PARENTAL CHOICE IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGH SCHOOLS – AN URBAN CAPE TOWN CASE STUDY.

by

Sedick du Toit

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape.

Supervisor: Professor H.D. Herman

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how families judge and choose high schools. A review of the literature relating to school choice provides a theoretical framework for the study. The review includes an international perspective including both developed countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, England and Wales, the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden, and developing countries including India, Chile, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritania, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa.

The context within which school choice occurs in South Africa is examined. This context includes continued influence of Apartheid policies and current legislation including the South African Schools Act, the Admission Policy for Ordinary Schools Act and the Norms and Standards for School Funding.

The literature review includes a critical analysis of the research, both local and international, which addresses questions as to which factors are considered when judging and choosing schools, who makes the choice of school, when the choice of school is made and which sources of information inform the choice of school.

The empirical study examines the process of high school choice in urban Cape Town. The Group Areas Act and other Apartheid policies have created a situation where the respondents have a large number high schools from which to choose The selected area reflects diversity in socio-economic status, including both privately owned homes and council rental flats and houses.

The study is limited to English medium or dual medium schools in the area. It includes both co-ed and single gender schools. The study deals only with choice of public schools.

The study examines the decision-making process of families with children in Grade 7 and who are in the process of choosing and applying to high schools. Questionnaires and interviews are used to gather data from families to address the core issues identified.

In most of the cases there was a search for information regarding the schools in the area. The choice of school was the result of the interaction between parents and the child rather than a decision made only by the parents.

An analysis of the components and functioning of the educational market leads to the conclusion that while competition and market-based reforms may have benefits for schools that have reached a level of adequacy, schools that have not reached such levels are unlikely to have the resources or capacity to respond to competitive pressures.

KEY WORDS
SCHOOL CHOICE; PARENTAL CHOICE; EDUCATIONAL EQUITY; MARKET
BASED REFORMS; QUASI-MARKETS; PUPIL MIGRATION
MARKETISATION; PRIMARY TO HIGH SCHOOL
EDUCATIONAL MARKETS;

DECLARATION

I declare that *Parental Choice in South African High Schools – An Urban Cape Town Case Study* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Sedick du Toit   March 2008

Signed.......................................

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

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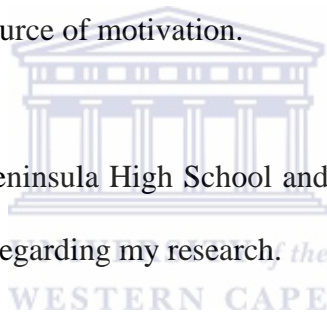
I also wish to express my appreciation to the principals at the schools involved in the study. Not only did you allow access to your schools, but your genuine interest and willingness to discuss, sometimes difficult issues, provided important insight into the issue of school choice.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Nazlie and sons, Daanyaal and Dahraan for the loving environment and understanding that they have provided during the time that it has taken to complete this thesis.
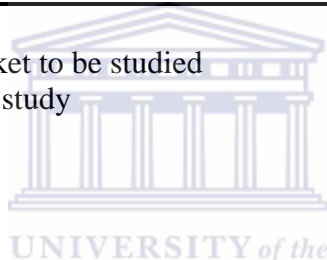
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Tables and Figures

1.1 General background to the problem

1.1.1 School Choice

School choice is one of the most controversial and widely discussed topics in educational reform. School choice programmes have be instituted in both developed countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, England and Wales, the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden, and developing countries including India, Chile, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritania, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa. While school choice programmes can take many forms such as a choice between private and public schools, between public schools, charter schools, magnet schools, vouchers and home schooling, the central issue involves the ability of families to choose which schools to send their children to rather than relying on more traditional methods of allocating children to schools, usually based on demarcated feeder areas (neighbourhood schools).
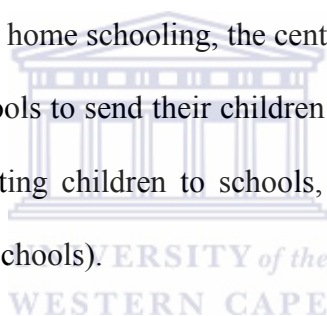
The proponents of school choice and the associated marketisation of education believe that increased competition between schools for learners and resources will result in increased educational quality at school, district and national levels. They believe that an increased role for market forces will result in higher levels of teacher, parental and learner involvement and satisfaction, higher levels of academic performance, that choice will have a positive impact on the ordinary public school system and that the inefficiencies of the current educational system, which is seen as being bureaucratic and wasteful, will be eliminated (Hurlbert, 1996; Ellig, 1996). They also believe that innovation will be encouraged. There is also the argument that choice, in itself, is a desirable component of any democratic society.

The opponents of school choice and an increased role for competition emphasize concerns about the quality of education provided to those children left behind in schools that are not popular and have student populations that are declining. They argue that there is a 'creaming off' of academically strong learners and that families who choose schools other than the nearest, 'neighbourhood' school are those who have the resources to access information and to transport their children to their chosen school. They also have the financial resources to pay higher levels of school fees and are more likely to be able to contribute to the chosen school in terms of time, skills and money thus increasing the organisational success of these already popular schools. They also express concerns about increased social stratification. Willms (1997), for example, found that in Scotland 'segregation between schools along social class lines increased substantially during the period when choice reform was proceeding'.
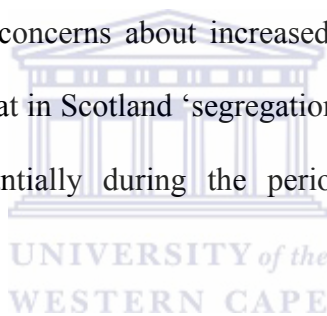
Much of the literature and evidence relating to school choice is contradictory at times supporting the benefits envisaged by those who favour increased school choice yet at other times seeming to confirm the concerns raised by its opponents.

1.1.2 School Choice in South Africa

(a) Introduction

Policies cannot be implemented without taking the context into account. As Tikly & Mabogoane (1996, 3) state much of the debate and empirical evidence relating to school choice is located within a First World context. The School Choice debate needs to be expanded to include the social and economic dynamics, not only of

Developing Countries, but the unique circumstances surrounding African society and particularly South African society.

The current situation in Africa regarding the development of the private school sector and school choice has followed a similar route in most African countries. In the initial period after independence private schools were often nationalised. Subsequently excess demand and the structural adjustment programmes 'recommended' by the IMF, the Word Bank and other foreign donors led to a reassessment by governments and enormous development of private schools mainly in the form of spontaneous and low-cost profit-making schools. This development will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 2.

Kitaev (1999, 101) states the school choice is a normal requirement for the development and finance of private education but that the presence of the private school sector does not guarantee choice as private schools often supplement the public school system rather than complementing it. Often where there is no public school in an area, spontaneous or low cost profit-making schools are established.

There is no doubt that any discussion of education in South Africa needs to take cognisance of the impact of the Apartheid system. A vast majority of the South African population has been denied basic human rights under the Apartheid regime. These rights have fallen into the political, social, economic and educational spheres. The right to quality education was seen as key to the anti-Apartheid struggle. With the democratisation of South African society the demand for quality education for all South African citizens remains a focal point.

The demand for quality education has been taken into account by enshrining the right to education in the Constitution of South Africa (1996) where it is stated that every person has the right to education. The state has recognised that it has a continuing obligation, in terms of the Constitution, to take 'purposeful and effective action to achieve the satisfaction of this right'. The right to education coupled to the other provisions of the Constitution not only guarantees education but an equal education free of discrimination.

This right to an equal education must be seen in the light of the impact of its Apartheid past on the South African educational system. Financial and material resources were allocated on a grossly unfair racial basis. Per capita allocations were based on the racial classification of learners. Similarly capital expenditure on school buildings and facilities also showed marked imbalances. These differences and imbalances have been well documented (see McGregor & McGregor, 1992:22).

The issued of educational quality is a complex one. In the South African context it is not, as is the case of the United States, that minority groups that have been denied access to quality education, rather it is the majority of the population. There the capacity to provide quality education in well-resourced and maintained schools is severely limited as these schools provided educational opportunities to the ruling class. The option of expanding these schools and employing admissions policies to allow access to families that did not have access under the Apartheid system is likely to have very little impact, and indeed very little relevance to the vast majority of South Africans. Other solutions will need to be found.
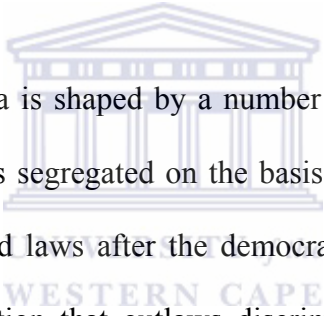
The Apartheid system applied a functional approach and was conservative in nature. The ideal of 'white superiority' manifested itself in the way in which the education system was run. Schooling was used to prepare the different race groups[1] for their differing roles in society. Linked to a system of 'job reservation' it precluded any form of upward social mobility. The educational system was specifically designed to reproduce and reinforce the social and economic divisions that existed in Apartheid South Africa. It is against this background that one must address the issue of educational equality in South Africa.

