen a private school for his son. He feels that the smaller classes in the private school mean that children get more attention from the teacher. In choosing this school, he looked for convenience, as the school is on the way to his workplace, but when he makes school choice decisions in general, he considers the results produced by the school, and the extra-curricular activities offered. Although the school choice decisions made are in a consultation between Pranil and his wife, he takes the final decision. Pranil has observed that children are now getting obtaining multiple 'A' passes. This is in contrast to the past when a single 'A' was deemed a major achievement. He concludes that Matric is much easier to pass today, and that the quality of the Matric exam has dropped over the years.

Pranil wants his son to pursue a career in business management when he grows up. He also feels that, as his son is too young to understand life choices, his career choice should come from him. His son must enjoy his schooling; then he will complete it. Right now, his son is achieving above average results, and this augurs well for his future. Pranil believes that schools in the future should embrace the electronic age, and should use electronic media as teaching and learning aids rather than the old-fashioned paper and books. He thinks that some private schools do so and knows that some public schools in another province are using electronic tablets in the classroom.

The location of the school is not a serious deciding factor for Pranil. Where he lives, there are no schools available. His son attends the school closest to his home that happens to be a private school. He would gladly send his son to schools outside his residential area but believes that schooling within the area is more convenient in terms of daily dropping off and picking up. In fact, Pranil is seriously considering moving his son to a school closer to where he works because it is characterised by upper class residences and public schooling that he believes is of excellent quality. Pranil is not very happy with the facilities at his son's present school. He reports that the school

has no facilities for extra-curricular activities. The children have to be bussed from school to attend swimming classes, and there is no sports field. Pranil feels that since he is paying high school fees, around R15000 (\$1047.41) a year, the school should provide basic facilities. Lack of physical facilities is the reason why Pranil is considering changing his child's school. He is generally happy with his child's teacher at this stage since it is early in the year and too soon to make judgements regarding the quality of the teaching and learning.

Pranil assesses the quality of education offered by public and private schooling. He chose this school because his brother's child attended it. He believes that because it carries the label of private school, it offers good quality education. Pranil learns about what is happening at the school by reading the newsletters that are sent home. There are parent and teacher consultations but this is only to discuss the progress of the child and not for any issues regarding the school itself. There are no other interactions with the teachers and principal. Pranil also believes that because his child is well behaved, there has been no need to engage with the teachers and principal. As far as the school fees are concerned, Pranil feels that the fees of this school are not justified. For the same of fees that he is paying, he could enrol his child in another school with more facilities. However, the quality of education rather than the fees was the deciding factor for Pranil in choosing this school. While Pranil does not know much about the details of South Africa's education policies, he is aware of the aspects that matter to his child. He gets his knowledge of education policies from the media rather than from the school itself. He feels that government formulates education policies to right the wrongs of the past.

“I think, historically, the masses have been deprived of a proper education. I think the focus now is obviously to get those people up to... to bring those under-privileged people up to proper schooling. I still think there's a lot more that can be done. There's still children that are taught under trees and things. I think it's slow but there's a slight improvement.”

Education policies do not directly affect Pranil. The school's policies are given to parents. Pranil understands what is contained in the school's policies. He is happy that the school is open for consultation on educational matters. Pranil's son is given very little homework, which takes him from half-an-hour to two hours to complete. Pranil

always checks the homework as it gives him an indication of what has been taught that day. It is not always easy to supervise his son's homework, as there are many matters to see to at home when he finishes work. Having said that, he also considers that it is important that homework be given, and will sacrifice his time for his child. When receiving his child's report, Pranil would be grateful if the teacher could comment on any areas of concern and suggest appropriate remedial action. Pranil is not in favour of extra tuition outside of school. In view of the fact that he pays high school fees, he expects the school to give reasons for the need for extra tuition and to provide remedial assistance. Only in extreme cases where the school cannot provide the required assistance would he consider extra tuition. Although Pranil is aware of the popular tuition services available, he has not considered the financial implications. However, should the need arise, he would go about choosing an extra tuition facility the same way he chooses schools: he will consider convenience, location and costs.

### **5.3.3. Beena's life story on school choice: 'My schooling was strict.'**

Beena is an Indian mother of one child, a son, who is attending an upper middle-class school. She does not know much about education policies but should they affect her children, she will develop an interest in them. She believes that equal access to education is what drives the government to make education policies. Beena's parents' experiences of education made them value education from different perspectives. Whilst her father completed school, her mother did not. Both her parents provided for their children's educational needs by saving. They also insisted that she and her siblings attend school regularly. When she went to school, there was no school choice. She attended the local public school within walking distance of home. However, there was a choice when it came to secondary school, as different schools offered different specialist subjects, so if you wanted to study art, you had to go to the high school that offered that subject. However, these schools were also within walking distance of home. Beena's schooling experiences were governed by strict discipline that moulded her behaviour. She only spoke when spoken to, and was afraid of her teachers because they were so strict. "It was highly disciplined, we were scared of the teachers which made us do what they said. It hardly developed inquiring minds, we had to answer exam questions exactly how they wanted us to answer them."

Beena feels that the quality of schooling today is dropping and she comes to this conclusion by commenting on how students are finding difficulty in adjusting from school to tertiary education. She feels that children are not sufficiently prepared for tertiary education. Beena finds public schooling very treacherous as teachers are not concerned about the children's welfare. This is why she has chosen a private school for her son. She feels that he will be protected in a private school, and the smaller classes will ensure personal attention from the teacher, leading to success. "A private school has smaller classes and my child will get personal attention and more of a chance to be successful." When she chooses schools, she looks for convenience and affordability. Her husband and her take joint decisions on school choices.

Beena's aspirations for her son are that he should be a successful adult with a good education, and good morals and values. She believes that schools should build future adults with good characters that can succeed in society and that they should lay the foundation for successful career choices. More skills training and work-based experiences should form part of the future schooling curriculum. Surprisingly, Beena believes that her school choice for her son may not be the best choice as she recognises that there are better schools than the one she has chosen. As both parents work, the location of the school is an important factor in school choice decision-making as it must be easy to access schooling. Where Beena lives, there are only public and private schools, and no ex-Model-C schools. She gets her information about other types of schools from newspapers and social media sites. Through her interaction with a few of the teachers, Beena feels that the teachers at this school are good, kind and loving towards the children. She is happy with her child's teacher because the teacher is patient with her son and understands him. Even though she recognises that there are not many physical facilities and extra-curricular opportunities at this school, this was not an important factor when choosing the school. The fees are high and unfortunately, not justified, as for Beena it is just buying the label of private school. "The only thing I see it buying me is the name of a private school. Other than that, it is just like any other public school, with the exception of smaller classes and less mix of cultures." Fees were an important consideration when choosing the school as it had to fit within the family budget. However, she does recognise that the fees of this private school are a lot less than

upper-class private schools in other areas. She pays about R18000 (\$1256.89) a year in school fees<sup>10</sup>.

One of the deciding factors for this school choice was that members of Beena's family have children at this school. She also read about it in local newspapers. There are Model C and private schools outside her area that she would gladly send her child to if she could afford it. She believes that these schools have more facilities, better experience in the management of schools, and more means of giving her child exposure. She also feels that the teachers in these schools view teaching as a calling and not simply as a job. Beena feels at home in her son's school for two reasons: Firstly, because of fact that the large majority of learners are Indian, she feels comfortable that her son is surrounded by Indian culture; and secondly, it reminds her of her schooling days. The mere fact that the school has the label of private was a major deciding factor for Beena as it carries with it the feeling that her child will be getting a superior education compared to a public school. She builds her knowledge of the school's reputation by attending parent/teacher consultative meetings and school meetings. Although Beena does not know much about South Africa's education policies, she notes that there have been many changes and that it has been difficult to keep abreast of them as the years progress. She gets her information on education policies from newspapers, school meetings and school newsletters. However, her knowledge of these policies does not impact on her school choice decisions. Beena recognises the need for education policies to bridge the gap in access to education for all South Africans. She feels that the government has to work very hard to bring education to the disadvantaged. Education policies have very little effect on Beena who feels that her child is safe in a private school where he will hopefully receive a good education. If she should have any queries on education policy related matters, she has opportunities to ask questions at school meetings or meet with the principal. In terms of the school's policies, they are given copies of the school's code of conduct and admission policies at the beginning of the year. That is when Beena will read them but she has no reason to refer to them again.

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that all three of the above participants are referring to the same school to which they send their children. However, they cited different fees for Grade 3. This is discussed further in the next level of data analysis.

She feels that she is under a lot of pressure with the CAPS curriculum, particularly during ANA<sup>11</sup> assessments as she worries about her son's results. Her son has homework at least two to three times a week and this gives her an indication of what is being taught. Homework affects her when her son does not understand certain aspects and she has to teach them to him. This becomes stressful and it takes longer to complete. She feels unsure of whether or not she is teaching him correctly. The school does send home written reports and there are opportunities to meet with the teacher to discuss the child's progress. Her child's results affect how she feels about the school. When he brings home average results, she wishes he could do better and then she could feel happier about the school. The academic plan for the year and school fees are discussed at school meetings. At these meetings, Beena feels excited about what is about to happen during the year, but also anxious that her child will be able to cope with the expectations. Even though there are opportunities to ask questions at school meetings, Beena prefers not to for fear of asking incorrectly. She reported that she would rather write a note to the teacher or principal if she has any uncertainties. Beena's son does not attend any extra tuition at the moment but she does recognise that he may need English tuition as time progresses. She believes that the school's role should be to identify the need in her child, provide the tuition necessary or refer them to an independent service should it not be able to do so. If she should require the services of an additional educational institution, she would obtain the relevant information from newspapers, friends, family, social media, and the internet. In choosing an institution, she will look for convenience and affordability. Having said all this, Beena is actually not prepared for this time as she expects that the private school she has chosen would be able to cover all her child's educational needs. She recalls that when she went to school, the school saw to all their needs, but realises that now, schools struggle to cope with children that are under-performing. Therefore, seeking assistance outside of the school's offerings is becoming a necessity. She has not investigated the costs of extra tuition as yet. These extra costs will affect how she feels about the school as she expects that it should be able to solve any learning issues that her child may encounter.

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<sup>11</sup> The ANA refers to the Annual National Assessments which are standardised tests administered throughout the country.



#### **5.4. Life stories of the middle-class choosing Model C schooling**

The following three narratives are from middle-class parents who have chosen a Model C school for their children. These participants are all mothers. The first is Indian and the other two are White. The participants are Priya, Jane and Anne.

##### **5.4.1. Priya's life story on school choice: 'I love the ethos of the school.'**

Priya is a middle-aged Indian mother of two. She belongs to the middle class, has a Matric and is self-employed. Both her children attend government public schools classified as previous Model C schools. Her son is in a secondary boys' school while her daughter is in a co-educational primary school. She grew up in a township and attended an Indians-only public school. When Priya went to school, her and her siblings' school choice was governed by the Group Areas Act and thus restricted to their racially-zoned residential area. Her parents insisted on good results and that they complete their schooling. Even if there were other school choices, her family's financial constraints prevented them from exercising school choice options. She remembers her schooling as an exciting time and loved the social aspect of school rather than the academic part of the curriculum. She excelled in sports at school and tried to get her Natal colours but competition from other race groups, particularly the Coloured group, was too strong. She remembers the teachers from her high school getting involved with the pupils and including them in all activities. The teachers were very interested in their pupils and influenced everything that the pupils did. The school itself was very disciplined and teachers "were the gospel, the truth and you would listen to your teacher and whatever your teacher said, goes." Priya feels that the children of today have a very relaxed attitude towards teachers and she would like to see more discipline. "I would like to see that, more discipline in schools, now. You know, and, ja, go back to that old days of being taught, you know where the teacher is like, you know, tells you everything and what he says or what she says, goes. I think today's kids don't even bother about that." Her reasons for choosing the particular schools were that she lived in the zone that meant that they would accept her children. She was attracted to the ethos of the school: "I think with the decisions with the kids we went with the ethos of the school and both of the schools that the kids go to do have a Christian ethos. That's fundamental for us." Because of her balanced and competitive nature, her daughter has fitted in perfectly with the school. She also realizes that the many similar school choices available in this and surrounding areas,

makes school choice decision-making easy. Her only worry is that there are insufficient choices in the area for a boys' high school. Priya and her husband take joint decisions when choosing schools for their children. She is very happy with her children attending a government school, and would not consider private schools. She said that she does not like the lack of discipline that she concludes from seeing private school children with no uniforms and long hair and feels that parents get too involved with the private school. Interacting with children from her family who attend private schools, has made her reach such conclusions. Priya commented on the education system of today as a syllabus that she does not particularly enjoy. There have been too many changes and this has not been good for children. As all the work is not covered at school, parents have to supplement their children's education by doing a lot of work with them at home. She also raises concerns about younger teachers who are not familiar with teaching techniques.

Priya's hopes for her children's future are that they progress to tertiary education, as this will allow them to lead successful lives. However, she feels that in order for this to happen, her children will need a lot of support from them as parents.

"I feel with schools today, as parents, if we're not involved, and if we don't actually push our kids, then, I feel, and you know, I don't want to generalise, but some teachers don't really want to push them, or they can't really be bothered, you know, umm, some of the, some of the feelings that you also get is that, er, you know if your child's not coping then, you know he either repeats, you know it's easy for them to say repeat or they'll say to you that, you know you need to, you need to do something at home, instead of actually picking up the problem there at school and rather sorting it out there."

Priya feels that with the many changes that have occurred in our country, the choice of school will matter greatly to her children's education. She suggests that, in the future, the CAPS education syllabus should be revised, as it is not working well. For schooling to be successful, improving the quality of teachers and hiring more experienced teachers are some of the changes she would like to see. When she chose this school, Priya and her family moved from a previously segregated Indian residential area to a multicultural upmarket area, with a choice of previously Model C public schools. However, the choice of school was not the reason for the move. In fact, her oldest child, a son, went to a private school in their former area. Since they

now reside in an area where previous Model C schools are accessible, Priya chooses to send her children to these schools.

Priya believes that the school has very good teachers who get involved and inform parents should any problems arise. She feels that the head of the school is the correct person for the job, as there have been no serious issues or problems with her child's schooling thus far. "I must admit, Somerset's got really good teachers, they got involved, you know, if there was any problems, we knew about it immediately, especially regarding this child, and I think the principal, you know, once the Head is right, everything else will be OK." However, her experience with her older child's teachers is a different story. Even though the schools he previously attended are good schools, the teachers that taught him produced different outcomes. She reflected on two years of her son's schooling when he did not have good teachers and this reflected in poor results. When he did have good teachers, he was motivated to do his best. Priya does not blame the school for this lapse because they are good schools, but does feel that when teachers are not good, this is a sad reflection on the school. "The teachers, you know, got to me, and I think that's just me, I can't blame the school for that, but, he didn't do well in those particular...and you can actually see it in his work... because of the teachers that he had. And that's the sad part, you know, and that's, that's just my concern, that my child gets a good teacher and then gets on with it." The physical facilities at the school are quite advanced and Priya's daughter enjoys computer lessons and the Art Club. The fees, however, are a bit steep and Priya believes that fees are specific to particular areas. This she gleans from her conversations with other parents. She has realised that she pays up to four times the amount other parents from other areas pay for the same type of schooling. However, she accepts the fees because she can afford them and her children are getting quality education. School fees were not an important consideration when she was choosing schools for her children. She can't quite remember what school fees she is paying but estimated it to be about R2000 (\$139.65) per month.

As a working mother, Priya recognises the difficulty of getting involved in school matters and may have only assisted in school activities when mums were required, perhaps once or twice a year. However, she does try to attend any day activities and school functions that they are invited to. Priya gives a slight chuckle when talking

about South African education policies. At the moment, she does not know much about education policies but should they affect her children, she will develop an interest in them. She believes that equal access to education is what drives the government to formulate education policies. In the government's quest to provide a fair education to all, Priya believes that the quality of education has dropped. However, because she has chosen a Model C school, which has a "body corporate," and is "part public, part private", Priya believes that parents are able to contribute to certain educational matters. Even though Priya is in favour of equal education, and realises that education is being made more basic for the disadvantaged, she would not like her children to be inconvenienced or affected in any way. She claimed that she is fully aware of the policies at both her children's schools.

Priya feels that homework is an important part of education as it allows the child to learn what has been taught that day and gives them more opportunities to remember information. She believes that parents should get involved in their children's homework. As her children advanced through the Foundation Phase, she felt that the homework was quite manageable, but when her older child progressed to higher phases, the quantity of homework increased and was sometimes a tad too much with which to cope comfortably. Priya is quite happy with the school's methods of reporting. Written reports, e-mails, and parent-teacher meetings are always positive with regard to her daughter, as she is competitive and well-liked by the teachers. She attends all school meetings even though at times she feels that they are unnecessary. At the first meeting, you are informed about the school and meet your child's teacher and the syllabus for the year is discussed. At successive meetings any changes in the school activities and funding are discussed. Priya feels that sometimes these issues could have been dispensed with in e-mails. Parents are busy people. However, she does appreciate that the school uses meetings to get parents involved in activities. She acknowledges that parents are given many opportunities to ask questions at school meetings and their opinions are noted.

Priya's older child has been in need of extra tuition and has attended Math tuition for many years. His marks dropped and the teacher notified her that he needed extra tuition. Priya sent her son to three different tuition service providers over a period of five years. The first organisation used a curriculum totally different from the school

curriculum and caused confusion for the child, even though the school recommended this institution. The second resulted in a further decline in marks, while the third service, a private tutor who formerly taught at her son's school, proved to be the most successful option as his results improved while she was tutoring him. With her experience with extra tuition, Priya believes that in order to remain consistent in terms of teaching methods, the child's school teacher should be the tutor, providing extra tuition should the need arise. She would be happy to pay for this service; however, she does recognise that this solution may present problems. When she has to pay extra, Priya feels disappointed as she pays so much for school fees already, that she feels the school should be prepared to handle any learning problems that may arise. Having to pay extra makes her angry with the school as she feels it should be giving her child the best opportunities possible to enable him to learn effectively. However, these costs are justified by her desire to do the best that she can for her children. She notes that these days many children need extra help with schoolwork and feels that schools should be prepared for this. Some have remedial classes for children that cannot manage in mainstream classes. However, Priya is worried about the child that does not necessarily need remedial classes, but cannot manage in the mainstream class. She believes that the teacher should be prepared to spend extra time with such children. However, she knows that it will be a rare occurrence when a teacher voluntarily accepts responsibility for a particular child as today's teachers are only prepared to teach the lessons they are paid for. This disappoints Priya as she feels that the high school fees she pays should command more commitment from the teachers.

#### **5.4.2. Jane's life story on school choice: 'Multi-cultural schooling.'**

Jane grew up in an urban Johannesburg suburb and attended public schools. She is married and is a young mother of two daughters, who attend ex Model-C schools. She has a Matric qualification and is self-employed. Jane belongs to the middle class. She and her family live in an upper-middle class suburb in Durban, where there are many Model C schools to choose from. Jane's parents viewed schooling in a serious light and were much involved in their children's schooling. They encouraged their children and stressed the importance of education. While they had many schools to choose from, religion dictated which schools they would attend. Since they identified themselves as "English", their schools of choice were "English schools". Jane

remembers her schooling as the place where she learnt respect and how to obey rules. Her schooling was structured and disciplined and children respected their teachers. Although she recognises that early education builds foundations, she reported that her high school prepared her for the world. Jane feels that there is not enough discipline in the schools of today and that children do not respect teachers. She also believes that respect must be taught at home. In choosing schools for her children, she was lucky to have many schools to choose from in her area. She looks for convenience, reputation, and “the feel of the school”. The school must have a personal touch and she identifies this during interviews with the principal. She makes her decision to choose a school at the interview. The fact that the school satisfies her religious beliefs is also a favourable factor. Jane and her husband share school choice decisions. Jane’s hopes for her children’s future are that they should perform to their best ability in school and be happy in whatever career path they choose. As a parent, her role is to encourage and support them. Jane believes that the school and home should work together to help children succeed and that schools need not shoulder all the responsibility of educating children. Parents and teachers need to work together, and be dedicated to and take their jobs seriously. The school’s role should be to educate children and teach respect and discipline. She would like schools to be more religiously oriented. She also feels that schools of today emphasise sport at the expense of academics, which she considers more important. She believes that a balance must be created.

Jane looks for the convenience of having her children in a school close to home. She considers herself lucky in having up to five schools to choose from in her area. However, should the need arise she would be prepared to travel to good schools. For now, she is perfectly content with this school. Jane believes that the teachers at this school represent a balance of old and new ideas by virtue of their age. Collectively, they have vast experience. She is very happy with the teacher her child has because the teacher understands her child. There are many sporting and creative facilities at the school. However, this was not a deciding factor of school choice for Jane as her children are not sporty. Her school fees for the year are R24000 (\$1675.85) and she feels that this amount is justified as it buys qualified, experienced teachers and a good education for her children. School fees did play a role in school choice decision-making as Jane had to be able to afford to send her children to this school.

Jane is in awe of the school, as she has not experienced any problems. She loves its Christian ethos and the manner in which respect for society and multi-culturalism is taught. She has spent many years as a parent at this school and has involved herself in its activities. She regards the school as “fantastic”. She gained her information about this school from physical visits, web browsing and speaking to other parents. She keeps informed of goings-on at the school through the D-6 Communicator and interaction with the principal and teachers as her involvement at the school allows her access to them. Jane is aware of the human rights issues surrounding children and education but is silent on South Africa’s education policies. She makes no comment on what drives the government to adopt education policies and the impact that they may have on her. She also refrains from commenting on the policies of the school.

Her child gets English, Afrikaans and Mathematics homework that Jane sees as very important. Even though homework does not affect her much, she does monitor and support her children where she can. The school reports to her regularly on her child’s progress. She receives a written report twice a year, which makes her happy as she gains an understanding of how her child is progressing. The report reflects how the teacher feels towards her child because whatever is written in the reports shows that they know her child. Jane realises the importance of communication between the teacher and parent and takes advantage of available methods of communication. She can request a meeting with the teacher, via a note in the homework book. Jane enjoys attending school meetings, which are informative and topic specific. At the last meeting she attended, expectations for the year and the child’s routine for the year were discussed, and there was an opportunity to meet the teachers. Parents are also able to ask questions at school meetings. Jane’s child’s teacher says that the child does not require any extra tuition at this stage. Jane does expect to be notified should the situation change. She likes the fact that the school has a resident Occupational Therapist and Speech and Hearing Therapist if she should require these services. If her child were to need tuition in the future, Jane would consider the location, convenience and cost of the service provider in making a decision. However, she will find out what the school recommends before making a decision. Jane has no comment on the expected costs of extra tuition, her preparedness for such costs or the impact her involvement with extra tuition may or may not have on the school of choice.

#### **5.4.3. Anne's life story on school choice: 'IEB is a better curriculum.'**

Anne attended private schooling as a child and lived in an urban residential area. She is married and a mother to two school-going children, a son and a daughter. Her daughter attends a private school while her son is at an ex-Model C school. She has a degree and is a Financial Director at a large manufacturing company. Her racial group is White and she belongs to the upper class. Both Anne's parents have professional occupations. Her dad is a Chartered Accountant and her mum is a teacher. Having acquired a high level of education themselves, her parents understood the importance of education and ensured that she and her two brothers went to good schools. They were very involved in the education of their children and always encouraged them to do their best. They supported the schools that their children attended and insisted that their attendance be consistent. While their social class and opportunities allowed them many choices for schooling, their eventual school choices were governed by religious choices. Her parents sent her to a Catholic private school where she completed all her schooling. Her memories of schooling are happy ones with great experiences, driven by the loving and caring ethos of the school. Her only unhappy memories were socially related but were soon forgotten as the good memories of schooling overcame those of bad moments. Anne feels that schooling then was a lot easier than it is today. Her schooling and her parents contributed significantly to her current life.

Anne is spoilt for choice in choosing schools for her children, as there are many good schools where she lives. However, the deciding factor for her is that she favours Catholic schools with the IEB curriculum<sup>12</sup>. Her daughter attends such a school but her son is in a Model C school simply because the school her daughter attends is not co-educational. She really loves the school that her daughter attends. "I am on the Governing Body of the school and my daughter attends the school. I think this speaks volumes for the impression that the school had on me." Anne and her husband take joint decisions when choosing schools for their children. They look for excellent educational standards, and consider the ethos of the school and their child's adaptability to it. When her daughter was born, her school was already chosen for her

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<sup>12</sup> The IEB (Independent Examinations Board) curriculum is an alternative curriculum choice offered mainly in elite private schools in South Africa, while the CAPS (Curriculum and Policy Statements) curriculum applies in public schools.



but as her son could not attend the same school as his sister, his school was chosen for convenience. In ruminating on the current schooling situation in South Africa, Anne feels that our education is “extremely confusing,” because the pupils in good schools are being trained to achieve the maximum number of As while pupils in poorer schools are just being helped to pass. She believes that children lack analytical and thinking skills for post-school education and this is evident when pupils that obtain Bachelor’s passes in Matric, either can’t get into University or cannot manage the tertiary education curriculum.