The democratisation of South African society has brought about a re-evaluation and rejection of the functional concept of educational equality. The liberal view argues that educational equality should be in the form of equality of opportunity. Supporters of this view argue that educational systems should be designed to remove external barriers of an economic, social, geographical and racial nature so that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds can have equal educational opportunities. This is usually expressed in terms of opportunity of access. Furthermore opportunity of access can refer both to access to the school system as a whole, as well as, access to particular schools with in the system. Liberals also argue that all learners should have access to quality education and it is their contention that those who do not take advantage of these opportunities only have themselves to blame. Those who do avail themselves of the educational opportunities gain social mobility.

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[1] As identified by the Apartheid system.

The liberal view is however limited in terms of educational realities. Educational equality cannot be defined only in terms of equality of access. While equality of access can be deemed to be a requirement for educational equality, there are other requirements. To achieve educational equality we must move beyond the simplistic and convenient liberal view of equality of access. If school enrolments reflect the demographics of the country in terms of race[2], social status and gender then retention rates, cognitive learning and academic achievement must also reflect these demographics. Similarly if these aims can be achieved the resultant social mobility should result in more demographically representative choices of occupations and appointment to high status jobs.

School choice in South Africa is shaped by a number of factors. Firstly the Group Areas Act created urban areas segregated on the basis of race and income. Despite the repealing of the Apartheid laws after the democratic elections of 1994 and the implementation of a constitution that outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, religion or culture, the economic inequalities that still exist today mean that many residential areas have maintained their racial character of the Apartheid years.

The Schools Act is based on the premise of neighbourhood schools. National and Provincial legislation demarcates feeder areas for schools. Schools should then give preference to those children whose parents live or work in the surrounding area (Department of Education 1998a). Public schools must thus be open to all children in

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[2] It is both clear and unfortunate that any discussion of educational equality will need to use terms such as 'white', 'coloured' and 'black'. These classifications are included to illustrate the imbalances that existed in educational provision under the Apartheid system and continue to impact on education attainment today. Their use in no way implies an acceptance of the ideological content of these terms by the researcher.

the local area. Parents are not, however, compelled, to enrol their children in the nearest public school. The impact of this on school choice is two-fold. In the first instance, well-resourced and successful schools are mainly located in formally 'white' areas (however there are some under-resourced, historically disadvantaged schools have also achieved excellence.) Thus children of parents who can afford to live in these affluent areas have first choice in attending these schools. A second consequence, identified by Hofmeyr (2000), is the emergence of 'unusual pupil migration patterns'. Pupils are travelling long distances at great cost in terms of time and money to attend their schools of choice.

(b) School fees, the cost of schooling and income

It can be argued that racial stratification with regards to school choice is being replaced by social stratification. Rather than creating equity, school choice, as it exists in South Africa, may be widening the gap between the rich and the poor. In the Cape Peninsula the income gap between whites and blacks is widening. Whites in this area earn four times more that Blacks. The average incomes are as follows:

Whites -Rl70 449,
Blacks -R35 967 and
Coloureds -R74 775   *(source: Cape Argus 2002).*

This highly unequal distribution of income must be linked to the costs of schooling as it impacts on the issue of school choice.

Public schools are allowed to charge fees and there is a set procedure whereby the majority of parents democratically determine the extent of school fees (Department of Education: 1998b). There is a large difference in the school fees charged by different (public) schools ranging from R100 to more than R15 000 per annum. School fees,

however, are not the only costs associated with 'free and compulsory' education. There are also travelling costs, textbooks, stationery and school uniforms. These higher fees mean better facilities, smaller classes and additional teaching aids. Many schools employ additional teachers in 'Governing Body' posts i.e. the salaries of these teachers are paid for by the school rather than by the Provincial Education Department.

The entire issue of schools fees is a highly contentious one. The ERP (Education Rights Project) is, in fact, questioning whether the charging of school fees is not contrary to the provisions of the Constitution. The Department of Education has introduced the concept of 'no fee schools'. The impact of this development on school choice will be examined later.
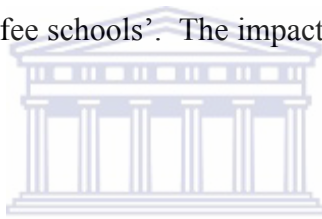
Unequal allocation of resources

The South African Schools Act (1996) makes provision for only two types of school namely public schools and private schools. Yet ex-Model C[3] schools are perceived as a class on their own due, perhaps, to historical advantages that these schools enjoy in terms of resources. While the Education Department has implemented a funding system which allocates additional funding to poorer schools (National Norms and Standards for School Funding) it is unlikely that these funds will enable the targeted schools to reach the levels of resources (both physical and human) enjoyed by those schools which received preferential treatment under the Apartheid system. Thus differences in facilities will remain to be an issue when considering choice of schools.

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[3] Model C schools are formally 'white' state schools that converted to state aided schools. From April 1992 96% of white state schools became model C schools and their fixed property and equipment was given by the state to the governing body of each school. These schools are therefore well resourced. In terms of the SA Schools Act only two type of schools exist namely Public Schools and Private Schools.

1.2 The specific problem to be studied

This research proposes to determine how parents judge and choose high schools. To be able to do this one can identify a number of sub-questions which need to be addressed. These questions are

1. What is school choice?

2. What are the societal forces impacting upon school choice?

3. What is the context within which school choice occurs in South Africa?

4. Which factors are considered when choosing schools?

5. Who makes the choice of secondary school?

6. When is the choice made?

7. Which sources of information are used inform the choice of high school?

8. What process is involved in choosing schools?
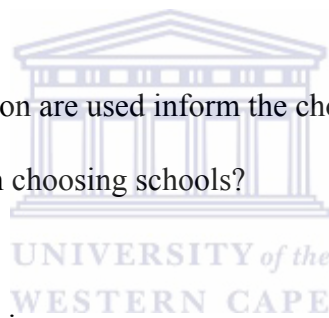
1.3 The significance of the topic

One must also unpack the implications of school choice for the various role-players i.e. parents, learners, schools and the educational system as a whole.

1.3.1 Parents

Parents have strong feelings about their child's entry into high school. Johnstone (2002: 7) indicates that parents also experience anxieties regarding the transition to high school. This further contributes to the anxiety that the child experiences. An understanding of the process of school choice, of how others evaluate factors, which sources they use and how they deal with the stress relating to school choice could help to reduce anxiety in parents.

Holloway (2001) cites a National Centre of Educational Statistics survey which found that parents who chose their children's schools were more likely to be satisfied with their school than the parents of children who were assigned to schools using traditional feeder area methods. This positive attitude could make parents more receptive to the educational programmes offered by the school by encouraging their children to participate in these programmes and supporting the ethos of the school.

In many cases exercising school choice involves a large amount of money. In addition to school fees there are costs involved in transport, school uniforms, text books and stationery. Parents will have to consider very carefully which school to send their children to. Perceived benefits relating to academic performance, quality of teaching and availability of educational, sporting and cultural facilities need to be weighed against higher costs of schools which render these benefits.
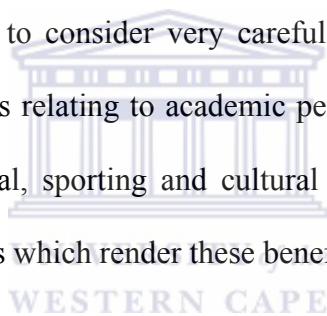
Many parents work with the result that pupils are spending increasing amounts of time away from their parents. The time spent at school therefore becomes increasingly important. The school is not only providing 'academic' education but also is seen as a socialising agent that promotes certain norms and values. Parents will choose schools that promote values which they share.

Parents are more likely to be actively involved in school affairs if they choose the schools that their children are to attend. They are more likely to make serve on, and to make a positive contribution to, for example, School Governing Bodies.

1.3.2 Learners

Pillay (1994: 19) concludes that the quality of the matric[4] pass, as indicated by the aggregate symbol, affects the subsequent earnings of the pupil. Van der Berg (2002,1) reaches similar conclusions. Because they have chosen the school they are more likely to be actively involved in the various activities at the school. Herman (1995) states that access to higher education is often dependent on achievement in the matriculation examination. In the South African context this means passing the matriculation examination and obtaining a matriculation exemption certificate. In addition to this exemption many institutions require certain levels of achievement in designated subjects e.g. 40 per cent for Mathematics Higher Grade or achieving a number of 'points' allocated to levels of achievement in various subjects (in the matriculation examination). The choice of school will thus play a role in both later earnings and access to higher education.
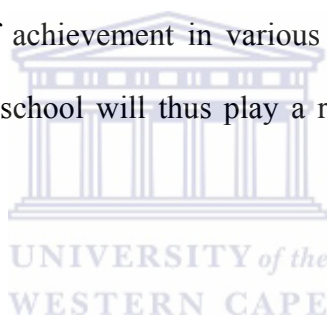
The transition from primary to high school is traumatic (Johnstone 2002). Pupils suffer from feelings of uncertainty. They leave a familiar environment where they have usually spent seven years (Grades 1 to 7) and would have to adapt to the social and organisation structure of a new high school. Furthermore at the primary school they were the seniors and this would have generated a certain degree of confidence, whereas at the high school they would be the youngest. The process of choosing a high school should take into account this uncertainty. Where the level of uncertainty can be reduced it would mean that the pupil would fit in more readily and would this could contribute to higher levels of achievement.

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[4] The school leaving exam

Pupils show higher levels of satisfaction where there is school choice. This could lead to increased levels of motivation. Pupils will have sense of pride and a sense of belonging. This could lead to better self-image and, in the long term, higher levels of goal attainment.

1.3.3 Schools

An understanding of how parents choose schools for their children has many implications for schools. While funding is not solely depended on pupil enrolment, socio-economic status also plays a major role, schools with larger enrolments receive more funds. A drop in the roll of the school means a reduction in funding. Thus it is in the interest of the school to understand the process of school choice so that

i.   the necessary information can be communicated to parents of prospective pupils and

ii. changes, where possible, can be made to make the school more attractive to these parents.

Hanushek & Rivkin (2002) suggest that, while there results are not conclusive, 'competition raises teacher quality and improves the overall quality of education'. Concerns also need to be raised concerning the motivation of pupils and staff who remain at schools with declining rolls. This may serve to increase the process of social stratification.

1.4 The Research approach

1.4.1 Schools to be studied

The primary and high schools in the Wynberg / Plumstead / Parkwood area will be studied. This area offers a unique opportunity to study school choice. The 'border' between the previously 'white' and previously 'coloured' areas is simply a road.

Under the Apartheid system the white residential area extended to the one side of the road and the 'coloured' residential area from the other side of the road. To cater for the different 'races' the Apartheid Government built a large number of schools, both primary and high schools, in close proximity. Due to the policy of Group Areas a large number of primary (12) and secondary schools (13) are accessible to residents of this area. This area also reflects diversity in socio-economic status, including both privately owned homes and council rental flats and houses.

The study will be limited to the English-medium or dual medium primary and secondary schools in the area. The schools studied will include both the co-ed and single gender schools. The study will only deal with public schools private schools will be excluded as only 2% of the pupils in South Africa attend private schools (Hofmeyr: 2000,9). A number of the primary schools and one of the high schools in the selected area have a particular religious character. As these schools are classified as public schools they will be included in the study.

1.4.2 Data collection methods

The study will focus on the parents of pupils at primary schools who are in the process of selecting and judging high schools (Grade 7) rather than focusing on the

parents who have already made the choice and whose children are at high school (Grade 8).

Three instruments will be used namely:

1.4.2.1. Initial Interviews:

Purpose: To confirm and refine the frameworks for addressing the research questions namely:

1. Which factors are considered when choosing schools?
2. Who makes the choice of high school?
3. When is the choice made?
4. Which sources of information inform the choice of high school?
5. What process is involved in choosing schools?

The data collected will also assist in the development of the questionnaire and questions for the follow-up interviews.
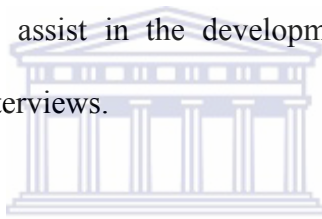
Procedure: Semi-structured interviews are to be used, as the purpose of these interviews is exploratory. The interviews are to be recorded on audio tape.

Selection of respondents:

Purposive sampling will be used for the initial interviews. As the purpose of the initial interviews is to get as many different viewpoints as possible, this sampling strategy is deemed suitable (Mouly 1970: 190). Twenty such interviews are planned.

Respondents will be selected to provide variety in the areas of gender, socio-economic status (as indicated by job and residential area), family structure (single parent or dual parent), educational level, home language and public school which the child attends.

Method of Analysis:

The purpose of the initial interview is to assist in the construction of the questionnaire. Interview responses will be checked against a preliminary questionnaire. This preliminary questionnaire will be constructed using data obtained from the literature review. Where necessary, additions and refinements will be made.

1.4.2.2. Questionnaire:

Purpose: To collect data relevant to the central questions posed in the study.

Structure: The questionnaire will consist of four parts namely:

(i) a biographical data sheet,

(ii) a rating section where respondents rate the importance of various factors that are considered when judging and choosing schools and the sources of information they used in the decision making process, respondents will rate factors and sources as being of no, little, some, much or great importance,

(iii) A section relating to who makes the decision and when the decision is made (here the respondents will have to choose between various alternatives),

(iv) A ranking of schools in order of preference.

Procedure:

Sealed and addressed questionnaires were sent to the selected parents. An envelope was included so that parents could seal the completed questionnaires. Parents are to complete the questionnaires at home. The completed questionnaires are to be returned by the students to the school, where they would be collected by the researcher. Where necessary a follow-up letter and a second copy of the questionnaire will be sent to the parents.

Selection of respondents:

The parents of a total of fifty-five (55) Grade 7 pupils at each of the primary schools will be randomly selected. Where there are fewer than fifty-five pupils the full complement of Grade 7 parents will complete the questionnaire. This will give a total of approximately 350 respondents.

Method of Analysis:

Due to the large amount of data the analysis of the questionnaire responses will be captured and processed by computer. Frequency tables are to be generated for the rating section. A factor or source would be considered to be of great importance if fifty percent or more of the respondents rated it as being of great importance. A factor or source would be considered to be of much importance if fifty percent or more of the respondents rated it as being of much or of great importance.
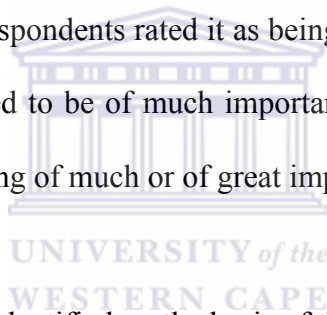
Differences between groups, identified on the basis of the biographical data, would be analysed by means of cross-tabulations including chi-square.

1.4.2.3. Follow-up interviews:

The purpose of the follow up interviews is to ascertain why parents rated factors and sources as they did. These interviews are aimed at providing depth to the data, to investigate how the factors fit together and to focus on how the process of school choice occurs.

Procedure:

These interviews would be of a more structured nature. Trends, anomalies and explanations flowing from the analysis of the questionnaire data will be investigated. These interviews will take place at the homes of the parents. Where necessary a second interview may be considered to clarify issues which had arisen in the first follow-up interview. These interviews will, with the permission of the parents, be recorded on audio-tape and transcribed. The analysis of this data will be more vigorous than was the case with the initial interviews as the purpose of the interviews was different. The initial interview aimed at identifying and confirming factors whereas the follow-up interviews aimed at gaining an understanding of why factors and sources were considered important. These interview are thus of a more explanatory nature.
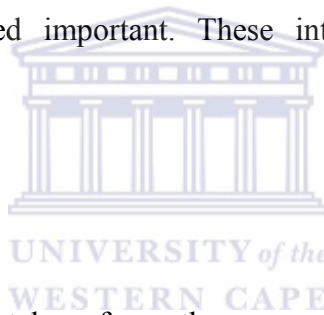
Selection of respondents:

A random sample will be taken from the respondents who indicated (in the questionnaire) that they were willing to be interviewed. Each questionnaire will be allocated a number on receipt. These numbers, in conjunction with a table of random numbers, will be used to select the sample.

Permission to conduct the study:

Firstly permission must be obtained from the Education Department. Once this permission has been granted, the individual schools will be approached, both in writing and by means of a personal visit, to negotiate access and participation.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is School Choice?

Choice, at its most basic level, can be described as any student assignment policy that allows parents and children to participate in the selection of a school (Cookson & Shroff 1997, 4). It is important to note that the concepts 'choice' and 'choosing' refer to the expression of a preference by parents and does not necessarily mean that these choices will be granted. West *et al* (1997), in fact, pose the question, 'Who's doing the choosing – parents or schools?' and reach the conclusion that often it is the schools who do the choosing. Hoadley (1998), Fiske & Ladd (2000) and Boyd & Lugg (1998) have reached similar conclusions. Hughes & Lauder (2002) state that as those parents who have the resources choose 'popular schools', parents implement admissions policies thus assuming the power of 'choice'. They further conclude that this leaves working-class parents with little real choice. Choice programmes are offered as an alternative to more traditional methods of allocating students to schools. These traditional methods are usually based on the concept of catchment areas or neighbourhood schools. School choice programmes are closely linked to increased competition between schools and a greater role played by the market. Choice can broadly be measured by the ability of a parent to choose their child's school, and the diversity of suppliers they can choose from (Guerin 1997, 19).

School choice while simple in its conception, is a highly debated and controversial issue. School choice at its most basic level involves parents choosing which schools to send their children to rather than being allocated to a particular school by more traditional methods. Yet from the initial focus on the right of the parent to choose has evolved a reform movement who claim that through choice, the resulting competition

and an evolution of educational markets that more closely resemble commodity markets, system-wide improvement of the educational system will occur.

School choice, both as a right allocated to parents and as a reform movement, occurs in many countries, yet the results of school choice remain unclear and in some cases contradictory.