Anne had such a happy schooling career that she hopes for her children to have the same. She believes that being happy in the school environment will motivate them to do well. The school choices that she has made will make her hopes for her children a reality, as they are being encouraged to learn and develop to their full potential. She believes that a good education will enable them to follow their dreams and get jobs that will maintain the lifestyle that they are accustomed to, or perhaps an even better lifestyle. Anne thinks that schooling should bring out the best in children, whether in the classroom, on the sports field, or in the community. She firmly believes that by writing an IEB Matric examination they will develop more analytical minds and be able to think abstractly. This will prepare them for the real world. Schooling should be standardised across the board for everybody, so that everyone can attend their local school and receive equal education. All schools should have similar facilities. Anne believes that teachers should be properly educated and if all schools were the same, teachers would be happy to teach at any school. She thinks that it is imperative that teachers always be in school and have the children’s best interests at heart.

Anne knows that Model C and private schools are available in her area. She feels that it is important for her children to attend school within their residential area for ease of travelling, and because her son’s friends are close by. However, if there were no suitable school for him in the area, she would be prepared to travel outside the area as schooling takes precedence over friends. Thus far, she has had no reason to do so. The school has a library, computer rooms, swimming pool, large sports fields and air-conditioned classrooms. Although Anne gained her knowledge about the school’s facilities at the initial admissions interview, this did not influence her choice as most schools in the area have similar facilities. Anne is very respectful of the principal of the school as she is quite serious, experienced and well respected. “The principal runs

a very tight ship,” Anne says. However, the teachers at the school are young and always seem to be looking for problems in children and refer for Occupational Therapy or remedial education. She feels that they do this out of fear that if they do not identify possible learning problems early on, they will be blamed later. Anne is not entirely happy with the teacher her son has because “she tried to ‘fit’ him into a box and because he is different she thought he had a learning problem.” Her son’s teacher last year was much older, had no problems with her son and understood the nature of being a boy. Anne’s school fees for the year are R19500 (\$1361.63) and she feels this is justified for the quality of education that her son is receiving. The school fees were not important at the time of choosing the school as she has no problem paying for good education. She does, however, take exception to schools that are run as businesses. “I do not mind paying for a good education but I would also not pay excessive fees to schools that are run like businesses in order to make a profit.”

Anne gathered information about the schools in her area simply because she has lived in the area all her life. Additional information about schooling in and out of her area is gathered by word of mouth and the internet. She believes that other areas have similar school types. “Similar education (happening in schools in and out of my area)-have family and friends who have children in schools in other areas so through word of mouth mainly.” She gets information about other schools from family members and friends. At the time of choosing this school, she was aware that it is a well-established school that has produced good students that achieve success after school. While she does not have much interaction with the teachers and principal because she does not like to interfere, she receives all necessary information about the school via the D-6 Communicator and local newspapers. Anne says that she trusts the school’s expertise in doing their best for her child and she will only address issues should they arise. Anne is silent on her knowledge of South African education policies and their relationship to her school choice decisions. She does not give her opinion on education policies and what drives the government to make policies. Nor does she comment on the policies of the school and if they affect her as a parent.

Anne’s son gets homework in English, Afrikaans, Mathematics and Reading. She finds homework very important and actively assists him in checking for correctness, completeness, and preparing him for tests. The school engages Anne by reporting on

her son's progress through written reports and parent-teacher interviews. The written reports are detailed with comments. If she detects any areas of concern, she can request an interview with the teacher. When her son was in the Foundation Phase, she had many informal meetings with the teacher. Anne reflects that she has different feelings when reading the report as opposed to meeting the teacher. She feels that "teachers are nervous to commit to really good marks in writing." In the Foundation Phase, Anne says that because the rating scores are not based on actual test scores, it is difficult for a child to get the maximum mark of 7. However, reports do not change her feelings towards the school, as she feels that school means much more than the report. Her child's report may not be good, but his happiness at school is much more important. At parent-teacher meetings, the child's progress in and out of the classroom is discussed, as well as his behaviour and social interaction. Because Anne's child is not similar to the other children in the class, she feels that he is not understood, and is then labelled as having learning and attention deficit problems. Anne is not in favour of her child receiving extra tuition but if the need should arise she would obtain information on such services from the school, other parents, and the press. If her child needs tuition, Anne does not expect the school to do anything about it as they already do the best they can. She sees it as her responsibility and will take full control of the situation. There are many tuition services available in the area where Anne lives and she feels that choosing a tuition service is as important a choice as the school choice. She believes the cost of tuition should be about R120 (\$8.48) to R150 (\$10.49) an hour and she is fully prepared for these costs as she will not hold back when it comes to giving her children the best education possible.

## **5.5. Life stories of the working-class choosing working-class public schooling**

The final three narratives come from mothers of the working-class. All three are African. The participants are Lindiwe, Nokuthula, and Hlengiwe.

### **5.5.1. Lindiwe's life story on school choice: 'I wish I could help my child with homework.'**

Lindiwe grew up in a rural settlement and attended African-only segregated public schooling up to Grade 11. The schools she went to were local schools in the rural area where she lived. She is single and the mother of five children. She has no Matric qualification and is employed as a domestic worker. She refers to herself as belonging

to the working class. Lindiwe's schooling took place away from her family home. She had to live with her aunt as the school was closer to the aunt's house. Her parents were happy that she went to school and accepted that she had to live away from them in order to attend school. Lindiwe walked to school from her aunt's house and enjoyed her schooling. She has fond memories of the excitement of learning and being with friends. The schools she went to were good schools with good discipline and good education. She currently lives in an informal settlement bordering former Indian-only, low-cost residential areas. She lives in a RDP <sup>13</sup>house. Lindiwe believes that her schooling enabled her to get to where she is today because she can read, write, and speak English, and fill out forms at the Bank.

While Lindiwe's oldest child is studying at a distance-education University; the second is in Matric and her third and fourth children are attending primary school in the surrounding Indian areas. The youngest is a toddler of three that and is not attending any educational facility. She feels that she has many schools to choose from and her children are attending the schools of her choice. She believes that education in the new South Africa is good and very important and that her children will get more education and live better lives when they attend the schools of today. Lindiwe hopes that all her children finish school, go to University and find better jobs, and she believes that the schools she has chosen will make her dreams come true. She feels that schools should give her children "good education and knowledge." Lindiwe lives close to the school and her children are able to walk there. This was a point in favour of choosing this school.

Although Lindiwe has not met the principal of the school, she has good feelings about her because her children come home and give her good reviews. She does, however, meet the teacher quite often as she visits the school regularly to check on her child's work. Since the teacher sent home a message to inform Lindiwe that her child is not doing very well and needs help with homework, Lindiwe feels that the teacher is very good at what she does. She is supposed to pay R550 (\$38.40) per year for school fees, but applied for exemption. She feels that schooling should be free for parents, like herself, who can't pay school fees. Lindiwe chose the school after hearing about it

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<sup>13</sup> The Reconstruction and Development programme (RDP) was adopted in 1994. One of its goals was to provide housing for disadvantaged communities.

from her friend. She likes everything about the school, but in particular, the discipline and the strict security measures. She is kept informed about what is happening at the school by letters that are sent home.

Lindiwe has no comment on the education policies of South Africa or how they affect her as a parent. Her children get homework at least once or twice a week. The homework troubles her to a great extent because it is far removed from when she learnt at school. However, her older Grade 7 child assists Lindiwe to help her younger children with their homework. Lindiwe gets written reports at the beginning of each school term. She has a good understanding of what is written in the reports. She feels very happy for her child that is doing well in schoolwork and bringing home good results, but equally happy for the children that are trying hard to do their best. She attends school meetings, which are usually about school fees and improvements to the school, and asks questions at these meetings. Her children are not receiving any extra tuition right now even though Lindiwe acknowledges that they need extra help in Mathematics, English and Afrikaans. She cannot afford extra tuition and says that should the need become urgent, she will approach the school and the principal to offer free tuition to her children. She believes that the school should organise extra classes.

#### **5.5.2. Nokuthula's life story on school choice: 'Unrequited educational aspirations.'**

Nokuthula schooled in a rural area in a different province from where she is now living. She attended African-only, segregated public schools. She is married with three children. She does not have a Matric qualification and is employed as a domestic worker. Nokuthula reports that she belongs to the working class. Nokuthula only went as far as Grade 11. Her schools were quite far from home and she walked for up to two hours to get to school. Her mother was a single parent and was very happy for her to attend school. Her father had nothing to do with her education. She liked her school and remembers fondly how the teachers taught her. She especially remembers her principal who was a good person as she helped Nokuthula with her schooling. She had dreams of pursuing a career in a creative, social field; however this did not materialise as she got married and had children. Nokuthula now lives in an informal settlement bordering a working class, largely Indian, community. Her oldest child is living away from the family in the province of Nokuthula's youth, and is attending secondary school there. Nokuthula's two younger children are attending

public school within walking distance of the family home. She believes that she has many schools to choose from and she is quite happy with her schools of choice. She believes that the school she chose will make her dreams come true as she has seen other children that attended this school employed in good jobs. However, if she had more choices, she would rather have her children attend private and Model-C schools in upmarket residential suburbs. Nokuthula believes that schooling in South Africa is very important and that schools play a major role in educating and improving the lives of children.

Nokuthula is confident that the schools her children go to will help them improve themselves and get more education. Her greatest desire is to see her children educated and independent, so that they can have better lives. “While I was waiting, I got married and I got these kids, so now my dream is to make them get more educated than me. And what I see now, you are nothing without education.” Nokuthula believes that the only way schools can prepare children for the future is by giving them more education. The school that Nokuthula chose is close to home. Her child walks to and from school every day. Nokuthula is very happy with her child’s teacher because she is a very good teacher and teaches her child very well. “When my children first entered Aurora Primary school, they didn’t know English. But now they can talk, read and write English.” She meets with the teacher on a monthly basis to check on her child’s work, and the teacher advises her if her child is doing well or not. Although Nokuthula has not met the principal, she is very grateful that the principal accepted her child. “I feel good about the principal because she accepted my children at her school.” Nokuthula pays R550 (\$38.40) school fees and receives a discount for two or more children enrolled. She would, however, feel more comfortable paying R400 (\$28.25) a year.

Nokuthula chose this school because her sister’s child attends it and is a clever child. Since attending the school, Nokuthula’s child is talking, reading and writing English. She is thus happy with the school and what it has to offer. The school provides a good education and keeps parents informed on what is happening through letters sent home. Nokuthula is silent on her knowledge of the education policies of South Africa and the effect they may or may not have on her. Nokuthula’s children get three to four sets of homework a week as well as assignments. The homework does not affect

Nokuthula too much. If she has trouble understanding what it is about, she asks somebody to help her children. She gets written reports from the school every term. Nokuthula understands very well what is written in the reports and she feels happy and excited when she reads the good results that her children are bringing home. Although Nokuthula tries to attend school meetings, her work commitments sometimes prevent her from doing so. Normally school fee increases, children's graduations, and proposed changes are discussed at these meetings. Nokuthula does not ask any questions at these meetings. Nokuthula believes that her children are receiving extra tuition in Mathematics and English, at no cost, at the school. She would not be able to afford extra tuition outside of school and believes that the school should be prepared to provide extra tuition to help children improve.

### **5.5.3. Hlengiwe's life story on school choice: 'My children must learn English.'**

Hlengiwe lived in an urban residential area in a different province and attended African-only segregated public schools. She is a single mother to three children. She has no Matric qualification and is a domestic worker at a small business. Hlengiwe reports that she belongs to the working class. Hlengiwe used to have a 30-minute walk to get to school. She loved going to school and especially enjoyed Mathematics and Biology. Her schooling equipped her with lots of knowledge. When she reached Grade 11, her mother, a single parent, passed away and Hlengiwe had to leave school to care for her younger brother and sister. Although her schooling helped her to achieve some skills like speaking English, she feels that it did not help to make her dreams a reality. Hlengiwe and her three children live in an informal settlement bordering a working-class, largely Indian, community. Her eldest child attends a working-class public school while the two younger children aged three and two do not attend any educational facility. She has many schools to choose from that are all like the one her eldest child is attending. However, she will not choose any other school because she is very satisfied with her school of choice. She feels that schooling in the new South Africa is very good. Hlengiwe feels that the schools her children attend will give them more education than she had. They will have opportunities to become doctors, teachers or nurses. She will support her children in their pursuit of education so that they can realise their goals. Hlengiwe realises the importance of schools of the future emphasising the teaching and learning of English. "Give her more knowledge in English because you can't get a job if you don't know English."

The fact that this school is close to home was a deciding factor in Hlengiwe choosing it. It takes her child 15 minutes to walk to school in the mornings. Even though the principal of this school is female, Hlengiwe feels that she is very understanding and helpful. She is happy with the teachers because she has seen steady improvement in her child's progress since she has moved to this school. Hlengiwe did meet her child's teacher often when she was in the Foundation Phase but now that she is in the Intermediate Phase she has not met the teacher yet. She pays school fees of R550 (\$38.40) a year and feels that this amount is justified, as she is very happy with the education that her child is receiving. Hlengiwe heard about this school from her friend. She is very happy with her decision to choose this school, as it is a good school that teaches the children well. She likes everything about the school and can see that her child is progressing steadily. She keeps informed about what is happening at the school via the letters her child brings home from school. She felt quite important when the principal asked her why she moved her child to this school and she replied that she wanted the best for her child.

Hlengiwe has no comment on the education policies of South Africa, whether the policies affect her as a parent and to what extent education and school policies impact on her school choice decisions. Her child gets three sets of homework a week. Although Hlengiwe does have some knowledge and is capable of helping her children with homework, it does affect her as a parent. She feels helpless when she cannot assist her children. She receives written reports when school closes for the holidays but sometimes the reports come home when school opens for the term. She understands the reports quite well when she reads that her child is "hard-working, improving and ready to progress" The reports make Hlengiwe happy. She does attend school meetings where school fees are discussed and she asks questions should she need clarification on any issue. Hlengiwe's child is not receiving any extra tuition at the moment but he does require help with English, isiZulu, and Mathematics. She says that she will be able to afford the costs of extra tuition. However, she does insist that the school take responsibility for any extra tuition that her child may need in order to bring him up to the level required to succeed.



### **5.6. Summary of emergent themes.**

Several emerging themes can be identified from the participants' life stories. Some relate to their past lives and educational experiences that affect their schooling decisions for their own children. Physical proximity to schooling is another consideration as we look at how people from different social classes access their school of choice and what importance these issues hold for schooling and the different types of schools. The quality of the curriculum and school governance, are recurrent themes. How parents experience the relationships between the institution and themselves is another pattern that emerges from the data on how parents interpret the value of the school. How parents create images of the school through formal and informal networking is relevant here. A strong expectation among parents is that a school should offer positive prospective outcomes. Financial investment in the education of their children and whether they are indeed receiving quality education is a key recurring theme. These emerging themes are the basis for further exploration in the next level of analysis in the following chapter.

### **5.7. Synthesis of chapter**

This chapter constructed the stories of the nine parents as they made school choices. The impact of their past experiences of education, their current involvement in education via their children and their aspirations for future education outcomes were revealed. In choosing schools, they revealed the dimensions of family dynamics, geographic location, school reputation, facilities, and curriculum that impact on their decisions. The similarities and divergences across the different biographies, contexts and types of school have relevance for more detailed comparative analysis. In the following chapter, each of the narratives is further analysed to constitute the level 2-analysis stage and dominant themes are identified. This provides the opportunity to critique the kinds of interpretations underpinning these parents' school choices, comparing both the field and the extant literature studies and theoretical framings.

## Chapter 6- Level 2 Analysis

### THEMATIC COMPARISONS OF SCHOOL CHOICE

#### 6.1. Orientation to the chapter

The previous chapter presented the descriptive analysis of the data through the construction of a narrative record of the nine participants. This data was gathered during semi-structured interviews, supported by details that emerged from the survey responses where necessary. This chapter takes the analysis further by identifying the themes abstracted from the narratives, and discusses the similarities and differences across the case studies. It also features a few purposively selected cases that presented with atypical data (“outliers”). The analysis of the quantitative data (in chapter four) is included to deepen the level of abstraction and analysis.

The chapter discusses the procedure adopted to identify the themes (5.2) and presents the cross-case thematic inquiry supported by qualitative and quantitative analysis (5.3), the analysis from atypical cases (5.4) and a synthesis of the chapter (5.5).

#### 6.2. The thematic approach to the analysis

This level of analysis used the constructed narratives as a template for the further abstraction of data. Firstly, codes were assigned alongside the constructed narrative texts to provide a concrete, descriptive level of the propositional content, treating the narratives themselves as a form of refined data. Secondly, repetitions across these codes were examined and reassigned with new labels to develop greater levels of abstraction. Thereafter, the recurring re-labelled codes were assembled into groups of similar or variant issues that represented “the story above the codes”. These themes constituted the first abstractions from the narrative sets. The themes were then grouped according to similar or related constructs. Whilst the construction of the narrative stories of each of the participants is regarded as narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.471), this chapter makes sense of these narratives by analysing them. It is here that the researcher’s analytical voice and sense-making is foregrounded. Representing the themes was a challenge. I decided that they would best be represented on a continuum of past, present, and future actions, with respect to the story of the unfolding decision-making processes of parents making school

choices. Thus, a chronological analysis was used to understand the process of decision-making. Three broad categories were identified and classified into ‘before school choice’, ‘in school choice’ and ‘after school choice’.

Even *before* parents choose a school, many factors contribute to their decision-making procedures. These include their past experiences of education; issues relating to access; their understanding of the broader political and governance issues relating to education; how they go about gathering information on school choice; their knowledge of the different types of schools available and financial considerations.

While parents are *in* the school of their choice for their children, the factors that confirm or challenge their decision are their relationship with the school, their satisfaction with their choice of school, communication between the parent and the school and issues surrounding the curriculum and homework.

What parents want *after* school choice is the next stage in the journey of school choice decision-making. Here, their aspirations of what they want school choice to do for them come to the fore. The school choice decision-making journey is not always a smooth ride, and bumps can occur, especially when children underachieve. What do parents do when their school choices are challenged?

### ***The schools***

In order to fully understand the themes discussed in the following sections, it is necessary to understand the ethos of the specific schools “under the microscope” in this study. However, it should be noted these representations were influenced by the researcher’s observations and personal interactions with these schools which were recorded in my reflective research journal. Furthermore, publicly available information on the school was used to construct a school profile. The working-class primary school (Aurora Primary) is comprised of Indian and African children: whilst the Indian children live in close proximity, the African children live in the townships and informal settlements on the outskirts of this residential area that is described as a low socio-economic location. The teachers are mainly Indian, and the principal of the school is an Indian female. The African parents that send their children to this school are mostly domestic workers and labourers, or are unemployed.

The middle-class Model C school (Somerset Junior Primary) is situated in an upmarket middle-class suburb and its student population is multi-racial. Children travel to school in their parents' cars. Most of the parents in this data set have professional occupations. The principal is a White female, and most of the teachers are White.

The private school (Westwood Independent) is situated in a commercial area. Learners are drawn from many different residential areas. As this is a private school, they accept children irrespective of residential location, as school zoning does not affect admission criteria. The school has a large Indian population with a smaller number of African students. Management is also mainly Indian with an Indian male principal.

### **6.3. Chronology of cross-case analysis**

This section analyses the themes across the case studies while emphasising the similarities of the groups. The groups are the working-class group choosing working-class public schools, the middle-class group choosing Model C schools and the middle-class group choosing private schools. Where appropriate, the quantitative data is used to support the discussion. The analysis is divided into *before* school choice, *in* school choice, and *after* school choice.

#### **6.3.1. Before school choice**

Many background factors contribute to parents' choice of schools for their children. These include their past experiences of education; access to schooling; policy and governance; networking and information-gathering; knowledge of the type of prospective school and financial implications.

##### **6.3.1.1. Past experiences with education**

Parents enter the realm of school choice with a previous history and background of their own involvement in education. Many of their parents had little or no schooling experience but they (the older generation) realised that it is essential for economic advancement and improved lives. Their lack of schooling motivated them to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to their children at that time. As these children (parents in the current study) steered their way through their own schooling, they developed opinions that, in turn, influenced their school choice

decisions for their children. Whilst all the participants held the education of the past in high esteem, the reasons for their evaluation differed among the groups. Nevertheless, they reflected a solid belief in the notion that good schooling offers prospects of better life opportunities and quality of life, mainly for their children, but perhaps also for them.

### **Aurora Primary School**

In the working-class group, the importance of going to school was reported as very important across generations. The quantitative analysis indicates that this group was very content with the education they received as children (albeit under segregated apartheid schooling), even though 64% of these participants did not complete their schooling. This suggests that, in retrospect, they are aware of the value that schooling had for them. Various circumstances (social, economic, and political) prevented them from completing their own schooling, but they still hold it in high regard. The fact that all their children are now in school shows that they are concerned about their future and that they believe that schooling will improve their future prospects. Exercising school choice was seen as investment in their children's future. The specific type of schooling and its everyday operations is considered of less importance than sustained attendance, adherence to school rules and completion of primary and secondary schooling. They believe that it is their duty to enrol all their children in school and possibly tertiary institutions. Their status as domestic workers in the zoned area of the school meant that they could access the school of their choice. Apartheid legislation would have prevented such access.

*“My dreams were to be in Art and Culture, so I did not make it. While I was waiting, I got married and I got these kids, so now my dream is to make them get more educated than me. And what I see now, you are nothing without education.”* (Nokuthula)

These parents believe that through their school choice, their children will live better lives and have more financial freedom, through employment, than they had. Not having completed their own schooling is a strong incentive to ensure that their children reap the benefits of schooling in a new democratic context.

The working-class parents recognised that the education system has changed and believe that the choice of school is important in order to keep up with educational trends. From the quantitative analysis, parents spoke about subjects such as agriculture, which equipped them for basic life needs and served their purpose at the time. However, they recognise that the subjects have changed and are more advanced to prepare their children for a global industrialised economy. The qualitative analysis revealed that, parents' greatest concern was that, through their school choice, their children will learn English that they deem the most important tool for later success in life.

*“When my children enter Aurora primary, they didn't know English, but now they can talk, read and write English.” (Nokuthula)*

*“School must give her more knowledge in English because you can't get job if you don't know English.” (Hlengiwe)*

The facilities offered motivate working-class parents to choose schools in areas outside their townships. These participants reported that much of their own schooling was done under trees or in large classes shared with different grades. In the schools that they choose for their children, learning occurs in what they consider “proper classrooms” in a school building, with books and learning materials. However, in their view, school teachers and managers have not changed. They regard today's teachers as dedicated to their work and this confirms their happy memories of schooling in the past. The qualitative analysis showed that these parents are grateful for the good teaching practices at their school of choice, particularly in terms of the fact that the teachers are teaching their children to read, write, and speak English. They were also grateful to the principal for accepting their children and offering fee exemptions if required. This indicates the ease of access of working-class parents into working-class schools. It also reflects a valuing of the catalytic effect that they feel teachers and managers have on their children's potential. They expect the teachers of today to continue the tradition of enabling their children to access better opportunities and their narratives reflect a relatively high degree of confidence in and gratitude for the current schooling system. Surprisingly, there is little hint of any negative critique of the chosen school.

### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

In the middle-class group, 68% of the participants reported positive experiences of their own schooling, noting that these assisted them to obtain a Matriculation qualification. While the majority came from education-rich backgrounds where their parents were educated and held professional jobs, only 44% of these participants completed tertiary education. They evaluated their own schooling experiences as happy and exciting, extending their academic environment to include sporting and religious involvement. The ethos of schooling (the quality of the relationships between learners, teachers, managers and parents) emerged as an important element of their schooling experiences and this influences how they choose schools for their children. This ethos is also referred to in cultural terms relating to religious or sporting cultures which prevailed at their own schools.

*“I think it is fantastic and I never had any problems. But I am very involved in the school and their education. The schools runs a Christian ethos, fosters mutual respect of our multi-cultural society.” (Jane)*

*“The school had a very loving and caring ethos which made it a happy place to learn.” (Anne)*

In contrast to their own educational environments they reported that schooling is now much more demanding. While they had great respect for their teachers, listened to them and were influenced by the passion they brought to their work, these parents felt that teaching in current schooling contexts has become relaxed to the extent that children have no respect for teachers. They believe that this has a significant impact on discipline.

While this group of parents comes from a schooling background that was disciplined, they reported that schooling now lacks discipline. Thus, they took discipline into account when selecting schools for their children.