That choice already exists in most educational systems is an undeniable fact, the question is whether the extent of choice and the associated role of competition and market forces should be increased. By examining the international experience with school choice one can begin to determine the impact of increased school choice and the greater role of competition on the quality of education offered by schools and the quality of the education system as a whole.
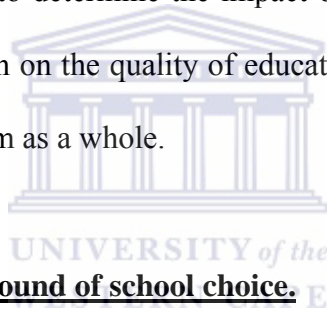
2.1.1 The theoretical background of school choice.

The rationale surrounding increased school choice rests on two broad groups of arguments namely those based primarily on democratic principles and those based on educational principles.

Firstly the proponents of school choice argue that choice is an integral part of any democracy and that just as people are free to choose consumer goods and the services of doctors and lawyers, they should be free to choose which school their children attend. They argue that choice itself is a desirable outcome.

The second group of arguments is more firmly seated in the educational domain. It is claimed that expanded school choice is a vehicle for educational equity, that it gives

parents in the lower income groups the same opportunity to choose as parents in the higher income groups. They also argue that even where there is no school choice programme some parents already enjoy choice (Viadero 1995, 2; Boyd & Lugg 1998, 4) and that school choice will give all parents the same opportunity to choose. Fitz & Gorard (2000, 3) state that '… choice advocates claimed that the right to choose "good" schools has been extended to those families previously denied them by the zoning effects of admission policies based on "neighbourhoods" or catchment areas.' The proponents of increased school choice claim that by encouraging a competitive market the overall quality in the educational system will improve.

The theoretical basis for school choice, as a school reform movement in the United States, can be traced back to the work of Nobel Laureate economist Milton Friedman. In the 1950s and 1960s Friedman asserted that the problems besetting public schools in the United States arose from the fact that they were 'public monopolies'. He proposed that the financing of education should be separated from the administration of schools. Families could be provided with vouchers financed by public funds to use at schools of their choice. He argued that such a system would promote competition among schools, in that they would compete for students, and that this would result in improved quality, lower costs and a 'more dynamic education system' (Kane 2003, 57).

Henig (1994) lists the following characteristics of 'public monopolies' as identified by the proponents of school choice:

- Most consumers are unable to switch products or schools. The high cost of private schools means few consumers have an alternative to public education.
- There is little incentive to keep costs low.
- There is little incentive to improve quality.
- There is little incentive to be innovative.
- It is economically *irrational* for them to improve the product.
- Educational consumers cannot 'exit' the market and thus the monopoly. They do not have the option of not buying the product as the 'price' which is paid for the 'product' mainly consists of taxes.
- The relationship between the price paid and the service received is unclear as, it is difficult to determine how much an individual consumer pays for the service they receive.
- Public monopolies gain an 'air of legitimacy' because of their association with democratic processes and allegiance to the common good.

Initially there was little support for Friedman's ideas (Molnar 1996, 2). The first attempts to introduce private school choice plans in the 1960s did not focus on the benefits that competition and a more market orientated system would bring to education but were, in fact, proposed by Southern conservatives 'as a means of thwarting court-ordered desegregation efforts' (Viadero 1995, 2). The implication of vouchers is that parents could use public funds, in the form of the voucher, to finance the private (fee paying) school sector. It was not until the 1980s that the role of competition and the market enjoyed greater support. 'School Choice' reappeared in a number of forms. It was no longer simply a choice between public and private schools but also choices between public schools. As Molnar (1996, 3) states, 'Suddenly "choice" was transformed into a strategy to reform rather than to dismantle the public school system'. States passed laws which allowed 'students to choose to attend any public school in the state *that had room for them*', (the emphasis is mine), this is a key issue to which I will return.

When the Education Reform Act was enacted in Britain in 1988, school choice gained 'further political and international visibility' (Boyd & Lugg 1998, 8). This Act was based on five premises which capture the logic of the supporters of increased school choice, namely:

- Parents had the fundamental right to determine all matters regarding their children.
- Parents were better judges of their children's needs than a bureaucracy.
- Choice would increase parental involvement and, in turn, the child's motivation.
- Competition between schools would lead to better performing schools.
- Competition would lead to schools becoming more 'consumer responsive'.

For a school choice system to be effective Gintis (1996) identifies a number of conditions namely:
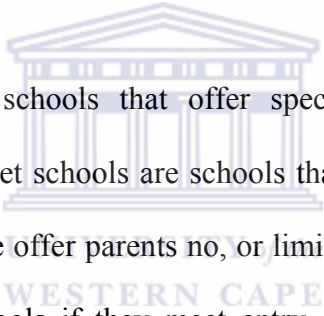
- Competition will be effective only if there are several alternative suppliers available to a significant percentage of consumers.
- Competition will be effective only if consumers can accurately determine the quality of the educational services they are purchasing.
- Competition will be effective only if consumers are aware of their needs and that these needs are reflected in the preferences and choices.
- A competitive system is 'socially efficient' only if the goods (or services) supplied is a private good i.e. that the positive and negative consequences of their choices impact solely on the consumers.

These conditions will best be attained when the state has strong policy regulating school choice to encourage competition between schools.

2.1.2 Forms of School Choice

Friedman's original conception was to introduce a more market-orientated system in education by means of a publicly funded voucher system. Other school choice alternatives were also developed which also supported the idea of increasing the role of market forces in the educational system and making schools 'accountable to the market'(Holmes 2001, 4).

The extent of school choice plans may be described as being intradistrict (more common) where parental choice is limited to schools within a specific educational district or interdistrict where choice is extended beyond the boundaries of a particular school district. School choice programmes may also be described as being intrasectional i.e. limited to a choice between schools in the public school sector or intersectional which includes both the private and public school sectors. Where choice plans partially restrict the choices of parents, controlled choice exists. These restrictions are often implemented 'so as to achieve socio-economic, gender balance between the schools' (Cookson & Shroff 1997, 5). Where there are few restrictions the policy is termed 'open enrolment'.

Magnet schools are public schools that offer specialised programmes such as technology or the arts. Magnet schools are schools that offer specialist programmes within a district that otherwise offer parents no, or limited, choice over schools. Any child may enrol in such schools if they meet entry criteria that are not based on geographical location. They supply highly specialised programmes (Guerin 1997, 23). They are designed to attract students to previously unpopular areas or schools and are often used to create racial balance (Cookson & Shroff 1997, 5).

Charter schools are publicly funded autonomous schools (Cookson & Shroff 1997, 5; Holloway 2000, 1; Hepburn 1999, section 3, page 2). They are not subject to many of the regulations which apply to ordinary (traditional) public schools. In exchange for the reduction of regulations, charter schools have a 'greater accountability for student performance' (Holloway 2000, 2). Charters are granted to these schools to provide a clearly defined educational programme. These charter schools cannot charge tuition

fees and their charters are subject to periodic review and renewal. They may be closed if they do not attract sufficient students or do not achieve the goals set out in their charter. Charter schools thus involve the establishment of new schools. Charter schools are publicly funded, non-profit schools that can be established by a charter between sponsoring groups and the local governmental authority. Their establishment costs are often paid for by the parents or community group behind the school, and they must meet strict educational and management standards (Geurin 1997, 23).

Voucher plans signify a method of allowing poorer families to attend existing schools which charge fees. Vouchers represent a funding system whereby funding follows the student and the level of funding which schools receive is dependent on the size of the enrolment. Vouchers may be either privately or publicly funded and have a fixed value and are redeemed when the students enrol at the school. The term 'voucher' is thought by some to have negative connotations and has been sometimes, particularly in the United States, referred to by the term 'educational scholarships'. Hepburn (1999, section 2, 5) Schneider *et al* (2000, 8) consider vouchers to be the most 'market-like' of the school choice reforms.

Charters, magnets and vouchers represent the most common forms of school choice programmes in the United States, other alternatives are tuition tax credits, second chance options and workplace training (Cookson & Shroff 1997, 5-6).

2.2 School Choice – An international perspective

2.2.1 The extent of school choice

School choice is by no means a new phenomenon, or one which is limited to the United States. School choice exists in many developed and developing countries. School choice exist in countries such as United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, England and Wales, the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden, and developing countries including India, Chile, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritania, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa.

2.2.2 Research – Claims and Counter-Claims

While the proponents of School Choice claim that the research into school choice programmes support their views, the opponents of the programmes make the same claims. Rather than moving towards consensus, the research has added fuel to the debate. The findings of the various studies often tend to be inconclusive and contradictory (Boyd & Lugg 1998, 1).

The proponents of School Choice have claimed that it is 'a panacea capable of curing mediocre government school monopolies' (Chubb & Moe 1990), the 'silver bullet' which will 'not only improve schools but resolve governance conflicts by allowing divergent groups to cluster in their own schools' (Boyd & Lugg 1998, 1) and, according to the title of an article by Caroline Hoxby (2002), the 'rising tide that will lift all boats'. Plank & Sykes (1999, 390) indicate that the proponents of school choice argue that competition will make public school systems more efficient, more productive, and more responsive to the demands of students parents and communities.

(Bickford (1996, 1) has the following to say regarding the claims of the proponents of school choice:

> 'They also argue that it will save public school money, that it will increase the sense of community and pride in ownership in schools – either public or private, and that it will bring about sweeping changes in education. Supporters contend that it will make the school much more responsive to community needs, improve accountability, improve standards and curriculum.'

The opponents envision injustice and increased social stratification (Astin 1993; Gewirtz *et al*. 1995; Hughes & Lauder 2002). They have grave concerns about the students 'left behind' in unpopular schools claiming that there will be a clustering of hard-to-educate students with less qualified and less experienced teachers in these schools. The possibility of reduced funding (due to a decreased enrolment) will further exacerbate this problem. They envisage the 'dismantling of a relatively successful, socially and politically crucial, but nevertheless fragile public institution' (Plank & Sykes 1999, 390).
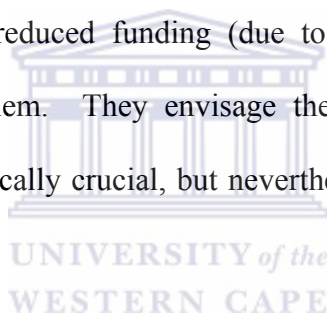
The literature reveals a number of claims and counter claims.

The proponents of School Choice claim that:

- There are higher levels of parental and student satisfaction
- There are higher levels of parental involvement
- There are higher levels of academic achievement
- There is a positive impact on the ordinary public school system
- There are higher levels of satisfaction for teachers
- The current educational system is bureaucratic, wasteful and inefficient
- Innovation is encouraged.

The opponents, on the other hand, claim that

- Academic skimming occurs
- There is segregation on the basis of social class and race
- There are dire consequences for those who are 'left behind' i.e. those who do not or cannot choose and those whose choices are not granted.

To assess the impact of school choice reforms one must examine the impact of these reforms at various levels. The first level involves the individual parent and household. Secondly one must examine the impact of school choice on schools and finally how expanded school choice affects the school system as a whole (Plank & Sykes 1999, 389).

2.2.1 Higher levels of parental and student satisfaction

This is perhaps the one claim about which there is little debate. Where parents have chosen the schools for their children to attend, there are higher levels of parent and student satisfaction. Holloway (2000, 1) found that parents 'who chose their children's schools were more likely to be very satisfied with their new schools than where the parents of children attending traditionally assigned schools'. When Witte (1998) studied the voucher programme in Milwaukee he found that parents who chose schools for their children have a far less favourable opinion 'of the public schools that their children had previously attended than the control group of similar parents whose children had remained in traditional public schools'. Boyd & Lugg (1998), Manno & Finn (1998), Vanourek *et al* (1997), Ellig (1996) and Viadero (1995) also identified increased levels of parental satisfaction. Manno and Finn (1998) also found that 'three fifths of students reported that charter school teachers were better than their previous teachers'. A more positive attitude towards the school could contribute to higher levels of school quality.

Hanushek (2002,10), however, found that 'regular surveys' of the attitudes which people have towards schools indicate that 'everybody likes their own school'.

2.2.2 Higher levels of parental involvement

Hughes & Lauder (2002, 2) state that the proponents of schools choice argue that 'parents who had previously shown little interest in their children's schooling would begin to take a much greater interest as they sought to make choices that would be to their maximum advantage'. This increased involvement represents an important resource into which the school can tap. Parents would be more willing to contribute in terms of money and time. However, the degree to which parents can contribute in terms of time, money and skills is closely linked to the social class of the parents. Upper and middle-class parents would be able to make greater contributions and where there is a clustering of such parents in relatively few schools, such schools would be at a tremendous advantage.

2.2.3 Higher levels of academic achievement

The proponents of school choice claim that there are higher levels of academic achievement where parents are able to choose the schools which their children attend. Authors such as Ellig (1996), Cheung, Murphy & Nathan (1998) and Hepburn (1999) found strong evidence of higher levels of academic achievement. While others such as Holmes *et al* (2003, 2) found small gains where school choice operated**.** Gorard *et al* (2001), Walford (2001) and Froese-Germain, (1998) found that there is 'little evidence' to suggest that the introduction of 'choice' has led to a rise in educational standards.

One must therefore conclude, as Viadero (1995) has done, that the effect of greater school choice on academic achievement is contradictory. Henig (1994) questioned the role which 'choice' played where there were improvements in academic achievement.

2.2.4 Positive impact on the ordinary public school system

While some proponents of increased school choice, such as Toci (1992), claim that school choice will only work if all parents have the opportunity to choose and have their choices granted, the majority of the proponents of school choice claim that school choice need not be available to all parents to be effective. They claim that when schools have to compete for students and the associated funding, they will be forced to improve the quality of education they offer or face closure due to decreased student enrolment. In this way, they argue all children will reap the benefits as increased school choice will increase the quality of education in all schools. This is one of the key arguments for increased school choice, competition and market-based reform.
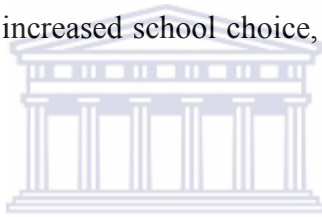
Opponents of school choice, on the other hand, voice grave concerns for students 'left behind' in the traditional public schools. They envisage an increasing gap between 'popular' and 'less popular schools' with a concentration of human and financial resources in the popular schools and a concentration of less experienced and less qualified teachers, disinterested parents, parents with fewer resources to offer the school and more hard-to-educate students in the less popular schools.

The impact on traditional public schools will depend on what type of market exists and, more specifically, what market imperfections occur. The impact of competition on schools will ultimately depend on how and why parents choose and how schools respond to the preferences of parents and students.

The concept of the 'market' in education is a contested one. While many of the early proponents of market related reforms argued that the market in education functioned in the same way as commodity markets, the current thinking tends to conceptualise the education market as a 'quasi-market' (Boyd & Lugg 1998, 10). In this regard Cookson (1991,1) has the following to say, 'Market advocates seldom call for complete deregulation, rather they advance a theory of quasi-markets which blends state regulations with entrepreneurship.'

The functioning of the educational market then becomes a key issue. Glatter *et al* (1997, 7) pose a number of vital and insightful questions namely "How good a market is being created?" and "What significant market imperfections are there?" Cookson (1999, 1) also poses a number of interesting questions such as 'Do social markets operate in similar ways to commodities markets?', 'Are families and children rational choosers?', Who will actually start and maintain these demand-side schools?, 'How will they be held accountable?', 'Do we need a unifying educational institution in a democracy?' and 'What are the real costs of deregulation?'. Only once we have attempted to answer these questions can we be begin to unravel the complexities surrounding the impact of markets and increased competition. The questions identified in the literature can be reduced into three main issues namely

- How do parents judge and choose schools?
- How do schools become aware of and respond to the preferences of parents?
- How do schools respond to competition from other schools?

These three critical issues need to be considered in the light of the market imperfections that exist.

The following imperfections have been identified (Fitz & Gorard 2000, Gintis 1994):

- Schools do not operate to maximise their profit. Can the economic model of the market, based on profit maximisation still apply?
- There is imperfect competition between schools.
- There is imperfect information on which 'consumers' may judge them.
- Schools cannot expand infinitely.
- Parents do not have untrammelled access for their children to any school of their choice.

(a) How and why do parents choose schools?

Many of the proponents of increased school choice identify the process of judging and choosing schools as being the key issue in the success of school choice programmes. They argue that most families are able to make 'wise' educational choices and that 'good' schools will prosper and 'bad' schools will either improve of close as a result of a lack of students ' (Fitz & Gorard 2000, 2). Viadero (1995,1) states that the supporters of increased school choice assume that parents will be 'good shoppers' and choose schools which are 'high quality' and 'more responsive'. Cookson (1999, 1) has the following to say'

'This theory of social and educational change, however, has at its core the enduring belief that the preferences shown by rational choosers result in greater and better opportunities than state mandated and managed change.'

Some opponents of increased school choice question whether parents are equal in their ability of exercise choice in educational markets (Hughes & Lauder 2002, 3), while others question the ability of 'parents of any social class' to act as effective consumers (Twentieth Century Fund report cited in Ascher *et al* 1996: 40-41) and do not seem willing to search for the information necessary to make effective educational choices.

As argued earlier, due to limited capacity at 'popular' schools, it is not parents who are making the final choice but the schools. In this regard Hughes & Lauder (2002, 3) have the following to say,

> 'The students from privileged backgrounds were three times more likely than their disadvantaged peers to get into a school in the most prestigious set of schools …'

In a similar vein Glatter *et al* (1997) describe the schools in England and Wales as being arranged in a hierarchy, they further state that middle-class parents with their greater material and cultural resources will 'find their way to the schools in the higher tiers'.