*“At the moment, I find discipline is a little bit... the tricky thing is we were very..., we went to very disciplined schools, you know, um, ...teachers, you know, they were the gospel, the truth. And you would listen to your teacher and whatever your teacher said, goes. Nowadays, it's a little bit different. I think with kids, they sort of have a very relaxed attitude towards teachers, so, ja, ...I would like to see that...more*

*discipline in schools now, you know. And, ja..., go back to that old days of being taught. You know, where the teacher is like, you know, tells you everything and what he says or what she says, goes.* (Priya)

This highlights the specific changes that they expect in today's schooling which seems to be devaluing the qualities of the past. Their past experiences influence what they believe schools should provide.

### **Westwood Independent School**

Although this middle-class group of parents that chooses private schools came from families whose parents were not professionals, 53% hold degrees. These parents rate their schooling experiences as excellent and of very high standard and they seek the same quality as they choose private schooling for their children. While they attended government schools, they remember their schooling in classrooms that were not overcrowded, with abundant learning resources, and sporting, music and library facilities. Such characteristics are what they seek as they choose private schooling for their children. However, some feel that their expectations have not been met.

*"It is called 'private' but offers nothing any other private school does. It has no library, no swimming pool, no grounds, no sports and the turnover of teachers are high."* (Rashina)

*"Well, it's a private school, er,... I think the quality of education is..., is good. The actual facilities in the school, I'm not too happy with. So much so that I'm actually considering moving him next year, because there's not like...extra-curricular activities. There's no sports field. There's no proper sports, ... I mean, if they had to do swimming lessons now they would have to take the kids, bus them to a public swimming pool, which I don't think is conducive, considering that it is a private school. ...And the fees that we are paying, so I'm not happy with that. So, from a schooling point of view and the education, the quality of education, I'm happy. But the infrastructure and the extra physical facilities ...I'm not happy with."* (Pranil)

These parents remember their own teachers as dedicated and focused; they expected commitment from learners. In the past, teachers valued learners' opinions and sacrificed their personal time for their benefit. In choosing a private school for their



children, these parents are hoping to access the quality teachers that they were exposed to as children.

As learners, they were subjected to what they considered exemplary discipline that was, at times, so strict and pedantic, that no freedom of thought was allowed. They attribute their personal success to such discipline. They reported seeking similar measures in private schooling for their children.

Whilst this group of parents' own parents did not all stress the importance of education, this motivates them to want and do more for their own children. It should be noted that, while the critique might be unique to the experiences of this group of parents, it is clear that they expected more from "private schooling" in curricular terms as well as the availability of physical resources.

#### ***6.3.1.2. Access to schooling***

Access to and availability of schooling is a determinant of school choice. Is there a relationship between access to schooling in the past and the present, and in what way does it influence parental school choice?

#### **Aurora Primary School**

Almost 60% of the working-class parents grew up in rural settings and walked long distances to school. They reported living with extended family members. One participant indicated that she had to leave school to look after her siblings when her parents died. Lindiwe's narrative revealed that her family unit was broken as she resided with her aunt whose home was closer to a prospective school. She regretted being away from her immediate family. When these parents chose schools for their children, they consciously decided to live closer to the school of choice which is a 10-15 minute walk from home. They also saved on transport costs. These parents reported that access to schools was more readily available, which is a positive outcome of the new democratic order. However, their choice of school is also based on other criteria (expanded on later in this chapter).

#### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

While 60% of this middle-class group of parents grew up in urban areas, their access to schooling was determined by the segregated areas they lived in. Access to the Model C school is determined by residence within the zoned area. It is to be expected that, in order to access the Model C school parents would relocate to the zoned area. However, some of sampled parents reported that they did not re-locate but sought access through other strategies.

*“We were looking to move this way, more the Durban, sort of ..... area. And we found a place, you know, a home... Well, a land. Then we built and I think, umm..., that’s mainly the reason why we did. But in any case, he [son] was at ....., so he was still in private school. So, when we moved, you know, we just got him into a Model C school here. And Somerset Junior primary came out best for us.”* (Priya)

This reflection indicates that the parent actively bought property to secure access to the Model C school. The family did not relocate to the area until much later. Instead, they used the fact that their child previously attended a private school to gain access.

The sampled White parents living in the area with many Model C schools recognised the availability of other quality schooling in the area. For them access and school choice was less cumbersome as they reported a wider range of possibilities. The choice of school was not necessarily influenced by distance from home. They were willing to travel to access schools that offer quality schooling. However, this was not necessary as they believed the school chosen offered what they required.

*“There are many very good schools in the ..... area where we live so we are spoilt for choice.”* (Anne)

*“Yes, to me it is, for convenience. If I need to get there in a rush, ...But by saying that, if the schools were not great, I would travel a distance to get her into a good school.”* (Jane)

### **Westwood Independent School**

This middle-class group of parents was largely from the Indian community and was still residing in previously Indian areas. Whilst the schools they attended as children were close to home, the private school they chose for their children requires travel. Some incur costs as they hire transport to take their children to and from school.

While there are government schools in their residential areas, this group of parents chooses to not to send their children to these schools but has selected a private school in another area. Thus, easy access does not seem to be a major factor in school choice. They are willing to pay to access what they believe to be better quality education. It should be noted that private schools are legally permitted to admit learners outside of their zone.

*“I know that for good schooling, my children would have to travel out of our home area.”* (Rashina)

#### **6.3.1.3. Policy and Governance**

Is school choice influenced by parents’ understanding of educational policy and how much has changing governance in South Africa affected the way in which parents choose schools?

#### **Aurora Primary School**

The sample comprised Indian and African parents. The survey responses revealed that not much has changed for Indian working-class parents in terms of school choice in an emerging democratic society, as they send their children to the same schools they attended. However, for the African parent, choosing to send their children to a previously Indian school is interpreted as an improvement on the rural African schools that they went to. Their narratives revealed that they perceive former Indian schools as offering better facilities. Whilst none expressed an opinion on South Africa’s education policies, it is clear that they are aware of the legal admission policies of schools, which is what interests them at the point of entry into schools.

*“I feel good about the principal because she accepted my children at his school.”* (Nokuthula)

These admission policies require parents to reside in the zoned ‘catchment area’ of the school. This also explains why African parents choose to reside (however temporarily) or relocate to areas close to the targeted school. Thereafter, they place their trust in the school to deliver education to their children as per the country’s policies. They offer little critique of what drives the quality of education delivery. However, this does not suggest that these parents have no opinions on value or the quality of the education offered at these chosen schools; instead, their narratives

reflect a conscious effort to report a favourable view of the school. The potential that the reported “better school” could offer perhaps deflects any criticism.

### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

The move to a multi-cultural education system is important for middle-class parents. For some, the educational disadvantages of the past motivate them to choose schools that offer their children better opportunities. The White parents sampled at the Model C school offered limited comments on educational policy and governance as they believe that not much has changed for them. They maintain their access to what is considered a good school, and this is regarded as further enhanced by the move to multi-culturalism which they consider progressive. These parents interpret the fact that their children are educated alongside children of different race groups as a hallmark of the new democracy.

The sampled Indian and Black parents that chose this school are much more aware of education policies and their rights. They reported feeling protected in Model C schools. These parents felt that the democratic order had ushered in major changes that have a significant impact on government schools. They interpreted new education policies as an attempt to equalise educational opportunities for all. However, they feel that this has lowered the standard of public schooling. This does not affect them as their children are in the Model C school. This reflects a measure of self-interest.

### **Westwood Independent School**

This school is largely populated by Indian children, and the sampled parents seem to favour the predominantly mono-cultural environment that the private school presents. The parents reported that their children were safe and comfortable with others of their own kind. They looked down upon government schooling for reasons of poor quality, and lack of safety and hygiene.

*“My kids would never cope in a normal government school. They are not exposed to drugs and crime. They have been sheltered in a private school set-up and it would surprise me if they managed to cope in anything else.”* (Rashina)

These parents interpreted educational policies as trying to bridge the gap between the previously advantaged and disadvantaged. They believed that the change in policy

would negatively affect opportunities for their children. It is for this reason that they feel a measure of safety in sending their children to a private school, where they can perhaps have some say in their education. Furthermore, a preference for mono-racial schooling seems to be an undeclared but underlying conservative consideration that motivates this group of middle-class parents.

#### *6.3.1.4. Networking and information gathering*

Before a decision on school choice is made, information needs to be gathered about the variety (or not) of choices available. This can be done through formal and informal networking. Different social classes are exposed to different types of networking to make their school choice decisions. For the purpose of this study, I was interested in determining how important these networking strategies were in influencing the participants' school choices.

#### **Aurora Primary School**

Both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the most prominent procedure in place for working-class parents to gather information on school choice is informal social networking with the community, friends and family. Schools within this community also rely heavily on newspaper adverts to publicise their learners' achievements and this is also a source of information for parents. However the sampled group of parents seemed to have limited access to this media. There also seemed to be limited knowledge of a small range of schools in the areas where they resided. The major criterion for school choice among this group was the proximity of the school to the family residence. It thus appears that social networking and the media do not make a substantial contribution to the school choices made by working-class parents.

#### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

While the middle-class parents also use social networking and the media to gather information, they rely heavily on internet browsing as the schools they are interested in have websites that are accessible to the public. This group of sampled parents was exposed to schools in and outside their residential areas. They were therefore aware of a wide range of options. The narrative indicates that they also visited schools on open days. Furthermore, some of these parents have lived in the same area for most of their

lives and consequently make school choice decisions for their children early on as they claim that they know the schools well. Nonetheless, networking for information gathering is an important criterion for school choice for this group as their reasons for choosing a school extend to more than convenience and location. This indicates that middle-class parents are exposed to many more schools and consider varied criteria in choosing a school.

### **Westwood Independent School**

While this middle-class group of parents is exposed to similar networking opportunities as the other group of middle-class parents, the narrative reflects that they did their own research to gather information on the private school. This school does not have a website and parents rely on personal networks and newspaper adverts for information. Since parents gather information from friends, family, and local newspapers, the school itself is geared to attracting a certain type of community. Given that some parents chose this school due to their self-reported degree of comfort in ensuring mono-racial schooling, the networks they are likely to have accessed are possibly also racially-based.

#### *6.3.1.5. Type of school*

What are parents looking for when they choose a particular type of school? Their knowledge of the different types of schools in either the private or public sphere is important in evaluating their choices. However, what parents initially seek may be re-evaluated after their children are already enrolled in the school.

### **Aurora Primary School**

The working-class parents did not express opinions on the different types of schools available to them. The participants reported that they rely on informal networking to establish the schooling types that are available. Their narratives do not appear to encompass knowledge of schools outside their residential areas. Hence, it can be concluded that knowledge of available school choice options is proximate and depends on the situatedness of these working-class parents. However, this data is somewhat contradictory since the participants indicated that they consciously made a decision to relocate to areas around schools which they reported offered better quality schooling, sometimes even crossing the boundaries between rural and urban contexts.

The data gathered for this study does not reflect the choices of African working-class parents to seek better schools within previously racially segregated zones, such as African township schools. The fact that these participants migrated to access schools is counter to their narrative on their knowledge of schooling outside their immediate geographic contexts. While it not clear why such migration is under-reported, fear of surveillance and removal of informal settlements within urban spaces, might be one reason.

### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

Although the parents that chose the Model C school “bought into” a public school, they believe that its quality is determined and controlled by the School Governing Body, that upholds its historical standards. These parents have negative opinions on private schooling, including a lack of discipline reflected in policies on uniforms and that there is too much parental involvement in such schools. However, the knowledge on which their school choice is based is not always accurate; for example, Priya refers to the School Governing Body as a Body Corporate, which refers to people entrusted with running an apartment block or cluster-type housing. She also refers to the Model C school as partially private, which it is not. Her comments seem to indicate a blurring of perceptions of what constitutes private and Model C schooling.

The sampled parents in the middle-class schools could be considered relatively narrow in the way they think about schools, preferring to remain comfortable in the environment that they have chosen to live and school in. For them, it does not matter that they do not fully understand the dynamics of a Model C school. This is also seen in their lack of assertive agency or power within the school. They critiquing private schooling from a Model C school perspective and have capitulated to the Model C school type because it offers them a sense of security and affirms their view of quality schooling.

### **Westwood Independent School**

The parents in this middle-class group, who have chosen private schooling for their children, have strong opinions on the pros and cons of public and private schooling. They cite large classes, danger (lack of safety measures, drugs, crime), and uncertainty (teacher strikes disrupting schooling) as factors that discourage them from choosing public schooling. However, they only speak of the public schooling available in working-class areas as Model C schools are unavailable to them because of school zoning. They feel that private schools offer smaller classes and are safer for their children. Consequently, the school choices of these middle-class parents are limited to two types, working-class public schools and the not-so-elite private school.

#### ***6.3.1.6. Finance***

The financial cost of schooling has to fit into the family budget, i.e. it has to be affordable for the parents. As parents start to pay more for schooling, they begin to question and judge the return on their investment in the schools they have chosen. How financial affordability and school choice are understood by the different groups of parents in this study, is the subject of the discussion below.

#### **Aurora Primary School**

The working-class group of parents in this study was sure about the amount they are paying for school fees. The affordability of the school was one of the major deciding factors for school choice for this group, second to its location. As the narratives reveal, various payment options, and even exemption from fees, are welcome facilities available to these parents. This caused them to regard school choice as more democratic and open. They expressed their gratitude for the services they get from the school, and in particular, for English instruction for their children. Even though paying school fees could be a major proportion of their take home wages, these parents felt that this was a justifiable expense. For these working-class parents, the financial cost of education has not hindered access. It should be noted that they constitute an employed category of the working class. Views among the unemployed might be different.

#### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

For the middle-class group of parents, affordability was not a criterion for school choice from the quantitative data. This was also true of the qualitative data, as each of



the respondents cited different school fees for the same school. Thus, it is clear that fees are not a major issue among parents at this middle-class Model C school; paying for education is taken for granted and is regarded as routine expenditure. Finance is thus not a major consideration when making school choice decisions. However, this does not mean that finances are not an underlying issue that affects their understanding of the school they have chosen.

*“I must say that I was one of those parents that didn’t take out an educational policy or anything like that for kids. I didn’t think of that then. Or didn’t think I would need it..., umm, to be quite honest, I didn’t prepare, ...we didn’t prepare ourselves for it. So we’re just fortunate that we’re able to afford it now.” (Priya)*

These parents believe that the costs of educating their children at the Model C school are justified and do not question them.

### **Westwood Independent School**

This middle-class group of parents in a private school pays similar fees for primary schooling as the middle-class public school group discussed above. This suggests that the fees of the private school and the Model C school are within the same range. These parents were aware of this fact. However, they feel that the facilities in their chosen school are far less at Model C schools. They feel that their school fees only buy them the label of ‘private school’ attendance. These parents seem to be stuck in a quandary over this type of school choice. They could afford Model C school fees but cannot attend these schools as they live outside of the school zone. Other private schools are much more expensive and are out of their price range. These parents reported that they would not consider local public schools, leaving them limited choice in terms of affordability.

### **6.3.2. In school choice**

As described in section 5.3.1 above, many factors are considered even before parents select a school for their children. This section foregrounds the factors influencing parents’ understanding of the school choice they made *during* their experiences of their children attending the school. Parents continue to review their school choice. The issues discussed in this section include parents’ relationship with the school, and

the reported connection between their satisfaction with their choice of school and school curriculum matters. These either affirm or contradict their earlier choices and are also varied across the three groups of sampled parents in this study.

#### *6.3.2.1. Relationship with the school*

The data reveal that parent-school relationships develop differently for each group. The match between the parents' and the school's worldviews is worth noting. Each school has operational restrictions on how parents can or cannot relate to the management and teaching staff, sometimes overtly or implicitly through patterns that evolve over time. All schools have overt or implicit views on what they require and expect from parents. How different parent groups engage with and interpret these expectations is discussed below. In particular, a school's communication strategies influence the level of interaction between parent and school.

#### **Aurora Primary School**

At the working-class school, communication between the school and parent as reported by the sampled parents takes the form of unobtrusive newsletters and written notices. These parents interact with teachers face-to-face, when called in for general or specific school meetings or meetings with the teacher regarding their children's progress in class. Some of these parents are not sure who the principal of the school is. The narratives showed that these working-class parents have more interaction with teachers and little, or no, interaction with the principal. Furthermore, since the Head of the school is so far removed from the ground, the parents believed that she had little to do with their children's learning. A clear separation between the teachers and the principal is noted in their comments. However these parents also reported that they welcomed the generosity of the principal in admitting their children to the school. The manager/ principal is seen as the gatekeeper, but the teachers are the activators of their children's education.

#### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

There are many opportunities for interaction and relationship-building between the sampled middle-class parents and the Model C school. The principal was reported as having met with each parent for an interview at the point of choosing the school. The narratives report that the teachers meet the parents at school meetings and are

available via e-mail for parents to initiate interaction on any issues of concern. Communication strategies here occur electronically via the D6 Communicator, an electronic information system that parents download on their computers and cellular phones. Furthermore, there are many opportunities for parent involvement throughout the year. The parents reported that they were willing to accept the offers of relationship-building and reciprocate. Some parents have long-standing relationships with the school by virtue of having attended the school themselves as children, or growing up in the area. The construction of relationships here points to a comfort zone created between the whole school and the parent body that affirms school choice decisions. Consequently, this school is fondly known as the ‘family school.’ However, the degree of closeness between the school and the parent body is experienced differently by those who are not White. This suggests that not all parents build relationships with their children’s teachers or management staff and hints at continued diverse experiences of parents of different race groups in the same school.

### **Westwood Independent School**

This group of middle-class parents did not have much to say on their interaction with the principal and teachers at the school. There are the required general school meetings and parent-teacher consultative meetings on children’s progress. However, the Board of Directors can override the principal and excludes any parental involvement in the activities of the school. The principal seems to be more aligned with the Board of Directors than teachers and parents, taking himself out of the equation of relationship building between his position of power and what is happening on the ground. The relationship between the parents and the school management suggests a business-like contractual agreement, with the “company” directing the product that it sells, and the “consumer” (parent) at the mercy of what is designed by the school (“the production line”). The lack of initiative in building relationships between this private school and the middle-class parent points to a kind of authoritarian rule.

#### ***6.3.2.2. Curriculum matters***

Curriculum matters do not seem to affect all parents at the time of school choice-making. However, whilst their children are enrolled in the school of choice, problems

with the curriculum do arise that seem to challenge parents' perceptions of the evaluation of the initial school choice. The discussion below raises some of the challenges and how they affect their reflections on school choice decisions.

### **Aurora Primary School**

The sampled working-class parents reported that they are content with the opportunity that the chosen school offers with respect to developing proficiency in English. They feel that this overrides any critique of other curriculum matters. They did not provide a detailed report on other school subjects. For example, there was no overt mention that the home language of isiZulu is not adequately catered for in the chosen school. They offer little critique of the kind of pedagogy related to particular subjects, for example Mathematics or the Sciences. Their narratives thus reflect a lack of overt critique of the full curriculum. The curriculum content is viewed by these parents when children do their homework. However, homework is reported to generate some degree of anxiety among these parents since they report a form of "disengagement" with what their children are learning. This could be because they do not understand the propositional content of the curriculum. Even though it is reported by the parents as putting them at a distance from their children's development, they obtain support for their children from older siblings or acquaintances that can assist.

### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

Middle-class parents are exposed to the curriculum through the engagement of their children at school, and they are at an advantage based on their personal experiences and research gathered from the outside world. They do have opinions on broader curriculum matters but other aspects of their school choice decisions satisfy them to the extent that they prefer not to engage in issues that they have no control over. Assisting their children with homework is a comfortable exercise and indicates to them that parental support is vital for their children's success at school. However, these parents also report that the changing nature of the school curriculum subjects leaves them feeling inadequate to provide direct support to their children during homework.

### **Westwood Independent School**

The sampled middle-class parents of this school suggest that it is not their responsibility to deal with the teaching, learning and assessment practices of the school. They reported that they believe it is the school's responsibility to deliver on a "purchased commodity". However, these parents reported that they chose this school for the individual attention their children would receive. They were concerned that they were expected to teach their children aspects of their homework. One parent reflected that it should be the responsibility of the teacher to detect that their children/learners had not grasped the concept that was taught. This parent criticised the school for insufficient monitoring of the learning success of their children.

These parents also reported that they were also not sure if teachers were indeed teaching their children adequately. One parent said that it seemed that homework tasks were being used quite extensively for continuous assessment purposes and therefore their importance was magnified. Consequently, these parents reported that they felt that not all credit should be awarded to the school for the good performance of the child since they believe that many parents were performing the role of teachers in the home, and that they ensured their child's academic success. The challenges of executing this role are reflected in the following comment:

*"Some of the work is really hard to teach as there is a big gap since I was last in school and lots has changed. It also sometimes shows me that the teacher isn't aware that not all children are understanding the lesson as we are forced to teach methods at home."* (Rashina)

#### **6.3.2.3. Satisfaction with the school**

Parents' level of satisfaction with their school choice indicates the extent to which the school meets their personal needs.

The working-class parents are satisfied with their school choice decision. The security measures at the school, the discipline and the affirmation that their children are being educated, fulfil their needs. The middle-class parents are also satisfied with their school choice decisions but on a different level. The excellent, balanced educational standards, the ethos of the school, the fit of the school to the child and multi-culturalism, appeal to the middle-class parent. However, the middle-class parents that chose private schooling are not entirely satisfied with the school and do not have great

expectations that it will deliver the promises of a private school education. Whilst they are confident that their children will be protected and receive personal attention, they feel that the same money could buy them better education delivery at a Model C school.

### **6.3.3. After school choice**

What do parents want school choice to do for them in the future, and will their school choices live up to their expectations? This question is the subject of the discussion below.

#### **6.3.3.1. Aspirations of school choice**

Parents desire outcomes from education and choose schools in the hopes that these dreams for their children will come true. What are the aspirations of different groups of parents and how effective will the school choice be in making these dreams a reality?

#### **Aurora Primary School**

The working-class parents hope that their children will progress from school to tertiary education and become professionals. In emphasising the learning of language as their main concern, they neglect the whole curriculum and thus do not report extended aspirations in their narratives. They are confident, however, that their school choice will bring about a better lifestyle for their children than they have.

#### **Somerset Junior Primary School**

The middle-class parents wish for their children to have careers that maintain the lifestyle that they are accustomed to. To some extent, these parents would like to improve on this lifestyle. They hope that in whatever career paths their children subscribe to, they are happy with their choices and live a comfortable life. These expectations are to a large extent fulfilled by the schools they choose. These parents view the outcomes of their children's lives as a joint effort between the school and the parent.

#### **Westwood Independent School**

This group of middle-class parents reported in their narratives that they hoped that the school they have chosen for their children will equip them with skills for tertiary education. As some have already mapped out career paths for their children, they hope that the primary school they chose will make their dreams a reality. However, given the current problems with this particular school choice, there is a measure of uncertainty as to whether it is the right choice to fulfil their aspirations.

#### **6.4. Extension of thematic analysis**

Identifying cases that present with phenomena that extend beyond the above dominant discourse helps to enhance the validity of the research study. Three issues outside the dominant trends are discussed. These are family composition, extending the curriculum and the challenges to the curriculum.

##### **6.4.1. Family dynamics**

The majority of families in this sample consist of married parents and children. The working-class mothers are mainly single parents with a large number of children (up to five), while the middle-class parents are married with a small number of children (up to two or three). Most school choice decisions are joint decisions between both parents, or made by the single parent. However, one case stands out with an unusual family composition that impacts school choice decision-making.

Rashina is a guardian to her late sister's son and daughter, her niece and nephew and is in a racially mixed marriage with a divorcee, who has a son of his own. Whilst the two younger children attend the private school in this sample, their older step-brother attends a boys' secondary school in an upmarket suburb where he lives with his birthmother. School choice decisions in this family are diverse. Despite the fact that Rashina is not happy with the private school, she continues to send her niece and nephew there because their late mother chose it. However, her step-son attends a Model-C school chosen by his parents. Thus, school choice decision-making can be situational and convenient for the specific, unique needs of a family. In a family affected by death and divorce, decisions are made to prevent further upset in the lives of children already traumatised by personal distress.

### 6.4.2. Curriculum

Most of the parents that participated in this study are exposed to the government education curriculum and do not compare it to any other curriculum choices. Anne, who went to a private all-girls school as a child, and prefers the IEB curriculum to the CAPS, is the only exception. Anne comes from a privileged background of elite private schooling and living in a privileged suburb, with educated and professional parents. This lifestyle continues as she is a professional herself and still lives in the same suburb. Her daughter attends the same elite all-girls private school that she went to. In fact, Anne is so well-known at the school that she is on the School Governing Body. Were the school co-educational, she would have sent her son there rather than the Model C school that he is presently attending (that is, the Model C school sample of this study). Anne believes that the IEB curriculum is superior to the CAPS as it teaches analytical and thinking abilities.