Market critics think that parents have unequal knowledge about schools and unequal power to send their children to the school of their choice. They argue that knowledge and power are structured by ethnicity and social class and it is the advantaged in terms of material and cultural capital who are able to exercise choice in an educational market while others are effectively unable to choose. Supporters of markets argue that parents have the knowledge needed to make decisions about the schools that best meet their children's needs and the ability to act on that knowledge (Hughes & Lauder 2002, 2).

Parental access to, and use of, information on schools is an important issue. Parents from higher socio-economic groups may have access to more information about educational options, and may be more used to making decisions. In contrast, other parents may not have the resources or the capability to make as much use of the choices available to them under an entitlement scheme. In this scenario, the parents from higher socio-economic groups may migrate to the better schools, creating clear

class distinctions between individual schools (Guerin 1997,24). Plank & Sykes (1999, 390) find that there is an 'extensive literature' on the unequal and inequitable distribution of information and opportunity in many choice systems.

Is it not simply a case of schools or the education administration making the necessary information available to all parents? Many of the proponents of increased school choice believe that this is so, however, I do not. Most of the studies which seek to identify the factors that parents consider, identify a wide range of factors many of which are complex and difficult to quantify. Furthermore many of the factors that are identified in the multitude of studies that exist are couched in subjective terms, for example discipline, good teachers and that the child should be happy. This raises important questions as to how such information can be communicated to parents and equally importantly how parents would evaluate the sources of such information.
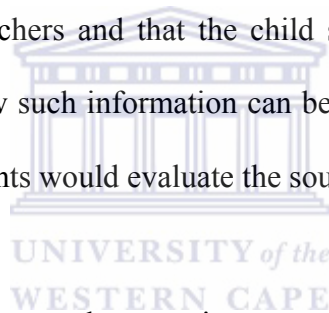
Furthermore even where open enrolment exists transport is a limiting factor which means that parents seldom have more than two or three schools to choose from (Guerin 1997, 24)

(b) How schools respond to the expressed preferences of parents.
A key question is 'Are schools aware of the preferences of parents?' While they may be alerted by a decreasing role or a change in the nature of their intake to the fact that their schools are losing popularity, one must question to what extent they are aware of the reasons that are causing this decrease in popularity?

If they do become aware of the reasons why certain parents are not choosing their school, do they have the capacity to make the necessary changes? It may be that the very schools that are required to respond to competitive pressures i.e. those that are less popular, are the ones which do not have the resources to bring about the desired changes. 'The capacity of schools to identify and respond to their 'consumers' is an important characteristic of any market-like educational system if it is to have any chance of producing the benefits that the advocates of choice and competition claim.' Glatter *et al* (1997, 5). Hughes (1997) states that 'interviews with primary school teachers and parents cast doubt on the extent to which schools are aware of their parents' views and will change their practice to accommodate these views.'
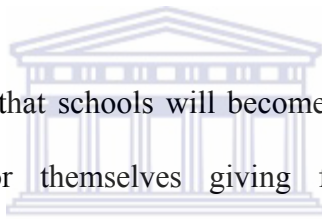
Supporters of markets argue that schools will become more diverse as they seek to establish niche markets for themselves giving families even more choice. Differentiation is a marketing concept relevant to schools' responses to a competitive climate. It involves understanding, and being able and willing to provide, what 'consumers' want or can be persuaded to buy (Glatter *et al* 1997). The key to successful differentiation is to be unique in ways that are viewed and valued by buyers. Glatter *et al* 1997, 7 state that '… a key element in any functioning market must be that there must be differences between the products on offer, and that these differences to some extent reflect and accord with the variety of needs and preferences amongst consumers'. This raises issues such as how do schools try to find out what parents want, what are significant differences among parents in what they are looking for and how schools decide on their differentiation strategy.

The empirical evidence does not indicate that schools are differentiating their educational offerings from those of their competitors. Glatter *et al* (1997, 7) found that '… in general neither 'popular', nor 'unpopular' schools are regarding differentiation as a route to success except where a school responds to specific funding initiatives offered by the government' .

Levin & Riffle (1997) state that on the basis of their empirical work with the school districts in Canada, they hypothesise that schools' responses to parental choice policies will be limited, short-term and conservative.

(c) How do schools respond to competition?

Will schools respond differently to profit seeking businesses? Rather than expanding their capacity, they will become selective in their intakes.

One needs to examine how both the popular and unpopular schools respond to competition.

How do the popular schools respond? The empirical evidence supports the assertion by Boyd & Lugg (1998, 10) that, 'Popular schools rarely expand very much to accommodate the demand for their services'. Research has shown that schools become more selective in their intake when they are over-subscribed. While Hirsch (1995, 51) argues that popular schools should be encouraged to expand, that very expansion may change the nature of the school in a number of ways that are important to parents and which contributed to the school being popular in the first place. Overall school size and class size have been identified as factors contributing to a

school's popularity. Furthermore expansion requires an increased capacity which is limited by financial constraints and the fact that schools are located in highly developed residential areas where available land is at a premium. Similarly the important role of teachers (Heller 2001,6) has been identified in many studies and popular schools many find it difficult to expand their staff complement while maintaining the same high level of teaching.

(d) How do the less popular schools respond?

Holmes *et al* (2003,9) state that the impact of the charter school on the traditional public school in the United States depends on the 'credibility of students' threats to change schools' and that the threats are become more credible as the distance between schools decreases (Holmes *et al* 2003, 9).
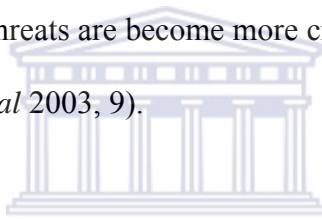
One most also pose the question as to 'Whether they are aware of the differences between their educational offerings and those of their competitors?" Not only must they become aware of how parents perceive and value their own educational offerings but also what makes a competing school more attractive. These unpopular schools, which in many cases are under-resourced in human and material terms, must then have the necessary capacity to make the changes identified.

Finally if schools have managed to make changes that would make their schools more desirable or attractive to parents or which more closely match the preferences of parents, how do these schools communicate the fact that these changes have been made to prospective parents?

Proponents may argue that the problems described above are also faced and are overcome in commodity markets but there is one very important difference, namely the profit motive. Simply stated suppliers in commodity markets gain cost advantages by producing in larger quantities. Existing capital can be used more extensively, for example, by implementing a shift system without compromising quality (this would lead to a reduction of cost per unit thus increasing profits). Expenditure on market research, to identify consumer preferences, and marketing to communicate the characteristics of their products, could be justified by increased turnover, leading to further cost savings and lower unit costs. Furthermore it would not matter who the customers are as the costs of producing the items are independent of the characteristics of the consumer as long as the consumer is willing to pay the price.

Schools, on the other hand, have few incentives to expand beyond their existing capacity. An increase in capacity would entail building more classrooms, acquiring additional teaching aids and employing additional teachers. This additional expenditure would not be balanced by lower unit costs as in the case of commodity markets. An increase in capacity would also change the nature of the school where parents value a smaller school and smaller classes (Groundwater-Smith 2001; Cookson & Shroff 1999; Cohen 2002). This may make the school less attractive to parents.

Much of the research is not clear in its use of the terms *efficiency*, *quality* and *equity*. It is important to unravel the meanings of these terms. While some authors appear to sometimes use these concepts interchangeably there is a clear distinction between

them. By unpacking the rhetoric surrounding these terms one may get an understanding of the differing perspectives of the state and parents.

Many studies refer to increased efficiency which is equated with quality. As I have argued elsewhere (du Toit 1997) school quality flows not only from efficiency i.e. optimal use of resources but also effectiveness i.e. achieving desirable goals. The current policy of rationalisation in South African schools, whereby large numbers of teaching posts were lost clearly has cost-saving benefits for the state which would lead to increased efficiency but equally clearly it has and will continue to have a negative impact on the effectiveness and therefore will impact school quality negatively. One can argue that the focus of the state may be on efficiency while parents (or educational consumers) may be focused on effectiveness.
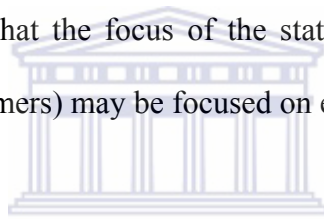
Cookson (1997, 7) also raises the issue of equity. He poses the question as to '… what evidence is there that markets distribute goods and services in an equitable manner?' and concludes that 'if markets create unjust distribution systems then we should be very sceptical about applying market strategies to school improvement.'

Many findings are influenced by how educational quality is defined and measured. Holmes *et al* (2003, 5), for example, measure quality as the 'achievement of the students in traditional schools as measured by end-of-year test scores'. It is often where such narrow definitions of school quality are used that the findings could be contradictory.