*“I would at this stage like both my children to write the IEB Matric. It does seem to teach them to be more analytical and to think out of the box. This will prepare them better for University and the outside world.” (Anne)*

As Anne comes from a privileged social background, her choice of schooling for her children is fuelled by the desire for continuity and indeed, further enhancement of her social status. Her perception of the IEB curriculum is that it offers better choices that move beyond mere schooling. Thus, the IEB curriculum is a means to replicate her current social status and lifestyle. The CAPS curriculum practiced in public schooling, might not offer the same upward mobility as the IEB curriculum.

### 6.4.3. Challenges to school choice

The middle- and working-class parents in the sample do not seem to feel that their children experience challenges with the curriculum at their primary school. However, some of the middle-class parents whose children attend the Model C school are reflecting on the implications of poor academic performance. One of these parents is Anne.

Anne is having trouble accepting that her son has concentration and poor performance issues. Despite the teachers bringing the problems to her notice over the years, she will not accept that he has any learning problems. She firstly, blames the teachers for



being inexperienced and hasty in identifying learning difficulties and feels that they do this for fear of being held responsible at a later stage, should the problem persist. Secondly, she feels that her child is an individual and should not be judged for refusing to conform to the dynamics of the class. Finally, she feels that because the children's marks are not based on proper tests in the Foundation phase, the child's level of ability is not apparent. Anne seems to be denying the teacher's professionalism and refusing to be alerted to the possibility of a learning problem.

*"The teachers are mostly very young and sometimes I feel that the young ones are always looking for problems in the child. It is too easy to send them to OT (Occupational Therapy), remedial. I think they are afraid that if they do not pick up a problem they will be blamed later on.*

*"I do believe she tried to fit him into a box and because he is different, she thought he had a learning problem."* (Anne).

Comparing this hiccup to the smooth transition of her and her daughter's schooling at the elite private school, it is fair to say that Anne is experiencing a problem with accepting discord in what should have been the smooth transition of educational achievement that she is accustomed to.

### **6.5. Synthesis of chapter**

This chapter presented a comparison of the themes as they emerged from the analysis of the narratives in the previous chapter, in terms of the manner in which they present themselves across the three groupings in the sample. This cross-case thematic analysis was further enhanced by the chronological process of time, reflecting on the before, within, and after, stages of anticipating, experiencing and reflecting on school choice. A range of intersecting factors across time and space, context and family specificities characterise the issues that emerge when considering parental choice of schooling. These themes were then subjected to further analysis, the level three analysis presented in the following chapter. This involved a rigorous process of further compression of the themes, matching them against the literature and theoretical review presented in chapter two. This comparative dialogue between the field-driven data analysis and the extant literature enabled the identification of what is confirmed,

new or rejected in relation to the phenomenon of parents' primary school choices for their children.

## **Chapter 7: Level 3 Analysis**

### **EMERGING CONCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CHOICE**

#### **7.1. Orientation to the Chapter**

Chapters four and five examined the data as a form of narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995), drawing on the data from the quantitative analysis where necessary (Lieberman, 2005). This paved the way for the final stage of the analysis presented in this chapter. Here, the outcomes of the mixed methods analysis are set against the backdrop of the literature review and theoretical framework (presented in chapter two) in order to establish the links that either tie in with or extend extant research.

School choice policies in countries such as the USA, UK and Australia enable all children to experience the schooling of their choice (Hill, 2005; Morgan & Blackmore, 2013; Whitty, 2001). However, a host of factors prevent this in practice, including affordability, access, and a school's cultural ethos. Thus, free choice may depend on extraneous political, sociological, cultural and economic factors that disrupt idealistic hopes for equality of access. Whilst policies may profess democratic accessibility, practice depends on where people are situated historically and is influenced by the fact that schools perpetuate normative social patterns (Christie, 2008).

In South Africa, school choice arises as a pre-occupation of post-apartheid reconstruction, especially in response to the legislated racial and class separation enforced by the previous regime. Being able to access schools of choice is therefore an inherent component of the democratic education policy landscape (see chapter

two). Many argue that school choice (in this sense of democratic accessibility) does not exist in South Africa because of the social inequalities that still prevail, constraining individuals and families from accessing schooling outside historically-bounded and geographic spaces. More than 20 years into democracy, South Africa still bears the hallmarks of a differentiated education system, where divisions are more likely based on class rather than race (Chisholm, 2004).

However, the previous chapters have shown that school choice plays itself out in unique ways even *within* social classes in post-apartheid South Africa. There has been a gradual shift in opportunities to make school choice. The focus of this section is the factors which militate against the dominant hegemonic and normativising patterns of social reproduction through school choice. This will reveal what enables or constrains school choice for parents in post-apartheid South Africa.

The factors influencing parents' school choices for their children are now more likely to include social systemic phenomena such as family relocation (*migratory patterns*) (6.2) to access alternative schooling, and shifting expectations and aspirations arising from societal class structures (*social class mobility*) (6.3). They may also include issues relating to the institution as parents begin to be drawn in to the structural issues associated with the school (*curriculum quality*) (6.4). The personal issues arising from relationship-building (*parent-school relationships*) (6.5) and the impact of shadow education on educational quality (6.6) are also worth examining. In addition to these contextual phenomena, school choice decisions are supported by the dominant ideologies that stem from the *background lives* of parents, cultural reproduction, schooling subjectivities, and personal positionalities. These key issues are addressed in this chapter.

## **7.2. Migratory patterns**

Under apartheid, race and class predisposed the kinds the school selections parents made for their children. It was assumed that as post-apartheid legislation broke down access barriers, such factors would no longer influence school choice. Parents saw school choice as being more potentially open. However, to make inroads into new schooling possibilities, some parents had to engage in a measure of mobility. Different classes and race groups migrated to access educational opportunities in

different proportions. In the early days of democracy people either changed residential areas to access better schooling or remaining in their established residences but their children migrated daily to access better schooling opportunities (Soudien, Jacklin & Hoadley, 2001; Fataar, 2015; Msila, 2009). Within this present study, the patterns of permanent migration are evident in the sample of working-class African parents as they exercise school choice across the parameters of the past. They make a *deliberate (active) choice* by consciously moving their place of residence to access perceived better schooling for their children. Msila (2009) notes, that, in the early years of democracy, African parents living in the townships would have liked to send their children to schools in other areas. He suggests that these preferences were driven by a desire to be exposed to languages such as English and Afrikaans that would help in “preparing them for a future world of work” (Msila, 2009, p.89). Similarly the African working-class parents interviewed in this study stated that the fact that their children are learning English is a significant advantage emanating from their school choice. These working class mothers who are employed as domestic workers in the areas surrounding their children’s schools reflected on their movement from the rural areas and their disrupted or incomplete formal education. This type of migration is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it enables parents to use what Cooper (2007) terms their present positionality to evaluate the benefits that the school choice would bring to them and their families. Secondly, since their social settings have changed through migration, this suggests that they are also negotiating their new spatialities to make choices that would benefit their aspirations. This deliberate choice is thus often embedded with aspirational values. Increased economic aspirations arise from their move from a rural or township residence to suburban Indian working-class areas. It should also be noted that migration to access schooling has altered the material geographic contextual settings of these parents.

A similar deliberate migratory pattern was noted amongst middle-class Indian parent in this study. These parents changed their living conditions by moving from a segregated Indian area into a previous Whites-only suburb. This indicates a coupling of migratory patterns and aspirant upward social mobility. Since in some cases, the migration was not only for school choice purposes, but simply a move to a new suburb, it is likely that the resulting school choice that occurs in an advantaged residential area becomes a *choice by design*. By taking advantage of better schooling

options, school choice becomes another layer to add to the social mobility that these families are already experiencing as a result of their migration from previously disadvantaged residential living to advantaged suburban life.

Other forms of migratory patterns also emerged from the study. For example, the middle-class White parents in the sample, having previously lived and schooled in advantaged residential areas, remain in these environments to access schooling for their children. I refer to this as a form of “non-choice” or a “*default or passive choice*.” These parents did not engage in any conscious planning but simply extended their previous hallmarks of residing and making school choices linked to their own histories and those of previous generations. They exercise their choice to continue their privileged lifestyles, a sort of reproduction of culture.

Middle-class parents use education as a means to maintain their social status by seeking out the best schools, and accessing information to enable them to make informed school choices (Reay, 2001; Brantlinger, 2003). The schooling choices they make for their children serve to maintain or extend their existing lifestyles but are based on access to a body of knowledge on the schools they choose. Here, the choice of schools attempted to reinforce the level of cultural capital of these parents and, thus contribute to cultural reproduction from generation to generation. They also extended their school choice aspirations by pursuing particular curriculum choices. The study revealed that, as private schools in their areas are believed to offer superior curriculum choices, such as the IEB rather than the CAPS of public schools, further choices that are perceived to extend educational aspirations were considered by these parents. The informed choice is a deliberate, informed and conscious one based on the perceived quality of the school.

A further example of the migratory pattern comes from the sample of parents that chose private schooling. These were middle-class Indian parents that remained in the family home in previous working-class Indian areas, but chose to access what they believed to be superior schooling in the form of private schooling. By opting to stay in their original areas but choosing schools outside these areas, they exercised a *transient migratory choice* in accessing schooling. I refer to this as “transient migration” since there is no permanent relocation of the family household; the

children perform temporary migration on a daily basis as they attend the preferred school outside of their residential space. However, the only schooling choices they had for the geographic situation they were embedded in, were private schools which are not bound by school zoning rules. These schools are also situated some distance from the residential home. This type of migration is conducive to what Fataar (2015) calls school choice displacement where children engage in a certain amount of travelling on a daily basis to access better schooling. Daily migration was coupled with the choice of a school that is largely culturally monolithic. The action of choosing a school dominated by a single culture resonates with Vandeyar's (2008) account of the difficulties intrinsic to the racial integration in South African schools during early democracy. The parents from this sample prefer not to racially integrate further as desired by the democratic ideals of the country, but rather prefer to seek solace in the separatist culture promulgated during the apartheid years. Surely, the mono-cultural ethos that they desire exists in the predominantly Indian schools within their residential areas? By failing to send their children to public schools closer to home, these parents chose to highlight education quality in a different manner. They do so by choosing private schooling that is accessible through transient migration. This school choice decision also illuminated how these families have negotiated their subjective positioning within their spaces. Here, school choice provided opportunities for these parents to break out of their confined living spaces. By choosing schools outside of their lived spaces, they perceived that they were getting schooling quality. This was further reinforced by the notion that their daily migration to access schooling gave them access to wider social contexts and worldviews. Their disappointment of not having activated this desire in practice has been revealed by the data where the transitory migrating parents (and their children) are still found to be at the margins of the new school.

### **7.3. Social class mobility**

It can be argued that how parents of different social classes chose schools is linked to their location within the framing of wider economic and socio-political influences. The type of school that parents chose in the past indicated their social class. For example, children attending elite private schools were perceived to come from an upper-class social positioning. Put differently, the race or class privilege of the parents *passively determined* the choice of schools for their children. Parents in post-

apartheid South Africa have varied choices of schooling. These seem to challenge the traditional boundaries of social class. For example, when the middle-class Indian parent chooses a form of inter-city migration to access private schools, they are expressing an aspirational choice for class mobility (see 6.2 above). In the past, private schooling was the domain of upper-class members of society, access to which was extremely costly. Simply put, parents were recognised by their elite breeding and economic power to access private schooling (Christie, 2008; Luke, 2010). This meant that private schooling was capitalised by the wealthy. However, it has become more accessible to members of other social classes (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004) since all private schooling is not necessarily out of the economic reach of the middle class parent. The emergence of relatively low cost private schooling (as noted in the sampled private school in this study) means that such schooling is no longer the privilege of the elite upper classes. Indeed, the attraction of private schooling as a dominant culture is a strong aspiration for parents as many prefer private schooling to public schooling. An explanation for this type of behaviour could exist in Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction that explains that subordinate classes misrecognise the dominant culture as a valid choice (Jenkins, 2006). As has occurred in this case, some middle- and working-class parents were lured into low-cost private schooling as they believed the quality of education was far better there. However, as the data reveals, the parents at the sampled private school expressed disappointment in their school choice as the school fell short on many aspects of traditional private schooling. There were no facilities, the teachers changed constantly, and parents were not treated in a friendly manner. It was as though they were lured by the title of private school but, once in the school, realised that it not meet their expectations. This could also be seen as a product of the particular school's marketing as a "private school" to attract parents who are dissatisfied with the public schooling system. Having accepted enrolment in their "private school", these parents chose to remain despite their critique of the school. The "label of private school enrolment for their children" offered parents a sense of mobility into superior class positioning among their peers and community.

Another example of how school choices are linked to positioning related to class is middle-class parents living in middle-class suburbs. The data revealed that these parents used school choice to maintain or extend social positioning. Traditionally, the middle-class parent is driven to maintain the class status of the family. These parents

actively engage in the educational activities of the school in order to ensure that their standards, aspirations and values are maintained (Reay, 2001). It is not surprising that they seek active engagement in school governance matters, parent-learner meetings and even extra-curricular activities. By maintaining their engagement with the school and its on-going choices, they ensure the habits of privilege. This could be seen as a means to fulfil their family expectations of schooling and its value, perpetuating chosen patterns in maintaining their class and cultural traditions. As the data revealed, this habituated privilege was exercised by some of the participants in choosing the same schools for their children that they attended. It was enhanced when they sought external support to supplement their children's educational experiences in the classroom. They also had access to superior social networks that provided them with information about schooling and education related matters. Thus, the social and contextual positionality of this group of parents allow them to evaluate choice-making with the intention of maintaining their social class standing.

#### **7.4. Curriculum quality**

There are three ways in which parents come into contact with education matters and knowledge of the school curriculum. Firstly, as children themselves going to school to learn, they are immersed within the school's curriculum through being instructed by adults. Secondly, as they grow older and exit the schooling environment, they are exposed to educational matters via the media. It is then that parents begin to form opinions and understandings of curriculum and educational matters from an external source. Media reports have a strong influence on parents' understanding of the school curriculum. Unless they are actively involved in the education sector as teachers themselves, parents' third method of exposure to the curriculum is via their children. Information on what occurs on a daily basis within the classroom and in specific school settings is gained via their children's reports about the school. Whilst parents may originally know about the school of choice through public reputation and networking, they could also progressively come to interpret the school through the eyes of their children. Their original knowledge may remain superficial if it relies only on the school's public imaging through conscious formal marketing. More in-depth understanding of the teaching and learning nature of the school is communicated via their children's reported everyday experiences. This understanding is further illuminated as parents gain insight into the pedagogical



character and nature of the school when they are confronted with the assessment tasks that their children bring home, in the form of homework. This study revealed that homework adds stress as children and parents battle to come to terms with the tasks set. Homework can also be discriminatory in the manner that it exposes families with cultural and language barriers to the medium of instruction in the school (Pressman, 2015). The changing nature of the subject content matter in the new school curriculum adds a further burden and affects parents' ability to oversee their children's take home tasks. Parents who are not familiar with this changing content reported feeling inadequate to help their children with their homework. In some cases, supervision is delegated to older siblings or senior learners that are neighbours or even formal extra tutorial support outside of school (see 6.7). It should be emphasised that homework provides parents with an avenue to know the school from the inside.

It gives them some insight into the world of the school. This knowledge evolves over time, adding layers of insights about the school. It can be argued that parents "know the school" better as their children progress through their engagement with its curriculum, teaching, and learning and assessment strategies. Different patterns are noted in the data about how parents of different race groups come to know the school. Homework relating to reading, writing, and understanding English, was reported favourably by the sampled African parents whose children attended the former segregated Indian school. As they attempted to assist their children with homework in a language that was not their home language, and were exposed to the demands of the curriculum, they realised that they were unable to assist. As reported by these parents, this cultivated admiration that their children were learning something that they did not know. Exposure to a language that was not the mother tongue and to "foreign curriculum content" fuelled their beliefs in the worth of the school in meeting their expectations. Schooling for their children was seen to offer more than what they themselves had received. Their admiration extended beyond their children's achievements within the school. They placed their trust in the teachers and admired them for providing a gateway to better life prospects. Thus, homework for the sampled parents in this working-class school served to reaffirm school choice decisions for the realisation of future aspirations.

However, the children of the middle-class White parents in the sample attended the same Model C schools that they went to as children. They re-lived their own schooling as they assisted their children with their daily homework tasks. Homework was resonant with their understanding, capability, and expectations. Their view of the changes in the curriculum was that they demonstrated an evolving and therefore superior education system which affirmed their reasons for the choice of school. Here, homework also served to reassure their particular views of education quality.

The middle-class Indian parents, whose children were registered at the private school in this sample, also began to view the quality of the school's pedagogy through the medium of homework. The data reveals that these children in the primary phase of schooling were occupied with homework for lengthy periods on a daily basis. The parents reported that their children struggled to understand concepts that were, supposedly, taught in the classroom. This delayed or affected the completion of the homework which caused much stress for these parents. When their children experienced difficulties in completing their homework, the parents began to question its appropriateness. This led to them questioning teachers' abilities. Parents equally queried the quality of the assessment strategies. These parents reported that they have had to step in as teacher and teach their children. They did this with uncertainty as to the relevance and correctness of how they supervised homework. Thus, homework engenders stress in both children and parents and this leads to questions about the quality of the school's curriculum and pedagogy. Homework activates these parents to critically evaluate their school choice decision and question the quality of the delivery of the curriculum at school.

### **7.5. Parent-school relationships**

Parents' evaluation of their school choice decision is further enhanced by their relationships with the school. School-parent relationships are important both at the point of entry and during the course of the child's schooling. Both stages serve to help the parent make a decision on whether to choose the school or withdraw from it. Parents can also evaluate their decision by getting to know the school through these relationships. Such relationships are reported as strongly influenced by the ethos emanating from the principal. This concurs with Barr's (2014) statement that school-

parent relationships are initiated and driven by the principal of the school and also influence parents' perceptions of the school.

The data showed that the principal of the working-class school had an authoritative leadership style. The researcher witnessed this when she visited the school to administer the survey. Parents here recognised the principal's commanding aura. This could be the reason why there seemed to be no relationship between the parents and the principal. This was confirmed when some of the parents interviewed indicated that they had not met or seen her. Their respect for the principal seemed to emanate from other factors such as the fact that she accepted their children's enrolment in the school even though some could not pay fees. On the other hand, the sampled parents reported a good working relationship with the teachers. The principal was not regarded as, as important as the teachers in assisting parents to interpret the worth of the school.

A different type of relationship was noted at the private school. Here, the managerial structure extended beyond the principal and his relationships with parents. The governing style of this school was a hierarchical structure with the Board of Directors seemingly possessing more power than the principal. This authoritarian style of governance did not seem to be acceptable to the parents in the sample. This concurs with Hofmeyer and Lee's (2004) argument that many private school governing structures impose decisions on the parental body. Boards often believe that the school operates on their terms and not the parents' expectations. The parents in this sample challenged the authoritarian manner of the principal. The governance style at this school also had implications for the way parents viewed the principal. The principal, who is traditionally seen as the head of the school is viewed by these parents as a "go-between" the parent and the Board of Directors. When parents raise challenges with the principal, they become frustrated that decisions that a principal would normally take are passed over as a responsibility of the Board of Directors. The parents regarded this as emasculating the principal, making him less important and powerful in their eyes. Thus, these parents believed that traditional conceptions of the roles of principals are being altered in this school governance structure. They reported a lack of relationship-building between the school and the parents and this led them to suggest that this confirmed their view of a lack of quality within the school. This was primarily because the parents believed that they had little agency to construct the

ethos of the school they wanted for their children. The authoritarian stance of the school governing structures was reported to shut out the parent, denying them parental oversight of the education of their children.

The governance structures of the Model C school consciously attempt to incorporate parents in decision-making. The leadership of this sampled school consciously works towards building relationships before parents' school choice decisions are made as well as during the child's stay at the school. The parents in this sample reported that they feel recognised by the school authorities since their relationship commenced with all parents being afforded a one-on-one interview with the principal. These parents indicated that they attend school meetings, sit on parents' committees, keep up with the school news via the D6-Communicator and often access the school website. This suggests that this school views parents as a primary element in the education of their children in collaboration with the school. Marketing messages and relationship-building through various activities were reported as paramount in co-management of the education of learners. The data revealed that the parents at this school admire the principal and the work that she does, and this contributes to what they term the "ethos" of the school. Schooling quality seems to be enhanced through the relationships established between the school and the parent.

#### **7.6. Extra tuition**

A call for additional academic assistance to children outside of school may arise for many reasons. One is when children are under-performing academically and/or present with learning disabilities whilst in mainstream schooling. Dealing with these issues involves the parent, the school and the teacher. For example, the parents from the working-class sample in this study expected the school to step in to provide any additional assistance that their children may require outside of the normal teaching/learning school day. As they cannot afford private tuition, they rely on the school as the primary source of education delivery. Since none of the data indicates that teachers were indeed providing extra assistance outside of school hours, it seems unlikely that this would come to fruition. Should the school provide such assistance this would fulfil parents' needs. This could contribute to the way parents view the quality of the school.

On the other hand, the need for extra tuition in the middle-class school raises another concern. When Anne received a report from the teacher that her son was not performing well academically, she reacted by finding fault with the teacher. She felt that the teacher did not understand her son and that she (the teacher) was young and inexperienced. Neaves (2009) notes that, conflict occurs between teacher and parent when under-achievement is addressed; teachers lack skills in presenting an adequate report on learning problems. The parent presents with anger and difficulty in accepting that there are problems with their child's academic achievement. Anne was completely satisfied with her choice of school until she was presented with a situation that challenged her decision. Her way of dealing with the situation was to deny the possibility that there was truth in the teacher's report. Instead, she chose to find fault with the teacher. Thus, in such a conflict situation between the teacher and the parent, schooling quality is questioned.

### **7.7. Synthesis of chapter**

This chapter demonstrated that school choice in post-apartheid South Africa is closely linked to parents' conceptions of what the new democratic order could offer. Parents exercise school choices in relation to their expectations of how the chosen school could offer new opportunities to their children. For parents this new potential is largely framed in economic terms, suggesting that they believe that schooling offers a way out of previous class positioning and new gateways into better class positioning. The majority of the study participants believe that schooling offers the prospect of better life opportunities, whilst also affirming the worldviews and cultural values of those who are already comfortable with their privileged positioning. Parents also believe that the schooling choice will assist them and their children to transcend beyond apartheid mentalities in terms of inter-cultural dialogue, better life opportunities, and access to knowledge and expertise. All of this is driven by the prospect of securing better jobs and careers.

Parental school choice decisions involve different migration strategies to access these perceived opportunities. For some, this involves permanent migration to contexts outside their original segregated enclaves; while for others, it affirms their present

habitus in privileged contexts. Most of the participants are nevertheless of the view that schooling offers the realisation of new linguistic, economic and cultural aspirations. As they make their school choices, parents are conscious of how schooling maintains or extends their social class. School choice decisions are not only deliberated upon before choosing the school, but while their children are in a particular schooling context. Parents value a school in relation to how they are treated by the school authorities and whether or not they are indeed seen as co-partners in the education of their children. School choice decisions are also based on perceptions of the human and physical resources of the school, but more importantly on how the teachers and managers interact with parents to activate the learning process for their children. Parents make school choices based on relationship-building with school personnel and an understanding of how they (teachers and managers) generate curriculum quality via their teaching, learning and assessment strategies, as well as how they advise parents professionally about the development and growth of their children. All these factors determine how parents in post-apartheid South Africa view education quality.

The following and final chapter presents the study's conclusions based on the critical questions that underpinned it; the theoretical, contextual, practical and policy advances achieved and the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 8: Concluding thoughts and Recommendations**

### **8.1. Orientation to the chapter**

This final chapter presents concluding thoughts and recommendations. It summarises the answers to the critical research questions (7.2) and outlines the study's final conclusions (7.3) against the backdrop of the original lens, examining the constructs that were confirmed, rejected or extended and thus paving the way for new theory development. The study's implications are also discussed (7.4) in view of theoretical, contextual, political and practical innovations. A contextual, theoretical, and methodological pushing back of the boundaries is then presented (7.6). Finally, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are highlighted (7.7).

### **8.2. Critical questions answered**

This study was based on two critical questions that guided the research process. The following sections (7.2.1. and 7.2.2.) set out the answers to these questions arising from the study's findings. Further discussion ensues thereafter to elaborate on the points raised here.

#### **8.2.1. What are parent's decisions on primary school choices for their children?**

The study revealed that different types of parents choose different schools for their children. Some working-class African parents living in townships prefer previously Indian schools so that their children can improve their English; while some middle-class Indian and White parents prefer Model C schools that offer more facilities, superior education, and a multicultural ethos. Middle-class Indian parents, who prefer the safety of schooling with a mono-cultural ethos, prefer low-cost private schooling. These examples represent a microcosm of South African parents, and as such, many more examples of parents choosing other types of schools may exist. Parents make school choices by remaining in their residential areas or migrating to access the schools of their choice. Social class creates opportunities and constraints that determine the types of school choice decisions they make. Their school choice

decisions are enhanced by the manner in which schools engage parents with pedagogical information and relationship-building opportunities.

### **8.2.2. Why are parent's decisions on primary school choice being made the way they are?**

Parents' lives, their biographical, historical and situational circumstances influence their school choice decision-making. Such decisions may be fuelled by the need to compensate for their own educational shortcomings, to promote their class aspirations, or to maintain a privileged lifestyle. Parents also seek specific schooling experiences for their children, which guide them towards the type of school they choose. Aspirations and hopes of particular education outcomes affect the school choices parents make for their children. Pursuit of perceived education quality may be the driving force behind most parents' decisions on school choice. Several key issues arise from these broad interpretations of the reasons for parents' school choices. The following discussion (7.3) details the key constructs that emerged from this study.

### **8.3. Key constructs**

Several key contextual constructs about schooling quality and related fields emerged from this study. These include migration, privilege, and curriculum, quality of relationships and conceptions of who the gatekeepers of education are. Firstly, the literature (6.2) notes, that migration for school choice takes the form of school choice displacement, with children travelling from the township to city schools on a daily basis, and intra-township migration where children travel within the township to access better schools at a distance from their homes. This study revealed a third type of migration for school choice purposes. Parents engage in permanent migration from rural to township areas, and from apartheid Black residential areas to affluent White areas. Whilst this might not always be for the purposes of school choice, better schooling opportunities have arisen as a consequence of their migration.

Secondly, school choice is symptomatic of the changing socio-political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. In the past, school choice was viewed as benefitting only the privileged social classes, but a measure of social mobility is starting to take effect. Social mobility through school choice reflects the habituated privileges of the middle-class, while for the working-class, investment in school choice incrementalises future



aspirational privileges. School choice also results in a perceived sense of elevated social class status when the prevailing living conditions remain low socio-economic, but the choice of school suggests a prospect of higher social class configurations. This study showed that school choice reinforces parents' class aspirations, with the working-class emphasising the learning of English as an important added advantage. In a space dominated by English, it is perceived that this would enable them to fulfil their aspirations of better life opportunities for their children. However, it should be noted that the study is confined to what parents believe their school choices would yield. It was beyond its scope to establish whether these aspirations are indeed achieved in practice. Longitudinal tracking through primary and secondary school, and post-school opportunities would yield further insight.

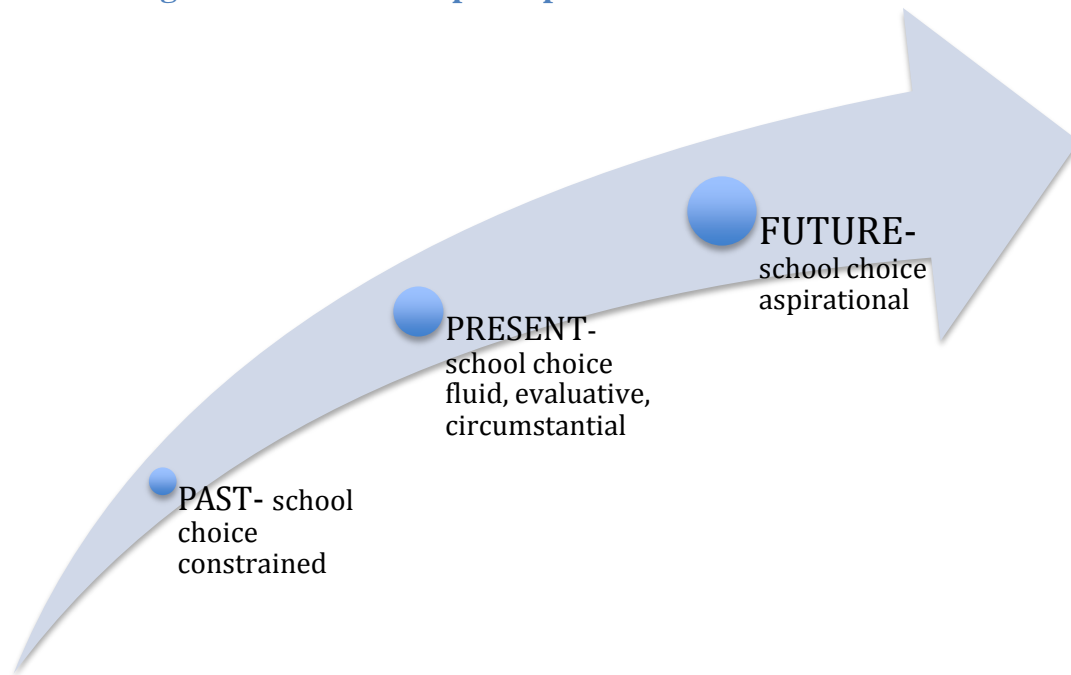
Thirdly, as parents engage with curriculum demands in the form of homework, they are exposed to a means to evaluate their school choice decision. When this engagement triggers doubt about the worth of the school curriculum, this could engender fears that their aspirations will not be realised because of the particular school they chose. Further consequences could arise out of the school choices parents make. In some instances the school choice affirms or alters parental roles within the household as parents step in to fill the gaps created by the delivery of the curriculum. Changing school choices engenders shifting roles and responsibilities not only for learners dealing with a new institutional and curriculum context in their new school, but new definitions of parental roles and responsibilities in the educational journey of their children. This could cause stress and affirm or alter their previous stance as parents.

In the fourth key construct of this study, parental choice extends to include developing conceptions of school quality via evaluating the kinds of relationships established between the school and home. When the school cultural worldview is authoritarian, it excludes parental voice and marginalises participation in the institutional life of the school. This is likely to create conflict between the school and the parent. However, when the school adopts a friendly and co-operative stance towards parents, this contributes to the measure of quality that parents determine as a positive ethos in the school environment.

Finally, this study also reflects the key role of the school as a perceived gatekeeper to better life opportunities for parents and their children. However, another conception of the colluding nature of the school as a gatekeeper is also offered. Schools enable or constrain the advancement of knowledge via the way in which they approach access to conduct research at their institutions. In this way, they become gatekeepers of insight by academic researchers. Granting access to schools is traditionally believed to reside with the principal mandated by the Department of Education. Several reasons may cause a school to hesitate to provide such access. This study revealed that senior management often delegates this gatekeeping function to lower ranked staff in their institutions. Many such staff has limited appreciation of the research process, and regards it as an added burden or disruption. For example, the study revealed that access was granted by relatively subordinate clerks in the Department and by secretaries within schools who regulated the commencement of the research process. Another more sinister interpretation could be postulated: that schools are wary of public disclosure of day-to-day operations, and may have something to hide. Schools that are more confident that their operations are ethical might be less guarded. The researcher's experience also suggests that the degree of trust between the researcher and school managers plays a significant role in obtaining access. Thus, clearer appreciation is required at all levels of the system of what and how academic research can benefit school contexts and how it could produce valuable knowledge. The relevant authorities, including school management, and local and regional departmental structures should thus support the research endeavour at higher education institutions.

This discussion on the key constructs that emerged from this study paves the way for an examination of these constructs against the backdrop of the temporary theoretical lens presented in chapter two.

#### 8.4. Evolving school choice in a post-apartheid South Africa



*Fig. 7: The evolving process of school choice in a post-apartheid South Africa.*

The temporary theoretical lens represented school choice on a platform of interconnecting time periods of the past, present, and future influenced by internal and external forces. In retrospect, it could be argued that this earlier representation presented the parent as a static decision-maker of school choice, suggesting that school choice occurs at a single moment in a period of time (i.e. on admission to the school) when the parent was largely at the mercy of circumstantial conditions.

However, the study data and analysis revealed that several competing and intersecting factors coalesce to influence parents throughout their journey of making a choice for their children's school. These factors span the stages before, during and after the moment of accessing the school. The on-going nature of the parental decision making process is not static, but evolves over time. It is not predetermined or constrained by the past, and is capable of being re-evaluated and re-considered.

Figure 7 illustrates that school choice in South Africa is a process that has and will continue to evolve. The conception of what it is to make school choices for their children itself evolves as parents become more sophisticated in their evaluation of school quality as fulfilling their aspirations. This emerges as parents acquire more

critical agency in the selections and offerings of the curriculum, mediated by their understanding of the inner workings of the school. This insider knowledge is largely generated through their engagement with their children's assessment that they are expected to support. The worth of the school is largely assessed through their lived experiences of how schools start and manage home-school relationships.

Moreover, school choice decisions extend from a process that begins long before the child's entry into school. Parental worldviews that influence their decision-making strategies are affected by their schooling and education. Parents' past experiences (in the home, family and community) create expectations and aspirations of schooling for their children. All these factors coalesce to activate their decision-making. The unique specificities of their own family structure, the kind of family from which they originate, their economic resources and location, and distance from the school all shape how they make decisions for schooling their children.

School choice decisions are intense at the time of entry into school, but evolve through interaction with the school. They continue to be influenced by what parents expect schooling to offer their children. However, this aspirational trajectory is not a linear, rigid static model of inputs, processes and outputs desired. At several points in the journey of the education and schooling of their children, parents embed themselves into the life trajectories of their offspring. During the early stages of schooling for young children (the focus of this study) the parent's role is more active and assertive in making choices on behalf of learners.

Whilst in the past, school choice was constrained by racial, social, and geographic boundaries, school choice in the new South Africa presents in principle a fluid set of possibilities. Official legislation promotes burgeoning opportunities that activate parents to seek the possibilities that school could offer in a democratic era. This includes choosing to migrate to access these possibilities, and sometimes choosing to invest heavily in their children's education. Such migratory patterns could promote racial and social integration, and social mobility.

School choice is also used as an evaluative tool by parents to judge the quality of schooling, whether it be through the lens of their investment, the school's pedagogy, or the development of relationships. All this plays out in a larger context of macro,

meso, and micro policies. On a macro-level, school choice reflects the changing socio-political and cultural milieu of South African society. The act of choosing schools provides insight into how post-apartheid South African society is being constructed. Through school choice, this society represents a fluid evolutionary process that sees education choices as a means to link the past and the futures of personal familial lives. Thus, school choice is embedded as a historical, social and political consideration. On a meso-level, school choice is an evaluative tool to understand schooling, school management, pedagogy, and schooling quality. Whilst evaluation of education quality has mainly been the domain of political and bureaucratic structures, this study has shown that parents are an important means of evaluating quality. They need not be actively involved in collaboration and talks with the authorities to reveal their evaluation. Instead, it is revealed through their actions, in how they choose or do not choose certain types of schools. It is also revealed through their lived experiences of interaction with schooling via their children. Finally, on a micro-level, school choice provides a medium to understand family choices that contribute to personal life pathways.

### **8.5. Implications of the study**

School choice as an evaluative, reconstructive, and social tool has implications for the policy and practice of schooling in South Africa. These include democratic ideals of schooling, the changing typology of schooling types and management of shortcomings in the education system.

Firstly, school choice enlightens us on the many ways in which democracy is filtering throughout South African society. As it results in different types of migration, even if on only a small scale, it offers opportunities to promote racial and social integration. This type of integration, an ideal of a democratic society, seems to be more activated within the middle-class. On first analysis, it appears that middle-class Model C schools are conscious efforts at racial integration compared to working-class and low-income private schools. However, one should not jump to this conclusion since the mere co-existence of different racial and/or class groups within a single institution does not necessarily mean that “integration” is taking place. However, this study’s findings suggest that Model C schools make a much more conscious effort to engage

parents from different race groups and classes in the form of management-school-home dialogues. Parents report positively when these efforts afford them greater agency.

Disturbingly, it is noted that the Indian parents that participated in this study who choose low-cost private schooling, did so in an attempt to avoid integration. Motivating factors include ill-discipline, poor teacher ethics, and social ills such as crime and drugs which they associate with the working class public school in post-apartheid South Africa. However, underlying their comments are hints of a desire to maintain mono-cultural schooling. They chose this particular low cost private school because it offers the safety of not dealing with diversity. Their migration and mobility activated through their choice of school for their children is driven by a conservative rather than a democratic worldview. They do not choose schools for their multicultural appeal, but rather because they uphold other values, such as religious, sociological or class values. They are restricted in their choices of other public schooling such as Model C types, because of their choice to remain in their existing residential area (zoning policy). This suggests that parents aspire to a different quality education from working class public schooling, but cannot access middle class public schools because of economic reasons (school fees are beyond their reach) as well as due to legislation (zoning policies permit only children legally residing in the zoned catchment area of a school to be enrolled). These parents appear to be the most dissatisfied with school choice amongst all the groups of parents that participated in this study.

The second implication is that in post-apartheid South Africa the types of schools are undergoing important changes. These changes are being activated via the choices that parents are exercising to alter the composition, structure and goals of schooling. For example, working-class African parents are changing the image of the traditional Indians-only working-class public school. The African learner in a previously largely mono-racial Indians-only school opens up challenges including issues like teaching and learning for second language speakers. The inter-cultural dialogue produces its own new intersections. Parents' reported contentment with the facilities, education delivery, and management of schools encourages them to feel optimistic about the future. Their children's results make them satisfied with their school choice. The

relatively highly competent, qualified personnel also are favourably viewed by these parents. The fact that working-class schools have a positive impact on parents bodes well for the overall image of working-class public schooling. This implies that parent approval of the school can motivate teachers and management to improve the culture of learning and teaching (COLT). The general contentment of middle-class parents with their choice of Model C school suggests that this type of school rests on a strong foundational model that parents approve of. There are hints that these parents believe that those that were previously not admitted to middle class White schools should acculturate to the already-established worldview with its patterns of privilege. This suggests continued perpetuation of existing worldviews of middle class schooling. The school may have de-racialised, but the cultural ethos of middle-class values remains uncontested. A further example of changing school types exists in the private schools domain. As the face of private schooling changes, ranging from low cost to middle and extremely high cost schooling, parents have a range of options. Those seeking exclusive education for their children could fall prey to education businesses that bear the label of exclusivity but may fall short on delivery. This implies that parents need to be careful about the type of private schooling they choose and the types of facilities and outcomes they sell.

This suggests that school choice is now influenced by an entrepreneurial agenda which has emerged to attract parents who are either disillusioned with public schooling, who are mitigating from the spaces of working class confinement, or may even be attempting to escape into enclaves which protect exclusive racialised, religious or cultural worldviews. Private schooling offers parents the option of fulfilling multiple agendas and these should be examined, especially in light of whether they are indeed preparing a new generation that upholds the constitution of the country. Whilst this critique can be applied to the aspirant middle and upper classes, it can equally be used to question the value systems that are being perpetuated across all schooling in a rapidly changing context.

This raises the third implication of this study that concerns the quality of the broader education that schooling offers outside of the classroom. School choice is not simply a matter of decision-making for enrolment in a particular school. Parents are indirectly making decisions about what they understand the holistic “package” to be.

These broader opportunities may not always be capable of being activated during the normative rituals of the school's official operations in relation to the formal curriculum. Indeed, the day-to-day operations of the school curriculum may require parents to seek additional educational services to provide deeper quality learning in targeted areas for growth and development. For example, the quality and logistics of the working-class public school (as depicted in this study) creates a need for parents to seek private tuition for their children. Large classes hinder individual assessment and remedial procedures, making it difficult for teachers to provide direct individual attention to children in need. However, private tuition may not be affordable for a working-class parent. Whilst the need might be evident, they are unable to provide such services. In this context parents often expect the school to provide the required assistance, but this might not always be feasible. However, the parents of children that attend Model C public middle-class schools are more likely to be able to pay for private education services when informed by teachers that their children require additional support. The data suggests that it is not always the school that raises the need for additional support. The need for "extra lessons" is sometimes driven by a strong competitive element that pervades these schooling types. Parents are co-opted into paying for extra tuition support to ensure that their children perform at a high level. They seek extra education services, not only for basic academic intervention but for sporting and peripheral curriculum extensions including music, other languages, speech and drama, and art. This is often marketed as an extension of middle-class parents' parenting duties. Marketing agents create the impression that broader education includes activities that sustain access or enable them to achieve a particular social status. Peer pressure plays its part, resulting in parents acceding to such activities so that their children can be accepted in certain circles.

The following section focuses on this study's contribution to knowledge.

### **8.6. Pushing back the boundaries.**

This study embraced research innovations that push back the boundaries or enhance the concepts of traditional research. These can be viewed from a contextual (7.6.1.), theoretical, (7.6.2.) and methodological (7.6.3.) perspective.



### **8.6.1. Contextual elaborations**

This study shed light on a number of contextual issues. These are explored under the topics of school choice (7.6.1.1), social class (7.6.1.2), primary school education and identifying quality (7.6.1.3), and extra schooling (7.6.1.4).

#### ***8.6.1.1. School choice***

While research on school choice in South Africa is limited to parents' choice of secondary schooling for their children, this study focused on primary schools. It highlights the importance of the foundational stages of children's education and formal schooling. In contrast to the past, parents in the democratic South Africa have a wider range of options for school choice for their children. School choice is thus more fluid and offers broader possibilities. The majority of the parents in the public school that participated in this study, whether in the middle-class or working-class area, held positive views of these developments. However, those that sent their children to the low-cost private school lacked confidence in the new system. This could be due to the many different forms of private schooling that are emerging to attract parents disillusioned with public schooling. However, parents may lack adequate knowledge of the different types of private schooling, as well as in-depth understanding of the nature of the curriculum on offer. The study's results suggest that middle-class parents believe that their choice of public schooling offers the kind of quality they expect. It affirms their cultural worldviews. The working-class African parents that participated in this study seem content with the long-term opportunities to minimise social inequalities that they believe public schooling offers. The literature notes that school choice is often driven by perceived value of the physical resources of a school and by the parents' ability to network and access the most affordable type of schooling; and that parents will even resort to migrating to access the preferred school. However, this study extended this understanding by revealing that parents make on-going interpretations and evaluations of the choices that they make for their children and that they continually re-evaluate their return on investment throughout their children's school career. It also revealed the important role played by managers and teachers in influencing on-going conceptions of the quality of the school. The school's image is assessed by parents in terms of the way it builds relationships and engages them in pedagogical issues.

#### *8.6.1.2. Social Class*

Social class previously determined where children schooled. However, the democratic dispensation offers the potential to challenge class categorisation. Thus, segregation by class has become blurred across different schooling types. It can be argued that social class can be clearly demarcated in public schooling, since learners' access to schools is legally prescribed in relation to geographic location. To a large extent, the South African landscape still reflects apartheid social engineering and it could be argued that public schooling reinforces class separation. However, private schools are open to a wider range of social classes, defined not by geography but by school fees ranging from low cost private to high cost private schools. Whilst some parents continue to live in low socio-economic residential areas, they may choose to send their children to private schools. Nonetheless, private schooling does not necessarily erase social class positioning since the kind of private school these parents access may span a continuum of fees structure. It thus attracts a permutation of social classes.

#### *8.6.1.3. Primary school education and quality*

As parents focus on choosing secondary schools to ensure the intended exit outcomes, they seem to ignore the importance of choosing schooling for foundational excellence. This study has elevated the status of early educational needs, delivery, and systems. Paradoxically, the data revealed little critical engagement on the part of parents with the foundational learning that their children's early childhood classrooms would offer. Detailed knowledge on this kind of learning is lacking among parents who seem to hand over the formal activation of foundation knowledge to the school/teachers. The study also identified additional indicators of how parents view the quality of schooling. Parents evaluate the quality of schools through engagement with pedagogical issues and the type of relationships between parent and school. They also view quality from the point of view of the school's ethos, which includes religious undertones and what constitutes a family. Surprisingly, a further hallmark of schooling quality was noted in the preference for universal rather than mother tongue languages. This negates the generic political rhetoric on affirmation of indigenous knowledge, as well as contradicts the literature which suggests that baseline foundation knowledge and cognitive growth and development during early education are best acquired in the child's mother tongue. The notion that mastering the

hegemonic language of power can lead to improved economic prospects has thus filtered down even to the foundational years of schooling.

#### **8.6.1.4. *Extra schooling***

Extra schooling, or shadow education, has emerged to compensate for shortcomings in the existing education system, and is said to offer all-round advantages for the child, school, and parent. The need for shadow education in the primary phase has not emerged as a necessity for parents. The data reflects that (at least in the current South African context) it is usually expected when children progress to higher grades. However, the participants felt that teachers should identify cases that require additional educational and health science interventions during primary school. Parents may engage additional support if they can afford to do so. The study participants stated that they are more concerned about how the teacher conveys this assessment and recommendations to them. They are conscious of the ways in which schools develops relationships with parents. Parental assessment of the worth of the school is often influenced by how the school negotiates the possibly conflictual interpretation of the presenting problem. Negotiating the need for shadow education could therefore enable or constrain interpretation of whether the school is regarded as a school of choice by parents.

#### **8.6.2. *Theoretical elaborations***

The Life Course theory examines the impact of their historical background and life events on the life course of an individual. School choice contributes to this theory as a factor that is prominent throughout the life of an individual: firstly, as a student themselves, then by making school choices as a parent; and experiencing school choice through their children. School choice is pivotal in influencing the direction of an individual's life. For example, working-class parents may choose schools with high expectations that their children will have better opportunities than they had. This could change the predicted life course of the working-class person. Alternatively, middle-class parents may choose schools that help to maintain their life course, transferring to their children the lives that have proven successful for them. In most cases, the parents' background serves as the point of departure for the schooling decisions they make for their children. These decisions are fuelled by a need to make

up for the inadequacies of the past or to perpetuate the past. This anomaly has particular reference and takes on different meanings in an evolving democratic society. The life course of parents is also influenced by their subjectivities. Subjectivities relate to how people make sense of their changing worlds, and how they become accustomed to and are influenced by their lived spaces, shaped by the macro-forces of political and socio-cultural dynamics. Parent subjectivity highlights the particular positioning of the parent as they make meaning of their previous and present lives to negotiate desires for their future lives. They make decisions that they hope will enable their families to survive in the socio-political circumstances of a changing country. Using education as a means, in order to adapt to these changes, parents may decide to change their lived spaces, or remain in them. However, in both cases, they choose the image of better schooling spaces to keep up with the demands of the changing world.

Furthermore, this study has brought to light the nature of the relationship between the habitus, field, cultural reproduction and school choice decision-making. Firstly, the emerging types of different migratory patterns have relevance. Parents who effect a deliberate choice of permanent residential migration in order to access better schooling are effecting a practice that transcends from the past into future aspirations. Their history of disadvantage propels them in the direction of maximising of new opportunities. With this comes a re-organisation of their habitus. Their past dispositions become influenced by new geographical settings, new cultures, and new fields to negotiate. Other parents who exercise a transient migratory choice by choosing to live in their (previously disadvantaged) residential areas but migrating daily to access private schooling for their children, seem to be pursuing the dominant culture of the more advantaged social classes. This practice indicates a kind of criss-crossing of social class categories, the actual social class with the desired aspirant social class. Secondly, different descriptions of the fields of schooling types links to discussions of the relationship between structure and agency. The school that follows an authoritarian leadership type seems to shut out the parent as an active member of their child's education. On the other hand, the school that offers a two-way communication between school and parent shows a shared responsibility for the education of their children. Thus, different schooling types shows that the relation

between the field of schooling and the agency of the parent can be either a positive or negative practice, depending on the type of governance of the school.

### **8.6.3. Methodological elaborations**

From a methodological point of view, this study offered some advancement in terms of extending research design, data collection procedures and data analysis. Firstly, in as much as the research design for this study was built on set design principles, the methodology that emerged during the research process suggests an unfolding evolutionary methodological process. This was represented in the research design and the sampling. Firstly, the unfolding methodology was reflected in the exploratory sequential design of the mixed method process, as the quantitative process dictated how the qualitative process would proceed. Secondly, purposive sampling procedures had to be modified and adapted regularly as the intended plans did not come to fruition. This was apparent when the original choice of elite private schools did not materialise, leading to the choice of the low-income private school. A further example was the choice of case study participants. Whilst the quantitative sample revealed substantial possibilities for the case studies, sufficient to warrant an element of selective criteria and choice-making, the actual number of willing participants was small in comparison to the number that indicated willingness to participate. The unfolding sampling procedure was reflected in the manner in which the selection procedure was continually pushed forward until commitment was obtained from participants. Finally, within the qualitative analysis process, an unfolding decision-making process was revealed, which I referred to as the chronological analysis of the decision-making process. Here, parents' decision-making processes were analysed as influences on decision-making before school choice was made, while in the school of choice and after school choice. This enabled elaboration of the conception of school choice decision-making beyond a single event (usually prior to entry to a particular selected school). Secondly, the data collection procedure was presented with circumstantial changes. Parents are busy people that are inundated with the pressures and responsibilities of work, home, and personal lives, making the process of data production a complex and difficult activity. This was made more intense by the need to meet the same participants on three occasions to produce data from three different

interview schedules. Understanding the different lifestyles of parents forced the emergence of different types of interviewing styles for the purposes of collecting data. Hence, parents were given the option of e-mail interviews, face-to-face interviews, or telephonic interviews. Whilst these differentiations are nothing new to research, they became necessary once it became clear that the intended linear, clinical approach to data collection was not possible. The study also highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of different types of interviews. Whilst some of the data capture and analysis processes went according to the set research designs, collecting data from the working-class parents called for a tailor-made approach. This is noted as a weakness but also a strength as it generated relevant, authentic and worthwhile data. A language problem was inherent at this juncture forcing the capture of data across languages. This involved conducting the interview in the participants' language of choice; translating recordings into English to construct a transcript, the researcher writing the narrative in English, then further translation of the narrative into the participants' language for member checking and approval. This back and forth process of data capture and first analysis across language barriers also contributed to an unfolding methodological approach which was considered appropriate and relevant to the specific participants.