2.2.5 Higher levels of satisfaction for teachers

The proponents of school choice indicate that they have found higher levels of teacher satisfaction where increased school choice and competition occur. Geske, Davis & Hingle (1997) found that teachers in charter schools have higher degrees of satisfaction while Manno and Finn (1998) found that charter school teachers felt 'empowered' and had a sense of 'personal fulfilment' and 'professional reward'. Teachers preferred the 'familial school atmosphere, sensible management decisions, dedicated colleagues, and enhanced personal and institutional accountability' found in charter schools (Finn *et al* 1996, 4). Teachers had higher salaries (Solomon & Gifford 1999) and performance based incentives, a flexible teaching environment and the opportunity to participate in important educational decisions (Hepburn 1999, section 4).
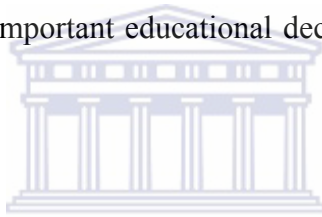
Hughes & Lauder (2002, 2) state that where market conditions occur, educational management will seek excellence and the quality of teaching will be raised as poor teachers leave (or are removed from) the profession and good teachers' morale, motivation and performance are enhanced.

One must then pose the question as to whether the conditions described above are unique to the market situation or perhaps due to the removal of restrictions and whether the removal of restrictions is conditional on the implementation of market-based reforms. Furthermore once schools compete for teachers those schools with better resources, easier-to-teach students and the ability to supplement the incomes of teachers will be able to attract the best and most experienced teachers. Thus leaving the schools, which are less well-resourced with more hard-to-teach students which

will only be able to attract less experienced and less qualified teachers thus exacerbating the problem of being less popular.

2.2.6 The current educational system is bureaucratic, wasteful and inefficient

Proponents argue that centrally managed education monopolies are no longer able to meet the educational demands of society (Boyd & Lugg 1998, 6). Ladner (2002,2) illustrates this point as follows:

> Before the reforms, only 30 percent of New Zealand education spending reached the classroom in the form of teacher salaries and student materials (the figure is less than 50 percent for public schools in the United States.) Today, 67 percent of all educational spending reaches the classroom.

However, Geske, Davis & Hingle (1997) found that some charter schools are more expensive to operate than ordinary public schools without delivering improved student performance.
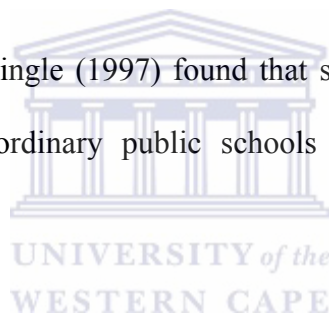
2.2.7 Innovation is encouraged

The supporters of school choice argue that as schools have to compete they will become more innovative in an attempt to attract students (Ellig 1996,4). Hepburn (1999, section 1, 2) states that charter schools have been called 'America's research and development centres for education'. They foresee a situation where schools will develop unique educational offerings and a unique character to meet the needs of a particular niche market. In this way parents can select schools which best match their educational preferences. Krunholz (1999) describes a number of innovations developed by charter schools that have been emulated by rival traditional public schools (Holmes 2001, 6). Many of the proponents of school choice have pointed to the 'success' of private schools which operate in a more market orientated

environment and have argued that a more market orientated environment for public schools would produce the same 'benefits' and greater success. Yet John Chubb (2003, 82) one of the foremost proponents of school choice has the following to say,

> 'Private schools, effective as they might be, were not being touted for their inventiveness. If anything, their no-nonsense traditionalism was the main attraction.'

Halpin, Power & Fitz (1997,5) express a similar opinion where they state that, far from "breaking the mould" and attempting innovative practices, GM[5] schools appear to be celebrating and reinforcing past visions of educational practice.

Gorard (1997, 2.6) argues that a market can lead to complacency and demotivation for successful schools and that less successful schools would emulate the successful schools conservatism and thus lead to stagnation and an overall reduction of innovation rather than greater innovation.
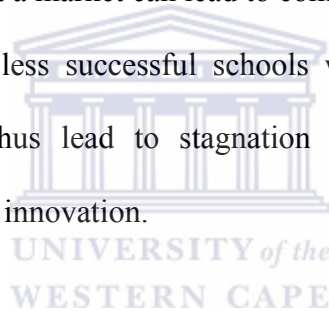
Lubienski (2001,4) states that, 'Findings indicate that hypothetical predictions about competition and choice are largely unfulfilled in practice. In fact, interventions by public bureaucracies have often succeeded in encouraging classroom innovations, whereas market mechanisms appear to contribute to standardization.' Boyd & Lugg (1998, 10) found that 'parents often appear to prefer more traditional schools, reducing incentives for a more diverse supply of school types'.

Geske, Davis & Hingle (1997) found that charter schools did not differ much from ordinary schools in terms of the educational offerings and accountability.

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[5] Grant Managed schools are schools in the UK that vote to opt out of their Local Education Authority

2.2.8 Skimming occurs

Rofes (1998) found that charter schools attracted students from a wide range of academic abilities not just the high achievers. '… students switching from traditional to charter schools are *above* average performers.' (Holmes *et al* 2003, 15). Moe (1995) notes that the issue is not whether there is skimming in an entitlement scheme, but whether that skimming will be worse than in the public system where students are largely segregated in schools with students similar to themselves (Guerin 1997, 24).

2.2.9 Segregation by social class and race occurs

This is a claim that has been made since the inception of school choice reforms and is grounded in the concept of 'shared community' which proponents have proclaimed to be one of the great advantages of market-based reforms in that parents who shared similar value and ideas about education could select schools that reflected those ideas and values. Opponents saw an inherent danger of increased segregation on the basis of race and social class.

When examining school choice in Scotland, Willms (1997,1), found that 'Segregation between schools along social class lines increased substantially during the period when the choice reform was proceeding.' When Henig (1990) studied enrolment patterns in Montgomery County magnet schools he found that race and class concerns were central to parental choices in the United States and that parents chose schools in which their children were less likely to be racially or socio-economically isolated. Weither and Tedin (2002) show that in their choice of charter schools, Texas parents were likely to sort themselves along racial lines. Galzerman (1997,1998) and Hughes & Lauder (2002) reach similar conclusions. Goldring (1997) finds evidence of the

tendency of schools of choice to attract pupils from higher social classes. Gardner (2005; 36) concludes that

> 'The experiences of New Zealand, Chile, Sweden, South Africa and China show that poor and minority children are the ones who benefit least from choice.'

Viadero (1995, 2) found that school choice 'may deepen the existing rifts in American society' this is a strong thread running through several studies. Fitz & Gorard (2000) found that 'while markets clearly do not cause socio-economic segregation, they do not seem to be causing desegregation either.'

While some of the proponents, such as Hepburn (1999) point to the apparent lack of segregation where school choice reforms have been implemented, Viadero (1995, 2) argues that 'If school officials had not taken a strong hand in maintaining racial balance in schools … many of the country's schools would have become more segregated'. Ausbrooks (2001, 3) indicates that, 'Virtually all U.S. charter school statutes include at least a provision prohibiting charter schools from discriminating on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, or other such criteria'. Henig (1994) and Schneider & Buckley (2002) support this view while Gintis (1994) argues that the apparent lack of segregation in US choice schools is not the result of some inherent characteristic of the market but is due to legislation which forbids discrimination on the basis of race.

Both Schneider & Buckley (2002) and Weiher and Tedin (2002) found that while parents do not express a preference based on race and social class when asked an examination of actual behaviour reveals such a preference. Authors such as Schneider & Buckley (2002) and Karsten *et al* (2003) warn that to determine the

preferences of parents one should not rely too heavily on survey data but should rather examine actual choice behaviour.

Fitz & Gorard (2000, 12) state that ' the success or failure of a market policy' (in terms of reducing social and racial stratification) 'may depend not so much on the nature of the policy itself as on the nature and scale of socio-economic segregation in the system it replaces'.

2.2.10 Stratification of the market

Linked to the processes of academic skimming and segregation by race and social class, opponents argue that the market develops a hierarchical structure and that rather than promoting equity, such a structure could reproduce wider socio-economic inequalities in education.
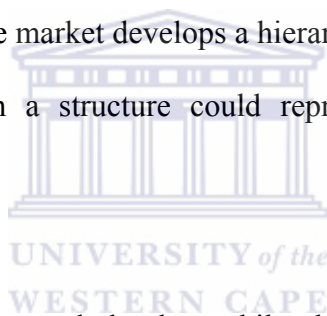
Gorard & Fitz (2000: 405) conclude that while the degree of segregation has decreased after the introduction of the Education Reform Act, which gave all parents in England and Wales the right to express a preference for a school for their child, there is little evidence to link this reduction to market forces.
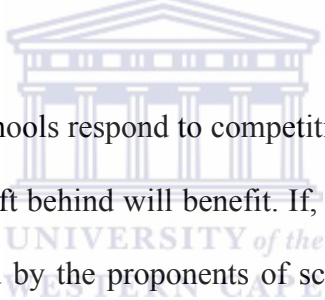
2.2.11 Implications for those 'left behind'

Holmes (2001, 7) has the following to say

> 'One potentially very important feature – and underlying assumption
> providing support for the charter school movement – is that when traditional
> public schools face competition (in the form of charter schools) they will be
> forced to improve. By exposing traditional public schools to competition for
> pupils (and, importantly, for the funding tied to those students), the
> government provides a market incentive to the traditional schools to
> improve. It is this competition that provides a positive externality to charter
> school provision. If the charter schools are indeed able to provide a higher

quality education to students than traditional public schools, then the small proportion of students who attend these charter schools (less than 1 percent) benefit. If, however, the competition provides quality increases in the *traditional* schools, then the overall increase in quality will benefit many more students than just the charter school attendees.'