## **8.7. Concluding thoughts**

The final section of this chapter discusses the recommendations emerging from the study, its limitations and suggestions for future research.

### **8.7.1. Recommendations**

Various recommendations emanate from the study's findings in relation to parents, policy-makers, schools and teachers.

Firstly, parents are influenced by many factors when making their school choice decisions. Their background provides a historical perspective that informs their aspirations. Their assumptions and images of schools and schooling propel them in certain directions. This implies a veritable playground of influences on decisions regarding school choices. This study also identified a number of factors that parents might consider when making school choices. As the schooling typology is constantly

evolving in response to societal demands, parents are presented with many and varied schooling choices. Indeed, school choice could become even more complicated in years to come.

Secondly, this study's recommendations could benefit education policy-makers, the field of Sociology of Education, and political decision-makers in South Africa. Education policy-makers could use its findings on how parents determine and identify the quality of schools and schooling to evaluate inherent school quality. Certain schooling models emerge as successful and these could be used to improve on models that lack quality. This study has broadened the phenomena of society, class, and life history perspectives from a school choice point of departure, adding to sociological understandings of these perceptions within the field of education. Finally, it has shown, through the medium of school choice, how transition from apartheid to democracy has progressed over the years and thus offers political leaders information on how social and education reform has impacted on the lives of parents.

Thirdly, this study has provided insight into how schools are interpreted by the parent. This information could be used by schools to reflect on how images of schools are developed, and how parents come to interpret the school. This could help them to rethink the way in which they negotiate their relationships with parents and the community.

The final recommendation is aimed at teachers. It emerged from the study that homework exposes teaching ability. Teachers should take cognisance of the fact that parents use the links between home and school as an evaluative tool. Communication between teacher and parent is a further consideration. Conflict may arise if teachers are not adequately trained to communicate with parents. This is more evident when such communication involves negative evaluations of their children. Parents use their evaluation of the teacher as one criterion to evaluate the school.

### **8.7.2. Limitations**

This study focused a particular kind of working and middle-class parent that accesses public and private schooling. It does not address the views of parents from the upper-

class and elite social classes, and the manner in which they make school choice decisions. The reasons were explained in chapter three. Thus, future research could focus on these groups. A further limitation to this study is the sampling procedure for the qualitative study. While some of the parents that participated in the initial survey indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed, very few ultimately made themselves available. This resulted in limitations in the variety of race groups represented in the case studies. For example, the working-class case studies represent only African parents (whilst African and Indian parents were in the original sample); and the middle-class private school case studies represent only Indian parents (whereas Indian and African parents existed in the original sample). Thus, some insights might have been missed. This could be addressed in future research (see below).

It is not the intention of a case study to generalise its findings, and this study does not claim to offer any wider generalisations. It focused on gaining insight into the phenomenon drawing from the sampled group's perspectives on school choice. These insights generate new sets of questions that could inform future studies on school choice.

### **8.7.3. Future research directions**

Stephen Ball (1997) speaks of the 'child fit,' where parents seek the type of school that fits their child. This study identified a 'parent fit,' where the relationships offered by particular types of schools, seem to 'fit' the type of parent they would prefer as partners in their institution. Future research on the link between parent, school and relationships would further the debate on school choice and relationships.

Another interesting topic would be an investigation of the claimed successful Model C school. The term 'family school' emerged from this study as a possible definition of this type of school, extending traditional conceptions of types of schools. The question of whether this school type is indeed the ideal in a post-apartheid democratic society needs to be further interrogated. What appears successful could be regarded as troublesome or contestable.



As noted earlier, interpretation of the worth of the working-class school in this study was offered only by African parents. Future research could therefore focus on the perspectives of all the race groups that frequent such schools. Do only working class children attend such schools? What do working-class schools offer that could be considered of value? Which school types offer democratic agendas that address a curriculum that promotes social justice? These questions also identify areas for future research.

## 8.8. Synthesis of chapter

Through the lens of parental school choice for their primary school children, we are alerted to the broader landscape of schools and schooling, especially in an evolving post-apartheid South Africa. In general, schools are spaces where generations hope, dream, aspire and develop potential for social change. They are potential spaces where reconstruction and transformation could occur, and where democratic ideals and political goals could be furthered. Whether we are indeed achieving these ideals should be a matter of constant scrutiny. This study suggests that parents are able to monitor and evaluate the quality of the kind of schooling South Africa offers. Whilst it foregrounded the issue of parents' school choice for their children, it also opened up possibilities to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of schooling in more generic ways. If schools pay attention to how they negotiate their relationship with parents, and how they mediate the quality of education they are engaging with as they develop learners, they could not only develop learners' educational potential, but enhance the quality of parents' agency. This symbiotic process builds the capacity of all involved. Indeed, it should perhaps not be limited to parents and the schools they choose, but extend to how we activate the capacity to exercise voice and agency as part of our democratic social justice responsibilities in the broader political and public arenas.

## EPILOGUE

### **'The 'located' journey of the self: finding my voice'**

As I reflect on my journey of educational achievement that spans almost 50 years of my life, I am reminded of Samuels' (2015) journey of developing the self as a

personal and professional being. Similarly, my journey of my research experience is embedded in the philosophies of the macro-context of the changing South Africa; against the backdrop of familial, social and professional experiences; the impact of schooling and my own personal educational extension (Samuels, 2015, pg. 114). My educational extension is this study. A PhD journey carries with it an illusion of educational culmination, the end of the journey, the greatest work that you will ever do. However, for me, my education zenith has yet to be reached. My PhD is but the beginning of finding my own voice which was, many years ago, in apartheid South Africa, severely tarnished when I crossed the path of a White woman.

Given my own personal difficulty with this project, I question the quality of my education pathway. By accentuating only one aspect of my being, that is my music ability my schooling denied me a holistic educational background. The gaps generated by my past educational experiences became very apparent as I struggled to adapt to the pressure of modern educational demands. I changed fields erratically from studying music to teaching young children, lecturing to adults; having entrepreneurial episodes and desiring to achieve the ultimate recognition in educational excellence in the form of a PhD. As experience upon experience became fleeting episodes of pushing myself to educational extension, the gaps created during my early educational experiences in a small Indian school in apartheid South Africa began to amplify.

As I stand on the precipice of the possible title of 'Doctor of Philosophy,' I question whether if it is through my own adversity that I reach this stage. Did the shortcomings of my embattled and subjugated youth make me strive for more? How much has apartheid affected, promoted, or retarded my quest for education? Has apartheid cost me valuable time? I am placed in the middle of the apartheid and democracy eras, having lived exactly half my life under apartheid and the other half in a democratic country. How have I progressed on the journey of discovering myself as a product of being situated on the fulcrum of the apartheid/democracy scale? Does my own journey reflect the history of change? Have I found my voice through my post-apartheid experiences to self-awareness? These questions direct me now in my enlightened state. As a parent in the age of democracy, I also question how my interaction with the institution of schooling has elevated my conception of agency.

The culmination of all these aspects: being a teacher on the inside, a parent on the outside, and a researcher seeking the reasons why, has taken my agency within the field of education to new heights. The journey of discovering my own 'self' can only be described as a 'located' journey, where my educational aspirations are located in my own geographical, sociological and background circumstances that continuously change and evolve over time. I am the changing South Africa. I am the change in South Africa.

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# Appendices

## Appendix (i): Gatekeeping letters and Informed Consent of Principal

The Principal

Dear Sir/ Madam

### **Application to conduct research**

I hereby seek permission to conduct research at your school for academic purposes.

I am a PhD student at UKZN (Edgewood) and I am conducting research on parent's decision- making on early education choices. The purpose of my research is to explore the decision- making processes of parents as they engage in choosing Foundation Phase schools for their children.

I require the dissemination of my questionnaire to all parents of Grade 3 children in your school, to be filled in by the parent and returned to school when I will pick them up a week after sending out. The questionnaire will go to the parent and be returned to school via their child in the Grade 3. Subsequent interviews with parents will be conducted outside the school.

Please be assured that any information that I gather from this study will be treated as confidential. The names of the participants as well as the name of your school will not be disclosed, and participation is voluntary. Participants can decide to withdraw from the research process at any time without any prejudice.

Whilst much research has already been done on schools and schooling, this research study is unique as it views education through the eyes of the parent. I therefore value your input in this study.

Thank you,

Date:

---

---

Nadira Manickchand (Mrs.)

## **Principal Consent**

**Research Topic:** Parent's decision-making of primary school choice for their children in KwaZulu Natal.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (full name of principal)  
hereby confirm that I am aware of the contents of this document and the nature of the study.

Signature of Principal

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

Thanking you,

Nadira Manickchund (Mrs.)

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Contact Details**

**Researcher:** Nadira Manickchund

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[ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

**Appendix (ii): Information Sheet and Informed Consent of Participant-English and IsiZulu.**

Dear Sir/ Madam

**Information Sheet**

**Research Topic- Parent's decision-making on primary school choice for their children in KwaZulu Natal.**

I am a PhD student at UKZN (Edgewood), researching parents who have chosen Foundation Phase schools for their children. I will be exploring how parent's life history, social, and cultural backgrounds influence their school choice decisions.

I have identified you to participate in my research because of your experiences with school choices that you spoke about in the questionnaire I sent to you. I appreciate conducting this interview with you which will take about an hour.

The interview will be conducted at times and venues convenient to you and will be voice- recorded. All names and information that I gather from this study will be treated as confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you can decide to withdraw from the research process at any time without any prejudice. Finally, be assured that all information collected from this research will be disposed off by incineration and shredding within a period of five years.

All parents have a story to tell about their experiences with education. This research project is unique as it shows the importance of parent's involvement in education and will be a way to make the parent's voice heard. I therefore value your input in this study.

Thank you,

Date:

---

Nadira Manickchund (Mrs.)

## **Participant Declaration of Consent**

**Research Topic:** Parent's decision making on primary school choice for their children in KwaZulu Natal.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview- Yes / No (Please circle appropriate answer).

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

Thanking you,

\_\_\_\_\_

Nadira Manickchund (Mrs.)

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Contact Details**

**Researcher:** Nadira Manickchund

0832674486

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Dear Sir / Madam

**Ukwaziswa Sheet**

**Izinqumo Research Sihloko-Womzali on zakuqala imfundo school  
izingqumo izingane zabo.**

I am a student PhD at UKZN (Edgewood), ukucwaninga abazali abakhethethe Foundation Phase izikole izingane zabo. I uzobe ukuhlola indlela umlando umzali yokuphila, kwezenhlalo, nezizinda zamasiko kuthonya izingqumo zabo school yekhethelo.

Ngikhothame uhlonze wena ukuba ubambe iqhaza nocwaningo kwami ngenxa nakho bakho izingqumo school okhulume ngayo lemibuzo ngathumela kuwe. Ngizwe Umqhubi ngamunye izingxoxo nawe. Kuyokuba 2 interview ehlukeni; ngamunye kuyoba nge ihora eside.

Izingxoxo izobanjelwa izikhathi kanye izindawo ezikahle kuwe futhi kuyoba izwi-eqoshiwe. Zonke amagama imininingwane ngibutha kusuka kulolu cwaningo Ukuphathwa ngokuyimfihlo. Ukuzibandakanya lakho yokuzithandela futhi ungakwazi unquma ukuhoxisa enqubweni lokucwaninga noma nini ngaphandle ubandlululo. Ekugcineni, qiniseka ukuthi konke imininingwane eqoqwe kuma kulolu ucwaningo kuyokwenziwa ilahlwe ahambe nokushiswa bese shredding esikhathini seminyaka emihlanu.

Zonke abazali indaba ukutshela mayelana nakho bawo yemfundo. Le projekthi ucwaningo uhlukile njengoba ikhombisa ukubaluleka ukuhileleka umzali kwezemfundo kuyoba indlela ukwenza izwi abazali wezwa. Ngakho-ke mina uyayazisa imibono yenu kule cwaningo.

Ngiyabonga,

Date:

---

Nadira Manickchand (Nkk)

**Umhlanganyeli Declaration of Imvume**  
**Ucwaningo Sihloko : izinqumo Womzali on zakuqala imfundo school**  
**yekhethelo .**

Mina , \_\_\_\_\_ , ngalokhu ziqinisekisa ukuthi ngiyaqonda okuqukethwe mbhalo kanye uhlobo locwaningo , mina invume iqhaza le project ucwaningo .

Ngियाqonda ukuthi ngingubani at inkululeko ukuhoxa kulolu hlelo noma nini , kufanele mina kanjalo sifise .

I Ngalokhu banikezele ngemvume ukuze :

Audio - irekhodi my interview - Iye / Awa ( Sicela Kokelezela impendulo ezifanele ) .

---

ISIGNESHA

Date

---

Nadira Manickchund ( Nkk )

---

Imininingwane

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## Appendix (iii): Parent Questionnaire

Dear Parent,

### Parent's decision making on primary school choice.

I am a PhD student at UKZN exploring how and why parents make decisions about schools for their children in early school years. I require that you fill out this questionnaire and return it back to the school in the envelope provided. Please ensure that the envelope is sealed before you send it with your child back to the teacher. The process should take about 20 minutes of your time.

In order to increase the possibilities of getting back most of the questionnaires, as this is important for the results of the research, your child will receive a sweet treat when this questionnaire is returned, completed, back to school. I do hope that you will take advantage of this incentive.

Please be assured that all information is confidential and that the name of the school as well as your details will not be revealed. You are also under no obligation to complete this questionnaire, however, in the interests of furthering research in the area of parent involvement in education, I urge you to participate. Your experiences in choosing schools for your children will assist in fostering understandings between the parent and education. You are free to withdraw from this research process at any stage should you wish to do so.

A questionnaire like this only gives me sufficient information to get to know you. I would like to explore further the background factors that have contributed to your school choice decisions. I therefore will be conducting interviews with parents that are willing to tell me more about their experiences in choosing schools. Please consider if you would allow me to interview you at your convenience. Details of this follow at the end of this questionnaire.

Thank you for your interest and participation.

---

Nadira Manickchund

---

Parent Questionnaire
----------------------

**Instructions-** This questionnaire must be filled out by **ONE** parent. Please tick your answer in the blocks provided, or answer in words where necessary. The questionnaire has 4 pages. **The numbers in BOLD are for office use only.**

### **SECTION 1: The parent as learner**

A. Who is filling out this questionnaire? **1 2 3**

Mother	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------	--------------------------



Father	
Guardian	

B. If you ticked ‘guardian’ in question A, then only fill in B. Kindly indicate your gender. **1 2**

Male	
Female	

C. When were you in Grade 1? **1 2 3 4**

1970’s	
1980’s	
1990’s	
Other	

D. What type of school did you attend when you were in Grade 1? **1 2**

Public	
Private	

E. In what type of residential area was your Grade 1 school? **1 2 3**

Rural	
Township	
Urban (city)	

1. How would you describe the quality of education you had in your early schooling days?

---



---

2. How did your parent’s value education?

---



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**Section B: The parent as decision maker**

F. What is your marital status? **1 2 3**

Married	
Divorced	
Single	

G. What are all your children’s ages, gender, and type of school they attend? Tick the appropriate boxes. **1a,b,c,d,e,f,g, 2a,b,c,d,e,f,g. 3a.b.c.d.e.f.g. 4a.b.c.d.e.f.g**

Child No.	Age 6-9	Age 10-13	Age 14-18	Male	Female	Attends public school	Attends private school
<b>1</b>							
<b>2</b>							

3							
4							

H. Who decided on choosing this school for your Grade 3 child? 1 2 3 4

Mother	
Father	
Both parents	
Other	

I. Have you changed this Grade 3 child's school in the past 3 years? 1 2

Yes	
No	

J. Do you have a Matric qualification? 1 2

Yes	
No	

K. Do you have a degree? 1 2

Yes	
No	

L. Is your child in Grade 3 attending any of the following extra- curricular classes?  
6a,b, 7a,b, 8a. b, 9a, b

	Yes	No
Remedial		
Occupational Therapy		
Speech and Hearing Therapy		
Private Tuition		

M. What is your combined monthly household income? 1 2 3

Below R15 000	
Between R15 000 and R50 000	
Above R50 000	

3. What were some of the reasons why you chose this school for your Grade 3 child?

---



---

4. How did you hear about this school that you chose for your Grade 3 child?

---



---

### Section C: The parent as aspirant

5. Very briefly, what are your dreams for your children's educational future?

---

---

---

6. If you answered 'Yes' to any of the blocks in question L, then continue with number 6. What were some of the reasons your child in Grade 3 is attending any of these extra-curricular lessons?

---

---

---

**Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.**

***Could I please contact you for an interview? I am very interested in exploring more of your experiences in choosing schools for your children.***

**Yes / No** (please circle your answer)

**N1 N2**

If yes, please can I have your details?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

e- mail: \_\_\_\_\_

telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

My details are as follows:

Nadira Manickchund

nadira.m5@gmail.com

0832674486

031- 5722278

**Appendix (iv): Letter of appeal to teacher**

19 May 2014

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for assisting me with the distribution and collection of my questionnaire for my PhD studies. I would appreciate it if they went out with the children today, and if you could collect them as they came in. I will be coming back to the school on Friday to pick up all the returned questionnaires.

In order to ensure that I get almost all of them returned, I am leaving sweet treats with you to give to each child only when they bring in their completed questionnaire. I am hoping that this will incentivise them to urge their parents to fill out the questionnaire and send it back to school. I will appreciate it if you could remind them each morning to return the questionnaire, filled out, and they will then receive a sweet.

Thank you for your assistance. My research topic is exploring the decision-making of parents as they choose schools for their children.

Best regards,

Nadira Manickchand

## **Appendix (v): Interview schedule 1- middle-class.**

### **Semi- structured Interview of middle- class parents 1:**

#### **School Choice and Family History**

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*The purpose of this interview is to explore the relationships between school choice and the family unit.*

---

#### **A: The Past**

##### **1. Family value for schooling**

- 1.1. What were your parents' attitudes toward schooling?
- 1.2. How did you know that they valued/ did not value going to school?
- 1.3. Did they have many choices to choose from when they chose a school for you and your siblings? Why?

##### **2. Parent's own schooling**

- 2.1. What are some of the memories you have of your schooling?  
PROMPT- memorabilia from parent.
- 2.2. How did the school contribute to your schooling experiences?
- 2.3. Would you like your children to have the similar or different schooling experiences? Why?

##### **3. Parent's views of schooling in the past**

- 3.1. What are your views of schooling of the past?
- 3.2. How has your schooling contributed to your life?
- 3.3. Which of the schools that you attended made a lasting impression on you? Why is this so?

#### **B: The Present**

##### **1. Children and choice of school**

- 1.1. What are the ages and sex of all your children and which schools are they attending?

- 1.2. How many choices for schooling for your children are open to you?
- 1.3. If you could choose any school, what type of schools would you choose for each of your children? Why?

## **2. Who makes school choice decisions in the family?**

- 2.1. What do you and your husband/ wife/ partner considers when you are making a school choice for any of your children?
- 2.2. How do/ did you and your husband/ wife/ partner go about making your school choice decisions?
- 2.3. Who makes the final decisions on school choice? Why?

## **3. Views of schooling in the present**

- 3.1. What are your views of schooling in the new South Africa?
- 3.2. How do you feel your children will fare in schools today?
- 3.3. Will the choice of school make a difference to your children's education? Why?

## **C: The Future**

### **1. Aspirations of children's futures**

- 1.1. What are your hopes and dreams for your children's futures?
- 1.2. How do you hope to make these dreams a reality?
- 1.3. Do you think that the schools you have chosen for your children will help make your dreams a reality?

### **2. Outcomes of education**

- 2.1. What do you expect schooling to do for all your children?
- 2.2. How can schooling make your expectations come true?
- 2.3. Do you have hope that the schools you chose will help make your expectations come true?

### **3. Views of education future**

- 3.1. What are some of the changes you would like to see in schooling of the future?
- 3.2. How can what you said become a reality?

3.3. Do you think schools will need to change? What changes will they need to make?

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Is there anything else you would like to say?

At our next interview we shall focus on issues of the particular school your Grade 3 child attends.

Thank you very much for your participation.

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## **Appendix (vi): Interview schedule 2- middle-class.**

### **Semi- structured Interview of middle- class parents 2:**

#### **School Choice and the Institution**

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*The purpose of this interview is to explore the relationship between school choice and school as the institution.*

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**The following questions relate to the child and the school that the questionnaire was administered in.**

#### **A: Geographic location**

##### **1. School location same as residence**

- 1.1. What types of schools are available in your residential area?
- 1.2. How did you go about getting information about the types of schools in your area?
- 1.3. Is it important to you that the schools you send your children to be in your residential area? Why?

##### **2. School location different as residence**

- 2.1. What types of schools are available out of your residential area?
- 2.2. How do you know about the schools out of your area?
- 2.3. Will you choose/ have you chose to send your child to a school out of your area? Why?

##### **3. Comparing location and perception**

- 3.1. What types of education are happening in schools in your area and schools out of your area?
- 3.2. How do you know this?
- 3.3. If you could send your child to any school, would you choose a school close to home or away from home? Why?



## **B: Reputation**

### **1. Perceived reputation**

- 1.1. What do you know about this school that your child goes to now?
- 1.2. How did you get this information?
- 1.3. Did this information influence you to choose this school?

### **2. Construction of reputation**

- 2.1. Apart from talking to friends, family, neighbours; what other information do you get about what's happening at the school?
- 2.2. How do you get this information?
- 2.3. How much of interaction do you have with the teachers and principal?  
Why is this so?

### **3. Reputation and Image**

PROMPT: Show pictures of a basic school and an expensive school.

- 3.1. What do you think about how the children in these two different schools learn?
- 3.2. How would you know this?
- 3.3. If you had a choice between these 2 schools, which one would you choose for your child? Why?

## **C: Facilities**

### **1. Human**

- 1.1. What are your views on the teachers and principal of this school?
- 1.2. How did you come about these views?
- 1.3. Are you happy about the teacher your child has now? Why?

### **2. Physical**

- 2.1. What facilities does this school offer?
- 2.2. How do you know about the facilities offered by the school?
- 2.3. Did these facilities influence you to choose this school?

### **3. Financial**

- 3.1. What are the school fees for this year?
  - 3.2. How are the fees justified? In other words, what is your money buying you?
  - 3.3. Were school fees very important when you were making a decision to choose this school? Why?
- 

Is there anything else you would like to say?

At our next interview we shall focus on the curriculum of the particular school your Grade 3 child attends. Please bring any school reports or documents relating to your child's education.

Thank you very much for your participation.

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## **Appendix (vii): Interview schedule 3- middle-class.**

### **Semi- structured Interview of middle-class parents 3:**

#### **School Choice and the Curriculum**

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*The purpose of this interview is to explore the relationship between school choice and the curriculum.*

---

**The following questions relate to the child and the school that the questionnaire was administered in.**

#### **A: The official curriculum**

##### **1. Education policies**

- 1.1. What are the education policies of South Africa that you consider to be important?
- 1.2. How did you gain your knowledge of South Africa's education policies?
- 1.3. Is there anything from your understanding of education policies that you looked for in this school before you chose it? If yes, what were they?

##### **2. How are policies made?**

- 2.1. What, in your opinion, drives the government to make education policies?
- 2.2. How do education policies affect you?
- 2.3. Does the school give you opportunities to give your feedback on educational matters? Elaborate further.

##### **3. The school's policies**

- 3.1. What do you understand about this school's policies?
- 3.2. How do you get information about this school's policies?
- 3.3. Does the school's policies change how you feel about the school?

## **B: The enacted curriculum**

### **1. Homework**

- 1.1. What homework does your child get from the school?
- 1.2. How important is the homework that is brought home?
- 1.3. Does the homework affect you as a parent in any way? What way is that?

### **2. Reporting**

- 2.1. What types of reporting of your child's progress does the school offer you?

PROMPT: School reports/ documents relating to the education of the child.

- 2.2. How do you feel after reading your child's report/talking to the teacher?
- 2.3. Does your child's reports make you feel happy about the school? Why?

### **3. School Meetings**

- 3.1. When you attend school meetings, what is discussed there?
- 3.2. How do you feel when you attend school meetings? Why?
- 3.3. Are there many opportunities to ask questions at these school meetings? Why?

## **C: The curriculum outside the school**

### **1. Extra tuition**

- 1.1. What types of extra tuition does your child get?/ would you like your child to have?
- 1.2. How did/ would you get information about what extra tuition your child needs/ may need?
- 1.3. If your child needed/ needs extra tuition, what would you expect the school to do?

## **2. Choosing extra tuition**

- 2.1. What types of extra tuition are available to you?
- 2.2. How do you/ would you get to know about these types of tuition?
- 2.3. Would you go about choosing extra tuition services the same way you chose schools? i.e, looking at location, reputation, costs, facilities? Give reasons for your answer.

## **3. Financial Implications**

- 3.1. What are your extra tuition fees? OR What do you think the costs of extra tuition are?
- 3.2. How prepared were/ are you of the extra costs of education, apart from school fees? Why is this so?
- 3.3. Do these extra costs change how you feel about the school? Why?

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Is there anything else you would like to add?

A narrative of your story will be drawn up and sent to you to make any changes should you wish to.

Thank you very much for your participation.

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## **Appendix (viii): Interview schedule 1- working-class**

### **Semi- structured Interview of working- class parents 1**

#### **School Choice and Family History**

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*The purpose of this interview is to explore the relationships between school choice and the family unit.*

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1. Did you go to school? Where was your school? What standard/ grade did you go up to?
2. Where was your school? Was your school close to your home? How did you go to school?
3. How did your parents feel about you going to school?
4. What memories do you have of your schooling days?
5. Did you like the schools that you went to? Why?
6. Where do you live now?
7. What is your occupation?
8. Has your schooling helped you to get to where you are today? Why?
9. How many children do you have?
10. How old are they and which schools are they attending?
11. Do you have many schools to choose from to send your children to?
12. Are you happy with the schools they are going to? If you had a choice, which school would you like them to go to? Why?
13. What do you think about schooling in the new South Africa?
14. How do you feel your children will do in the schools of today?
15. What are your hopes and dreams for your children's futures?
16. Do you think that the schools they are going to will make your dreams for your children come true?
17. What do you want schools must do for your children?
18. What are some of the changes you would like to see in schooling of the future?

Is there anything else you would like to say? At our next interview we shall focus on issues of the particular school your Grade 3 child attends.  
Thank you very much for your participation.

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## **Appendix (ix): Interview schedule 2- working-class.**

### **Semi- structured Interview of working-class parents 2**

#### **School Choice and the Institution**

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*The purpose of this interview is to explore the relationship between school choice and school as the institution.*

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**The following questions relate to the child and the school that the questionnaire was administered in.**

1. How did you find out about Aurora Primary School before you chose it for your child?
  2. Why are you sending your child to Aurora Primary School?
  3. Is Aurora Primary School close to your home? How does your child get to school?
  4. What do you like about Aurora Primary School? Is there anything you don't like about the school? What are they?
  5. How do you get information about what is happening at the school?
  6. How often do you meet with the teacher?
  7. Have you met with the principal? When was this, and what was discussed?
  8. How do you feel about the teachers at the school? Why?
  9. How do you feel about the principal of the school? Why?
  10. What are the school fees for the year? Can you pay the fees?
  11. What do you think the school fees should be?
- 

Is there anything else you would like to say?

At our next interview we shall focus on the curriculum of the particular school your Grade 3 child attends. Please bring any school reports or documents relating to your child's education.

Thank you very much for your participation.

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## **Appendix (x): Interview schedule 3-working-class**

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### **Semi- structured Interview of working- class parents 3**

#### **School Choice and the Curriculum**

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*The purpose of this interview is to explore the relationship between school choice and the curriculum.*

---

**The following questions relate to the child and the school that the questionnaire was administered in.**

1. What do you know about the education policies of South Africa?
2. How do education policies affect you as a parent?
3. Does your child get homework? How often does your child get homework?
4. How does the homework affect you as a parent?
5. How often do you get school reports? How well do you understand what is written in the reports?
6. How do you feel when you read your child's reports?
7. Do you go to school meetings? What are the meetings for?
8. Do you ask questions at school meetings? If no, why not?
9. Does your child get extra tuition? Does s/he need extra tuition?
10. What extra tuition would you like your child to get?
11. Can you afford extra tuition?
12. If your child needs extra tuition to pass Matric, what would you do then?
13. If your child is not performing well at school, what do you expect the school to do?

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Is there anything else you would like to add?

A narrative of your story will be drawn up and sent to you to make any changes should you wish to.

Thank you very much for your participation.

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## Appendix (xi): Quantitative analysis

Number data	Word data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data clean and capture.</li> <li>• Consolidate numbers according to independent variables for each school.</li> <li>• Descriptive analysis- independent variables clustered into the dependent variables</li> <li>• Central Tendency scores according to the mean measurement for each variable in each school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcription of word answers.</li> <li>• Colour-coding of themes.</li> <li>• Sub- topics and responses noted for each different school</li> <li>• Probes for Phase 2 interview schedules noted</li> <li>• Case study participants chosen</li> </ul>

### Phase 1: Quantitative analysis

**Phase 1: number data-** Descriptive analysis- studying single variables one at a time according to the Mean measurement of the Central Tendency scores.

Dependent and Independent Variables	Aurora Primary School (working class)	Somerset Junior Primary School (middle class)	Westwood Independent School (upper middle class)
No. sent out	63	105	52
No. returned	<b>44</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>43</b>
Percentage return	69%	42.8%	82%
<b>1. Background</b>			
1.1. era of schooling -70's	15%	28%	20.9%
- 80's	36%	60%	72%
- 90's	38.6%	6.66%	4.6%
1.2. type of school attended			
public	100%	93%	97.6%
private	nil	6.66%	nil
1.3. residential setting			
rural	59%	13%	25%
township	20%	26.6%	27.9%

urban	-	20%	60%	41.8%
<b>2. Family dynamics</b>				
2.1. marital status-married		36%	84%	90.6%
divorced	-	6.8%	2%	6.97%
single	-	56.8%	15.5%	2%
2.2. SES of family-working class		63.6%	8.88%	9.3%
middle class	-	9%	60%	65%
- upper middle class		nil	28.8%	16%
<b>3. Agency and the Institution</b>				
3.1. qualifications-has matric		36%	97.7%	93%
has degree	-	6.8%	44.4%	53.4%
3.2. participants-mother		84%	82%	62.7%
father	-	9%	17.7%	30%
3.3. engaging in private tuition		9%	24.4%	11.6%

**Phase 1: word data:** Themes and sub-themes

	<b>Aurora primary School</b> (working class)	<b>Somerset Junior Primary School</b> (middle class)	<b>Westwood Independent School</b> (upper middle class)
<b>1. Parent as learner- views of their own education</b>			
1.1. Quality	-good, excellent, high standard - average, low, very poor, satisfactory - easy & understandable	-good, excellent	- good, excellent - public school was not the best
1.2. Facilities	overpopulated shared classrooms	below standard conditions	Schools provided textbooks &

	was taught under trees windows broken, was cold	limited resources	stationery Classrooms not over full Had library, music, sport
1.3. Teachers	Excellent, taught well Very little skilled teachers	Poor- used bursaries as a stepping stone into other careers Dedicated Passionate Went the extra mile	Looked forward to educating, Gave individual attention, Was considered a high profession, Focused, Great, dedicated, were educated, Took interest in making sure we had a good education, Performance was good- reflected in students' results.
1.4. Accessing education	Walked long distances with no money, Should learn with no food in our stomachs	Time was spent running from police and tear-gas	No extra tuition if you had weaknesses in any subject
1.5. Description of education then	Under Bantu education Not taught many things Built a child physically, mentally and gave more knowledge Very strict Had subjects like Agriculture which I liked Provided adequate skills A wonderful experience	Syllabus not covered English taught in mother tongue- did not help the development of language, Meticulous Fun and great Not interesting Great foundation Disciplined Well- rounded Equivalent to current private education	Lots of discipline Students wanted to learn Strikes and bullying Fun Informative and basic Firm grounding, good foundation Disciplined learners Easy to understand work Sufficient for that time Kids were scared not to go to school No thinking out of the box was encouraged
1.6. Comparison-	Not the same as	Not as advanced	Better quality

education then and now	this new education Everything is advanced today, Was simpler, not complicated like today, Not mixed like today- Black people were in their own school, More understandable than the education of our children in these days, Has improved from my system	as today	then than now
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**Phase 1: Possible probes for case-study interviews**

- Era of schooling-schooling experiences-views of education then and now:  
How does this influence schooling decisions for your children?
- Place of residence-qualifications-SES:  
To what extent does this influence school choice decisions?
- Marital status-family composition-who makes school choice decisions in the family?  
School choice decisions for each child.
- Networking-access to school choice information-relationship between parent and school/ teachers/ principal:  
How does the parent engage with the institution in making school choice decisions?
- Rate the necessity of private tuition intervention-  
Does private tuition feature in success of your school choice decision?

**Appendix (xii): Transcript of e-mail interview, Model C school, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview.**

<b>6. Anne B/ b/e</b>
<b>A: Geographic location</b>
<b>1. School location same as residence</b>
1.1. What types of schools are available in your residential area? Former model C schools, private schools.
1.2. How did you go about getting information about the types of schools in your area? I have lived in the area all my life so know a lot about the schools. Also word of mouth and school web sites.
1.3. Is it important to you that the schools you send your children to be in your residential area? Why? It is important that they are in our residential area so that their friends are in the same area. In saying that if there was not a suitable school in the area, they would go to a school outside the area. Schooling is more important.
<b>2. School location different as residence</b>
2.1. What types of schools are available out of your residential area? Similar to the one's in our residential area.
2.2. How do you know about the schools out of your area? Word of mouth, web sites, have lived in Durban my whole life.
2.3. Will you choose/ have you chose to send your child to a school out of your area? Why? No I have not. My child is at a school in the area.
<b>3. Comparing location and perception</b>
3.1. What types of education are happening in schools in your area and schools out of your area? Similar education.
3.2. How do you know this? Have family and friends who have children in schools in other areas so through word of mouth mainly.
3.3. If you could send your child to any school, would you choose a school close to home or away from home? Why? Close to home for ease of transport and so that his friends are close by as well.
<b>B: Reputation</b>
<b>1. Perceived reputation</b>
1.1. What do you know about this school that your child goes to now? It is a well-established school with a good reputation for producing good students who achieve well when they move to other schools.
1.2. How did you get this information? Word of mouth.
1.3. Did this information influence you to choose this school? Most definitely.
<b>2. Construction of reputation</b>
<u>2.1. Apart from talking to friends, family, neighbours; what other information do you get about what's happening at the school?</u>
2.2. How do you get this information? D6 communicator, local newspaper – Northglen News.
2.3. How much of interaction do you have with the teachers and principal? Why is this so? Not much. I do not like to interfere. They know more about education and I trust them to do the best with my child. Obviously if there is an issue I will discuss this with the teacher.
<b>C: Facilities</b>
<b>1. Human</b>
1.1. What are your views on the teachers and principal of this school? The principal

<p>runs a very tight ship. She is well respected and has much experience. The teachers are mostly very young and sometimes I feel that the young ones are always looking for problems in the child. It is too easy to send them to OT, remedial. I think they are afraid that if they do not pick up a problem they will be blamed later on.</p>
<p>1.2. How did you come about these views? When my son had an older teacher in Grade 2 she had no problems with him and understood that he was a “boy”.</p>
<p>1.3. Are you happy about the teacher your child has now? Why? I am not unhappy but I do believe that she tried to “fit” him into a box and because he is different she thought he had a learning problem.</p>
<p><b>2. Physical</b></p>
<p>2.1. What facilities does this school offer? Library, computer room, swimming pool, large fields, good size classrooms with aircons.</p>
<p>2.2. How do you know about the facilities offered by the school? Saw them and was told about them at the interview.</p>
<p>2.3. Did these facilities influence you to choose this school? No not really. Most schools in the area have good facilities.</p>
<p><b>3. Financial</b></p>
<p>3.1. What are the school fees for this year? R19 500</p>
<p>3.2. How are the fees justified? In other words, what is your money buying you? I believe they are justified. They are getting my son a good education.</p>
<p>3.3. Were school fees very important when you were making a decision to choose this school? Why? No they were not that important. I do not mind paying for a good education but I would also not pay excessive fees to schools that are run like businesses in order to make a profit.</p>

**Appendix (xiii): Transcript of face-to-face interview, private school, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, and coding.**

<b>2. Prnil A/a/f2f</b>	
<p><b>1. What were your parent's attitudes towards schooling?</b> I think in the old days we were instilled that schooling was the <u>most important thing</u> in our parent's lives. Education was primary for our parents to make sure that <u>we get to schools</u> and educate ourselves. It was very important.</p>	<p>education very important education was accessible</p>
<p><b>2. Did they have many choices to choose from when they chose schools for you and your siblings?</b> No, not really. It was just <u>public school</u> and the <u>closest one to home</u>.</p>	<p>schooling was localised schooling was only public school</p>
<p><b>3. Where was home at that time?</b> Well, it depends. Primary school was in (.....) and then secondary school was in (.....).</p>	<p>apartheid- lived only in Indian areas</p>
<p><b>4. You went to public schools?</b> Public schools, yes.</p>	
<p><b>5. What are some of the memories you have of your schooling? Good and bad memories?</b> I think more good, but I think more...(hesitates), I think if you're asking for a comparison, I think <u>discipline</u> was of utmost importance then but <u>I don't think the same thing applies these days</u>. Er, I think more the <u>dedication of the teachers</u>, in our days, compared to what we see these days. Teachers then, I think, <u>sacrificed their own personal time</u> to teach you <u>after hours</u> and I think now it's more for <u>monetary reward</u> that they will do something extra now, and I think for me, old school teachers actually <u>took more of an interest</u> than what I see now.</p>	<p>Old- discipline, teachers dedicated, sacrifice personal time, took more interest Now- no discipline, teachers want to be paid for extra work</p>
<p><b>6. You have 1 child, according to your questionnaire. Would you like your child to have similar experiences that you had, or different experiences? Schooling experiences?</b> Well, I think, different in the sense that, when we went to school, it was in the days of <u>apartheid</u>, we were <u>segregated</u>, and nowadays, <u>schools are much open</u>, you can go to any school, so, different in the sense, and similar aspects of discipline and the culture of learning and those kinds of things. Obviously nowadays you have <u>electronic means of learning things</u>, so, which we wouldn't have had in our days, so, some similarities, some differences.</p>	<p>apartheid determined schooling of the past now you can go to any school electronic means of learning now</p>
<p><b>7. How has your schooling contributed to your life?</b> I think it actually <u>molded us</u> to where we are now. So, very important, the upbringing.</p>	<p>schooling molded the future</p>
<p><b>8. Which of the schools that you attended made a lasting impression on you?</b> I think (...) Secondary, that will be my high school. I suppose it would have the foundation for where I am now.</p>	
<p><b>9. The age of your child?</b></p>	



<p>He's going to be 10 this year.  <b>And he is going to (.....)? He's still there?</b>  He's still there, yes.</p>	
<p><b>10. How many choices for schooling for your child were open to you? Did you have many choices?</b>  Well, I suppose I had choices of public school but I think, at that time, when I enrolled him at Mount Edgecombe Private it was more a <u>matter of convenience</u>. I was working at (....) and I live in (.....), and the school was on the way home to, ... on the way to work.</p>	<p>Schooling choices: convenience</p>
<p><b>11. If you could choose any school, what type of school would you choose for your child? By type of school, I am referring to private, public.</b>  I think <u>definitely private these days</u>. Well, if I have to compare what we had in public schools in our days and what we see now, I think there's a <u>lack of discipline</u>, there's <u>no dedication from the teachers</u>. I think the teachers just come to do their job and that's it, it ends there. I think there is <u>more attention in the private school</u>, there's much <u>smaller classes</u> in the private school, so, affordability, in terms of private school, if I could, it would definitely be a private school.</p>	<p>public schools now- lack discipline, no dedication from teachers</p> <p>private school- smaller classes, children get more attention</p>
<p><b>12. What do you consider when you are making a school choice for your child?</b>  I think <u>location</u>, firstly, <u>convenience</u>, in terms of transport, and also then, the (pause) the <u>results</u> of the school, and also <u>facilities</u>, especially extra- curricular.</p>	<p>making a school choice- location, convenience, results, extra-curricular</p>
<p><b>13. Who, in the family, makes the final decision on the school choice?</b>  I think it's a consultative between myself and my wife, so, but generally, I would, <u>I would decide</u>.</p>	<p>father decides on the school</p>
<p><b>14. What are your views of schooling in the new South Africa?</b>  In general, ok, you will have to make a comparison between private and public schools. Public schools are, like I said, not what it used to be. Er, (pause), I think it's made, schooling is made, or <u>passing is made a lot easier</u> that in our days. I think when I was in Matric, if you had one A you were a brilliant student, but now, you see the guys just getting 7, 8 A's. I don't believe that the <u>quality</u>, the standard of passing is higher than what it used to be in our days. So, I think it's made much more easier to pass, especially in Matric.</p>	<p>schooling in the new S.A- Matric is easier to pass, quality not higher than the old days</p>
<p><b>15. How do you think your child will fare in the schools of today?</b>  He's generally an above average student, er , I <u>think he will do well</u>.  <b>And in the school that he is in?</b>  The school that he is in, he's <u>above average</u>.</p>	<p>Aspirations- child above average student</p>
<p><b>16. So, do you think that the choice of school will make a difference to your child's education?</b>  Definitely, yes, definitely</p>	
<p><b>17. What are your hopes and dreams for your child's future?</b>  Well, hopefully, the hope was for him to, <u>to do well</u>.  (interrupted by call)</p>	
<p><b>18. What do you expect schooling to do for your</b></p>	<p>parent has made child's career</p>

<p><b>child?</b> Well, I suppose schooling should be there to mold him, to be a better individual when he leaves school and pursues <u>a career in the business environment.</u></p>	<p>choice</p>
<p><b>19. I was asking before what were your hopes and dreams for his future?</b> Oh, yes, obviously to do well and pursue something that he loves. I suppose he's a bit too young to understand what it is right now, but, er, the choice must be his because he must enjoy what he wants to do and complete it.</p>	
<p><b>20. What are some of the changes you would like to see in schooling of the future?</b> I think we are going into a digital age, I think maybe schools should start now, I think some of the private schools are going that way. Er, I think some of the public schools, bought tablets that were introduced in Gauteng, I think it was. But, I think we need to go more <u>electronic rather than the paper and books.</u></p>	<p>schooling of the future- embrace the digital age</p>

Codes:

Schooling of the past

Schooling of the present

Schooling of the future

## **Appendix (xiv): Quantitative Analysis**

### **1.1. Orientation**

This appendix presents the findings on the quantitative data collected. The dominant and significant responses are represented via commentary and discussion or graphical representation. I begin by discussing the participants' background, focusing on their views on the quality of the education they received and their own parents' attitude to education. This is followed by a discussion on their reasons for school choice and the methods they used to gather information to guide such choices. The document ends by highlighting areas from this quantitative analysis that guided the data production for the qualitative phase of this study. The codes used to identify the participants' responses are X for the working-class school participants; Y for the private school participants; and Z for the Model C school participants. The number of the questionnaire that the participant completed is used as reference, for example, X23 refers to the participant from a working-class school that completed questionnaire number 23. It should be noted that the word-data are reported verbatim, without any attempt to clean the language, thus providing insight into the conversational and language aptitude of the parents. The percentage return on the survey was 69% in the working-class school; 42.8% in the Model C school; and 82% in the private school.

### **1.2. Parent's Background**

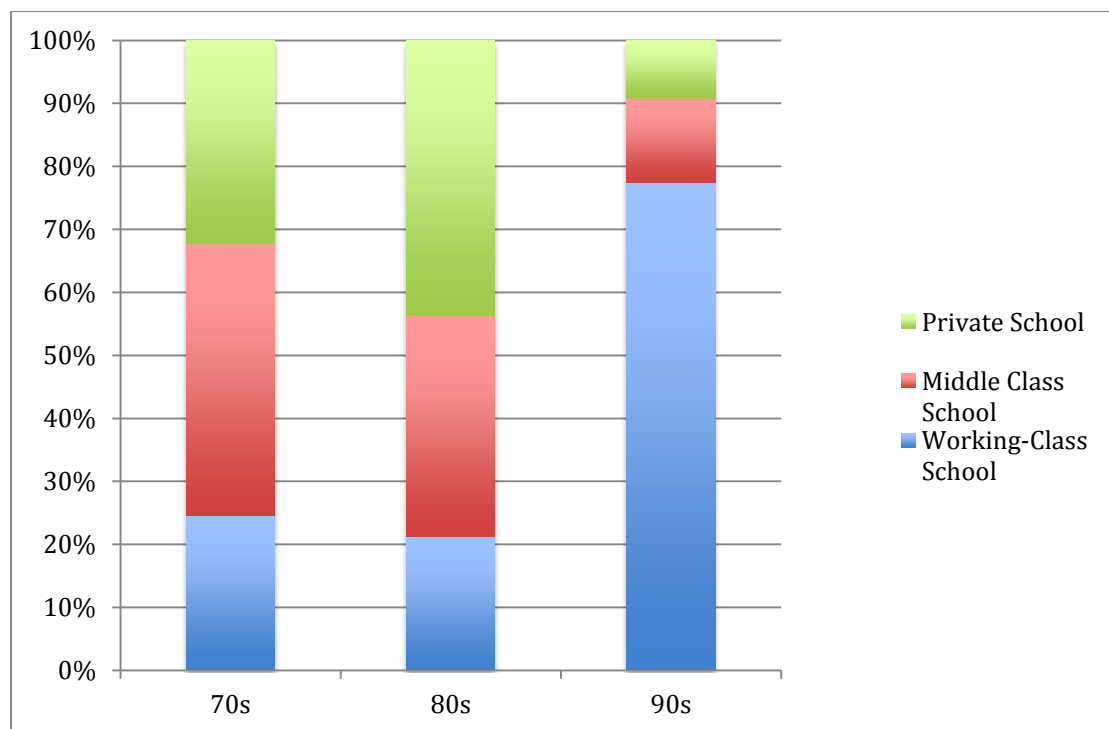
Parents' demographic details; their views on the quality of the education they received; and their own parents' attitudes to education, were determined under sub-categories in the questionnaire. These factors provided comprehensive information on who the parents are that are choosing schools for their children. They also provided the reasons for the parents' school choice, which were explored in phase two of the research process.

#### **1.2.1. Era of schooling**

Parents who did their early schooling in the 1970s are now in their forties, while those that attended such schools in the 1980s are in their thirties and those from the 1990s are in their twenties. All the parents within the thirties age group that

answered the questionnaire had a child in Grade 3. A Grade 3 child is roughly eight years old and is in the final year of the Foundation Phase in the South African education system. Almost all of these parents experienced early education under the apartheid government, with some attending school during the early days of democracy and others not having this opportunity.

The following figure shows the age groups of the parents who answered the questionnaire in relation to the type of school they chose for their Grade 3 child. The majority of parents who chose a working-class school are in their twenties; while the majority of those that chose private schooling are in their thirties. The parents that selected a middle-class school were in their thirties and forties, while a significant but small number of parents in their twenties chose a middle-class and private school.



**Fig.2:** Parents' era of own schooling and type of school chosen for their Grade 3 child

### 1.2.2. Views on quality of education received

All the parents in the working-class and the private school attended public schools as early learners; while in the middle-class school 6.6% of parents attended private school and the rest attended a public school. Consequently,

when parents described the quality of education they received, they mainly spoke about the quality of government schooling. Several themes emanated from their writings on school quality.

#### **1.2.2.1. 'Good' education**

In the working-class school, 47% of the respondents described their educational experiences as 'excellent,' 'good,' 'very good,' and 'high standard.' Few reasons were given to explain this assessment but the following comment provided some areas to explore educational outcomes.

*'It was good, we did not have subjects like LO, we had agriculture, I liked this subject because we used to plant and saving the planet.'* (X13)

Sixty-eight per cent of the parents from the middle-class school said that the quality of their early educational experiences was 'good,' describing their education as 'solid' and 'well- rounded.' One parent made a comparison between public and private schooling, describing the quality of his education as *'excellent-equivalent to current private.'* (Z86).

In the private school, 74% of the parents described the quality of their education as 'excellent' and 'very good.'

*'Quality time spent on lessons, easy to understand work.'* (Y39)

#### **1.2.2.2. 'Bad' education**

Only 27% of the respondents in the working-class school described their educational experiences as 'poor,' 'low,' 'satisfactory,' and 'average.' In the middle-class school, only 0.4% described their education quality as 'poor.' One parent cited failure to complete the syllabus as the reason why he felt that his early education was of poor quality. However, at the private school, none of the parents felt that their educational experiences were of poor or bad quality, and only one evaluated it as 'average' (Y35).

#### **1.2.2.3. Comparing education then and now**

In the working-class school, the parents that compared the education of the past to today's education recognise the changes in the education system as the years have gone by and evaluate the present education system as 'advanced,' and

'improved.' Some parents stated that they did now know what the new education system proposes and expressed frustration at trying to engage with an education system that they have difficulty understanding.

*'I cannot say that today's education is better because education has changed a lot in the last 20 years.'* (X43)

*'It was much more simpler and higher not like now day complicated and lower.'* (X45)

In comparing the education systems of the past and present, one parent made reference to the racial separation of children.

*'I can say we were not mixed like in this days black people were in their own school so as white people.'* (X61)

In the middle-class school, parents recognise that today's education is more advanced than before, supporting their evaluation from early and further education perspectives.

*'In 1984 it was the norm to attend Gr. 1 without having had prior exposure to pre-schooling.'* (Z98)

*'Now there are more opportunities for further study and be good people.'* (Z80)

Parents today feel the intensity of the education system.

*'There is more pressure today for kids at school.'* (Z102)

Only one parent from the private school compared the education of then and now.

*'The standard of education in government school then was of a high standard. Teachers showed dedicated and classrooms were not overcrowded.'* (Y43)

#### **1.2.2.4. Teachers**

In describing their teachers' contribution to their schooling experiences, parents from the working-class school stated that they were 'dedicated,' and 'patient.'

*'Teachers did a good job on us, not like these days.'* (X45).

In the middle-class school, those parents who wrote about teachers held them in high esteem; two described teachers as being passionate about their jobs. However, one parent disagreed.

*'Some "poor" teachers due to the fact that they used bursaries just as a stepping stone into another career.'* (Z13)

In the private school, parents wrote about their teachers being 'focused,' 'dedicated,' and 'passionate.' They made reference to the relationship between good teachers, discipline, and outcomes.

*'The teachers were educated and dedicated and the discipline was in tact. Kids were too scared not to go to school.'* (Y8)

*'Teachers performance was good, this was reflective from students results.'* (Y25)

#### **1.2.2.5. Facilities**

The parents from the working-class school that wrote about learning facilities recounted negative experiences. They cited sharing classes; broken windows; learning under trees; and walking long distances to school as barriers to their learning. Parents from the middle-class school did not place much emphasis on facilities and resources; only one parent described access to learning resources as 'limited' (Z83).

The parents from the private school spoke of the abundant learning resources they enjoyed.

*'Classes not over full. Teachers could give you individual attention. Schools provided Textbooks and stationery.'* (Y19)

*'Secure, reasonable size classroom, good sports facilities, offered music, had library.'* (Y18)

One parent made reference to modern resources that aid teaching.

*'I had a good quality of education although there were least electronic equipment they used for teaching.'* (Y40)

#### **1.2.2.6. Discipline**

Only one parent from the working-class school related his/her schooling experience to 'strict' discipline. The parents from the middle-class school who

wrote about discipline, did so in a positive light describing it as enhancing education quality.

*'Discipline in schools added to an improved level of education.'* (Z98)

*'Good discipline system, most teaching and learning was achieved within a school day in school hours.'* (Z112)

Parents from the private school were also positive about the discipline during their days of schooling, describing it as 'exemplary' (Y11), and 'rigid structure' (Y52). However, one parent offered a different perspective.

*'Very strict, to the book- no thinking out the box was encouraged.'* (Y17)

#### **1.2.2.7. Apartheid education**

None of the parents from the working-class school and only one from the middle-class school made reference to their educational experiences during apartheid.

*'Very unstable as most of the time we spent our time running from the police and tear gas.'* (Z71)

At the private school, one parent commented on the behaviour of teachers and learners as a result of apartheid education.

*'Going to a public school the teachers and Learners didn't really Care about their Conduct. Most of the time there was Strikes and Bulling.'* (Y23)

#### **1.2.2.8. Extra tuition**

Commenting on the quality of the education of yesteryear, one parent from the private school made mention of extra tuition.

*'We had lots of assistance in school. We did not have extra tuition if you had weakness in a particular subject.'* (Y49)

### **1.2.3. Participant's own parents' attitude to education**

The participant's own parents' attitude to education forms a significant part of their background.

#### **1.2.3.1. Working-class school**

In the working-class school, the majority of participants' parents held education in high esteem, mainly to the fact that they lacked educational achievements and the realisation that education was a means to a better life.



*'They valued and appreciated this education, they believed this education because they believed it was the key to success and me becoming a teacher.'*(X13)

Some parents that did not emphasise education did so because of their lack of educational achievements and poor understanding of the importance of education; favouring traditional customs as more important. As one parent writes:

*'They didn't care about education because they were uneducated and marriage was the priority of the old minds.'* (X28)

Parental presence sometimes determined access to education. In the working-class school, a parent mentioned the difficulty of her granny bearing responsibility for her schooling because she did not stay with her parents at that time (X6). The impact of a parent's death on education was also mentioned.

*'They use to like education but I couldn't go further because they died when I was in secondary school.'* (X22)

### **1.2.3.2. Middle-class school**

All the respondents at the middle-class school said that their parents valued education very highly; and that it was a priority. The difference between the responses from the working-class school and the middle-class school is that no participant at the latter wrote of their parent having a negative attitude to education. In fact, these participants highlighted further features of their parents' influence on their education, including the parents' academic qualifications.

*'Dad had a degree so it was extremely important.'* (Z81)

*'Very important. Grew up in a home where education came first. My dad was a school teacher and then a school principal.'* (Z73)

Parents had expectations that went beyond school education.

*'It was important to be able to get tertiary education. They were very strict and expected our best.'* (Z45)

### **1.2.3.3. Private school**

The parents in this sample also stated that their parents' attached high value to education. They referred to their academic achievements and the importance attached to tertiary education. Some identified other factors that influenced

attitudes to education, including parenting styles and parental presence in educational matters.

*'Making sure that I had all that was required for schooling, and also spending quality time helping me with my schoolwork.'* (Y28)

*'They did their best but could not afford private Schools, they did not push us to obtain the best, which is why our parenting is much different.'* (Y23)

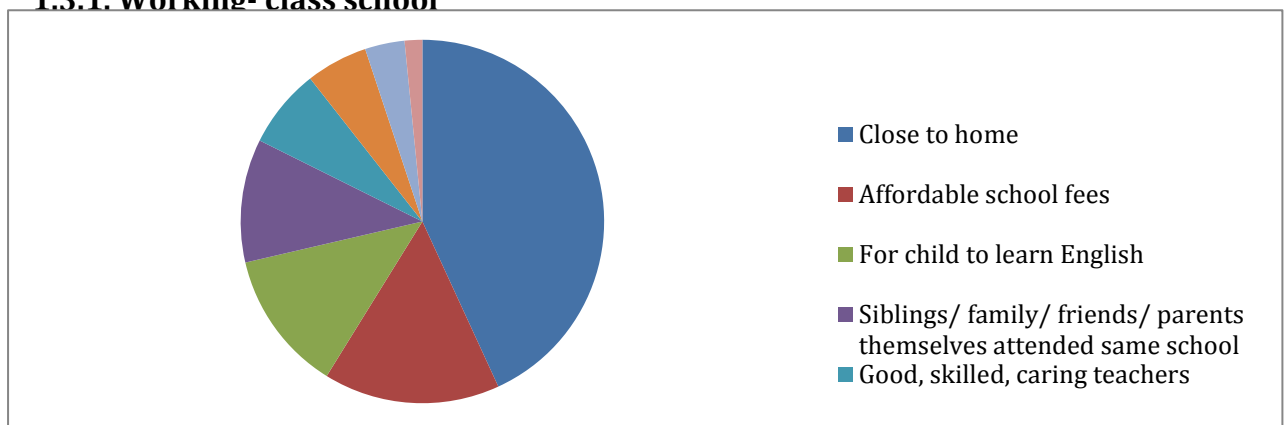
Also of importance is the relationship between school and parent.

*'It was very important. My parents supported the teacher when it came to discipline.'* (Y25)

### 1.3. Reasons for school choice

Although the reasons for parents' school choices varied from school to school, common reasons define the different social classes. Parental concerns and personal circumstances, which differed between social groupings, motivated them to choose a particular type of school. Furthermore, while the working-class parents suggested eight reasons for their school choice; middle-class parents suggested 14; and private school parents 11. Does this suggest more scope for choice of a middle-class school?

#### 1.3.1. Working- class school



*Fig 3: Reasons for parents' choice of working-class school*

In the working- class school, the most popular reason for parents choosing the school was because it was close to home. This reduced the cost of travel. Furthermore, some parents were happy that the school understood their financial circumstances; thus affordability of school fees was the next important reason.

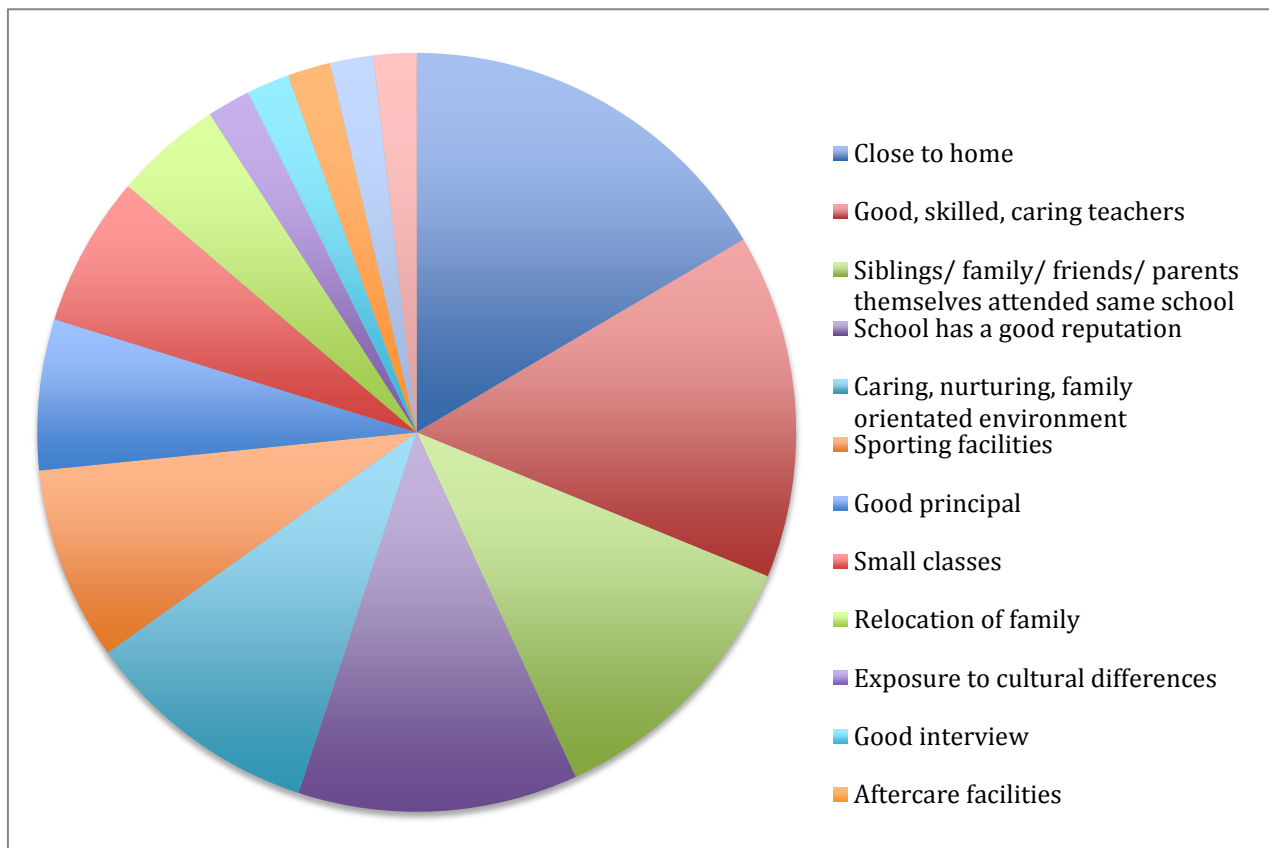
*'Because of my lower income I earn And they are very good in understanding that situation they give my child good education.'* (X39)

The next important factor in their school choice related to learning English. Most of these parents sent their child to this school so that they could learn English. This dovetailed with the fact that these parents wanted their child to achieve more from education than they did.

*'The reason that I choose for my child. I wish her a better education than me.'* (X64)

Furthermore, people in the parent's family and social circle had attended the same school and as a result, the school and teachers have a good reputation. Only one parent cited safety as a reason for school choice.

### 1.3.2. Middle-class school



**Fig 4: Reasons for parents' choice of middle-class school**

The school's location and its teachers were the two most popular reasons for the choice of the middle-class school. Teachers were described as 'dedicated' (Z52), and 'excellent' (Z117) and it was stated that their...

*'Teaching methods are as good as those of the leading private school in the area.'* (Z81)

Of equal importance was the popularity and reputation of the school; as, similar to the parents at the working-class school, many families had long-term relationships with the school. This promoted the notion that the school created a caring and nurturing atmosphere.

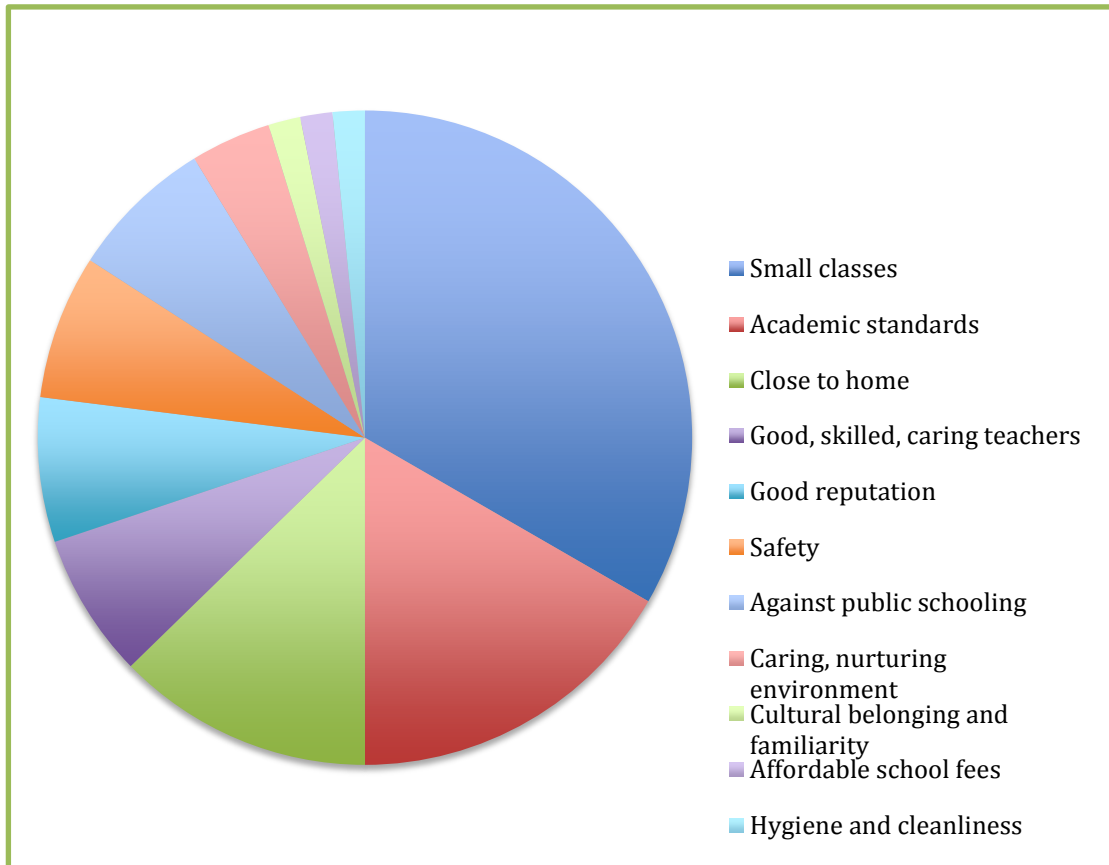
*'We loved the family orientated feeling of the school, everyone was extremely friendly.'* (Z11)

The following three reasons were not cited by the parents at the working-class school but are obviously important to those at the middle-class school. These are the sporting activities offered by the school; recognition of the good work of the principal; and small classes.

Few families, who chose this school as a result of relocation, did so due to good reviews of the school (Z8).

Of less importance, but nonetheless significant, by virtue of their being mentioned are the last five reasons why parents chose this school. Firstly, the school is multicultural and one parent felt that it is important that her child be exposed to cultural differences. Secondly, the principal of this school conducts interviews with parents and children that apply to the school; and one parent was happy with the interview, citing it as his reason for the choice of school. Thirdly, aftercare facilities were mentioned, as this is an important resource for working parents. Fourth, in terms of the process of teaching and learning, a parent was happy that there were few interruptions. Finally, the importance of the religious orientation of the school was mentioned.

### 1.3.3. Private school



*Fig 5: Reasons for parents' choice of private school*

The parents who chose the private school for their child did so chiefly because of the small classes and the individual attention their child would receive from teachers.

*'So that he could receive individual attention, in turn benefit the maximum from the education system from a young age.'* (Y45)

Next in importance was the academic standards offered by the school and the proximity of the school to home and en route to work.

The following four factors were rated of equal importance: Good teachers; the good reputation of the school; the safe environment; and the fact that it is not a public school.

*'The quality of education in public schools has declined drastically. For safety reasons. Public schools are no longer safe.'* (Y2)

The caring environment created by the teachers was of significance to the parents as well as the fact that their children were amongst others of a similar culture.

*'Predominantly Indian children (for cultural purposes).'* (Y9)

The parents that decided that the school fees here were affordable did so in the context of the school being affordable as a private school. Finally, a unique reason for the choice of this school is the hygiene and cleanliness of the school, when compared to public schools.

*"Hygiene factors and comfort levels also outweighs public schools.'* (Y17)

#### **1.4. School choice information gathering**

Most of the parents in the three schools chose their schools while becoming familiar with it via community networks, including friends, family and neighbours; by living close to the school; and through the reputation of the school gleaned from the community and the media. For the working-class parents, the fact that the school had teachers that could teach English was a big advantage. The middle-class school was chosen based on recommendations by independent pre-schools and education businesses; the internet; and attending school meetings. For the parents that chose the private school, the fact that it was the only private school in the area was the biggest selling point, as these parents consciously set out to choose private schooling.

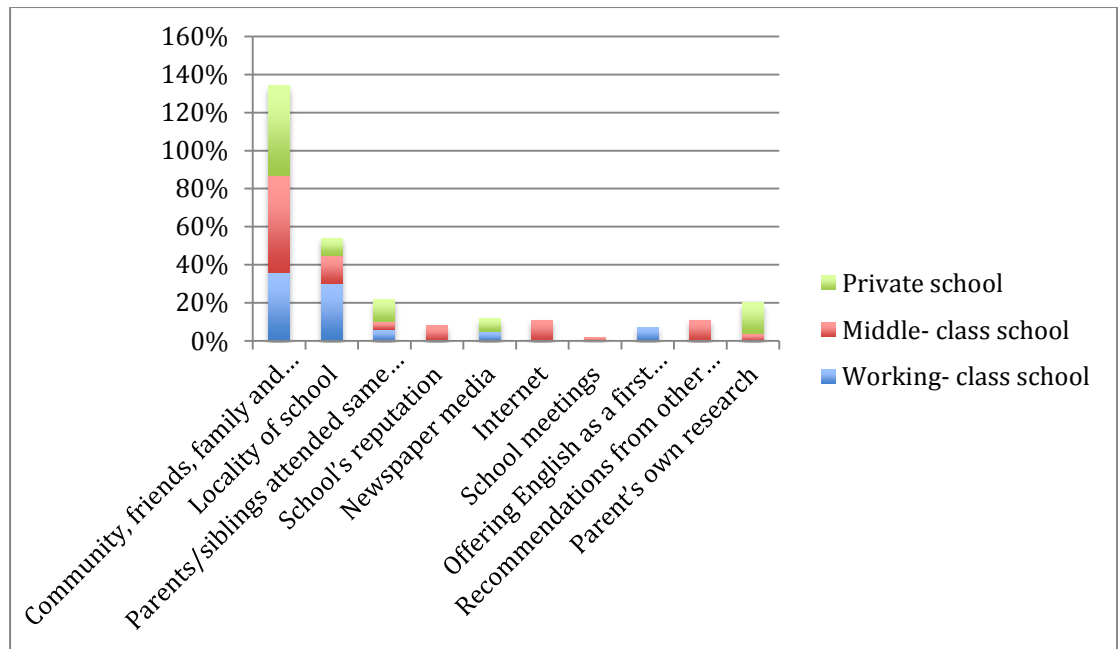


Fig 6: Parents' networking that influenced school choice

### 1.5. The link

The quantitative analysis uncovered several issues relating to parents' choice of school in the South African context. Emerging from their own schooling experiences to make decisions on schools for their children while having expectations that their future hopes and dreams will be realised through their education choices, illustrates the veritable playing field of school choice. However, as quantitative analysis paints a general picture and more specific analysis can be gleaned from the qualitative case studies, what, at this stage, emerged as issues that required more in-depth examination? As a bridging medium between the two phases of this study, the following section discusses intergenerational ideals of schooling; political changes and schooling; parents' biographical construction; quality and schooling; reasons for school choice; and networking, that were used to guide further exploration in the following phase of data collection and analysis.

#### 1.5.1. Intergenerational ideals of schooling

The parents in the quantitative sample held different ideas on the importance of education. Whilst some felt that traditional duties should take precedence over education; others recognised the importance of education for their families. Most

parents referred to their own lack of educational achievements or opportunities to motivate for or against the importance of education. Where parents had educational leverage, they placed greater demands on their children to succeed. This suggests that families with educationally rich environments want their children to further their achievements. The previous generation thus set the stage in emphasising the importance of schooling. An area for further exploration would be how the specific biographical and educational backgrounds of parents influence the way they choose schools for their children.

### **1.5.2. Political changes and schooling**

The sample of parents that participated in the survey has lived through political change in South Africa. Whilst most schooled under apartheid in separate education systems and types of schools; they now view a new order of education from the outside, not having had actual experience of schooling in the new, democratic South Africa. How has their schooling experiences under apartheid influenced the factors they seek in post-apartheid schooling for their children? How have they embraced societal and educational changes? Their evaluation of political change and schooling is a window through which we could view and evaluate the process of democracy in a changing society.

### **1.5.3. Age of parents and children's schooling**

Whilst all the age groups chose the middle-class and private school in the sample for their children; an alarmingly high number of parents that chose the working-class school are in the 20-30years age group. This group of young parents has minimal occupational and academic achievements and young children. What are their expectations and hopes of the education system? Do they have the same dreams and expectations as middle-class parents? Knowing that a large number of the working-class are raising their children in a low socio-economic context, do they see the education system furthering their aspirations through their children? This young generation of the working-class will have contact with the school through their children and schools can play a role in effecting positive changes to their existing lifestyles. How then does the school view the working-class parent and what role does the working-class school play in effecting change for such a parent?



#### **1.5.4. Quality of schooling**

It has been questioned whether parents have the ability to identify quality education and schooling (Bosetti, 2004). The survey suggested that parents equate the good quality of education that they received as learners to decent learning experiences; subject variation and specialisation; and an uncomplicated curriculum. Whilst they are aware of changes in the education system, they regard these as advanced, improved, complicated, and demanding. How do parents evaluate schooling and the curriculum through the lens of their children and the school? Does their interaction with schooling for their children provide them with a medium to measure the quality of schooling in the present?

#### **1.5.5. Reasons for school choice**

The majority of the working-and middle-class parents, who chose public and Model C schools, cited the fact that they are close to home and good teachers as the major reasons for their school choice. The middle-class parents who chose the private school preferred the school for the small classes and high academic standards. As this study proceeded, it was interesting to determine whether the parents who chose private schooling evaluated the academic standards of the school as their children continued to engage with the school. What are the levels of satisfaction among the parents who have chosen private schooling? Have their expectations been met?

#### **1.5.6. Networking**

The dominant networking system for all groups of parents in the survey was their immediate relationships with family, friends, colleagues and the community. This indicates that schools are chosen due to their reputation. Further exploratory issues with regard to schooling and reputation would be to determine whether schools' performance is consistent with their reputational image or whether this depends on personal experiences after the choice has been made; and whether parent's expectations, which are built through networking initiatives, are being met.

### **1.6. Synthesis**

This document serves as a link between the two phases of the research study. It explored pertinent issues that, having emerged from the quantitative analysis, uncovered further questions that required probing. These issues, of intergenerational needs and aspirations; the effect of post-apartheid schooling on parents; the relationships that abound with schooling, and the agency of the parent in choosing schools, speak to that fact that school choice means more than merely choosing a school.

## Appendix (xv): Editor's Note