There is little doubt that where families do choose, the child benefits, but one must pose the question, 'At what cost?'. Competition by its nature creates winners and losers, where some are privileged and many are excluded (André-Bechely, 2005). How does school choice impact on society in general and the general level of education? We must weigh up the benefits to the individual and the costs to society are large. Gardner (2005; 36) argues that 'choice cheats children' and that choice increases inequality of opportunity with increasing educational quality.

This issue depends on how schools respond to competition. If they respond positively then all students even those left behind will benefit. If, on the other hand, they do not respond in the way envisaged by the proponents of school choice there will be dire consequences for students that are left behind in unpopular schools. Schools will not 'go out of business' straight away but will suffer years to declining enrolments with the associated reduction in funding. These schools could develop a staff that will exhibit decreasing levels of motivation caused by reduced resources and higher levels of 'difficult to educate' students.

How can these contradictory and conflicting findings be explained? Boyd & Lugg (1998, 2) cite Glenn (1989, 220)

> 'The experience of other nations yields no conclusive evidence that parent choice has a decisive effect, either positive or negative, on the quality of schooling. Evidence is extensive, however, that choice may have a positive or negative effect upon equity, depending upon how the

process is structured and what incentives are included for ethnic and class integration.'

These contradictory findings can also be explained by taking into account the fact that school choice programmes no longer represent a single policy but represent a wide range of policies each structured in different ways and, furthermore, that policies do not operate in isolation and could deliver different results depending on 'how the programme interacts with the demographic and economic makeup of the community' (Bruce Fuller quoted in Viadero 1995, 2). Depending on how they are designed and regulated, choice programmes can either promote desirable reforms or cause serious problems (OECD 1994).

It may be that both the proponents and opponents of school choice have overstated the impact of the increased role of competition in educational markets. In this regard Taylor (2001) has the following to say:

> 'I would like to argue that the impacts of these reforms, on balance, have been minimal. Both in terms of raising standards and being socially divisive.'

2.3 Who makes the choice of high school?

2.3.1 Which families choose?

When addressing this issue two dimensions must be considered. Firstly are all parents in a position to make an informed decision about which school to send their children to and secondly, do parents have the same power to send their children to the school of their choice?

Various studies have found that it is the better educated, socially advantaged, higher income earning parents who are choosing levels (Willms 1997; Viadero 1995; David

et al 1994; Armor & Peiser 1998; Smedley 1995; Fitz & Gorard 2000; Hughes & Lauder 2002). Boyd & Lugg (1998,11) cite an additional eight sources that reach the same conclusion. The San Antonio School Choice Research Project (1993) found that, 'Choosing families are better educated and have higher incomes, fewer children, more female parents in the workforce, and higher education expectations for their children than non-choosing families'.

Essentially school choice benefits the middle class (Reay 1998; Gipps 1993; Ball, 1996) and poor families will 'not be able to play the market successfully (Fitz & Gorard 2002). Gewirtz (1996) states that research shows that the market is a middle-class mode of social engagement and that parental choice is class- and race-informed.

One may then pose the question as to why is it that the middle classes have this 'competitive edge'. Fitz & Gorard (2000, 407) state that the opponents of market forces in education see the market operating as a 'more refined mechanism of social selection and exclusion' and suggest that

> '… since making a good choice, perhaps making any choice at all, requires families to have financial and/or symbolic resources which are unevenly distributed in society.'

Such resources include literacy, confidence, taste, knowledge of legislation, leisure time, information about schools through social networks and private transport. Waslander & Thrupp (1995, 21) state that 'those endowed with material and cultural capital will simply add to their existing advantages through choice policies'. This has great significance for choice in the South African context given the inequalities that still exist in South African society.

The issue of information includes both knowledge of policies and mechanisms of school choice and specific information relating to particular schools. Hughes & Lauder (2002) state that '… while parents do seem to have equal knowledge about schools, those from different SES and ethnic groups have markedly different power to send their children to the school of their choice.'

2.3.2 Who within the family chooses?

It is clear from the literature that in the large majority of cases the choice of school is a joint one. Gorard (1997, 1) found that 'Over 50% of respondents claim that the choice of high school is a joint one, where neither the parents nor the child can be said to have the larger role, while fewer than 10% of the respondents claim that the main role is taken by the child.' Elliot (1981) reported that fifity-six percent of respondents claimed that choice of high school was jointly made by mother, father and child and that a further 31 percent claimed that it was made jointly by mother and father and only 6 percent that it was made by mother alone or mother and child jointly.

Gorard (1997, 3) found that 'The role of the child increases almost directly with age…' and therefore will play an important role in the choice of high school. Smedley (1995) found that children of working class parents had a bigger influence on the decision-making process than the children of middle class parents. Elliot (1981) found that while none of the respondents claimed that the choice of school was made entirely by the child, the frequency with which the child preferences was listed as being important indicates that many children have a great influence on the decision-making process. It may be that the role of the child may be consultative rather than participative.

The role of the mother in gathering information and making the decision has been found to be key by a number of authors including Lawley *at al.* (2001), David (1994) and Aitchison (2002). David *et al* (1994) found that in almost half of the families in the sample, the mother has the main responsibility for choosing the school.

An understanding of how parents judge and choose schools must thus take into account the interactions between the various family members.

2.4 Which factors are considered when choosing a high school?

An issue which has been well researched is the factors which are considered when the choice of school is made. Which factors are considered and how they are evaluated is a key issue as these factors indicate the preferences of families with regard to schools. Schneider & Buckley (2002, 3) have the following to say,

> 'At the core of these studies of parental preferences is the debate about whether or not, given choice, parents will select schools on educationally sound dimensions or make choices based on non-educational ones.'

2.4.1 Selected Studies

Elliot (1985) conducted an investigation in the United Kingdom into the reasons why parents chose a particular school. This was in response to concerns about the declining roll. The following factors were identified:

1. Provides a balanced, well-rounded education.
2. Curriculum caters for the child's personal and academic level.
3. Children are generally happy at the school.
4. Parents can easily approach the head/staff on a child's progress.
5. Atmosphere at the school is personal rather than impersonal.
6. The school is well managed and efficient.
7. Children get on well with teachers.
8. Discipline is good.
9. Teachers make sure that the basic skills are acquired.

10. The school is good at keeping parents informed of the problems and progress of children.
11. Children are stretched in the classroom.
12. The school has good exam results.
13. Children enjoy lessons.
14. Teachers know their subjects and how to put them across.

Petch (1986) and West & Verlaam (1991) examined the reasons why British parents and pupils in the last year of primary school selected a high school. The most frequent reasons given were that the school was conveniently situated, a wide range of subjects was offered, that specific subjects e.g. Art were available and that siblings were there. The reasons that were given as being most important for selecting the school were that the child would be happy there, that it was the child's preferred choice and that the school had better discipline. These findings are fairly typical of this sort of research.
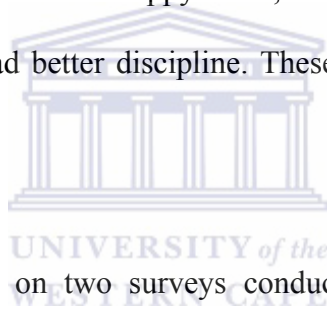
Hirsch (1995, 251) reported on two surveys conducted in Sweden and England regarding the choice of secondary school. The survey findings are summarised below:

Reasons for choosing a school other than the nearest (In Sweden)	%
Friends / good peer atmosphere	34
Quiet / not violent / small classes	21
Good teachers / school leadership	16
Social factors affecting pupils	15
Special Pedagogical nature (Waldorf / Montessori)	12
Geographical factors	10
Better equipment / facilities	8
Attention to pupils with problems	7
Special subject character (art/music/foreign languages)	5
Good reputation	4
Special religious character	2

Source: Temo Testhuset Marknad Opinion 1993

Reasons for choosing an English Secondary School

Reason	%
Child preferred school	59.2
Near home / convenient to travel	57.3
Child's friends will be there	56.1
Standard of academic education	55.7
Facilities	55.7
School's reputation	54.6
Child will be happy there	49.2
School atmosphere	44.7
Policy on discipline	42.0
Standard of education in non-academic areas	40.8
Examination results	38.9
Subject choice	37.4

Source: Woods 1993

Many of the differences can be explained by the different socio-economic conditions that exist in the different countries. For example, facilities do not seem to be much of a factor in the Swedish survey. This may be explained by the fact that because of their sound economic condition, schools may not differ much in terms of the facilities that are available. Thus the factors which parents consider important could differ markedly from community to community.

Aspects mentioned by West(1992) as being important in choice of senior/secondary school, in the United Kingdom, were

1. suits child's needs
2. good discipline / well behaved students
3. good exam results
4. pleasant buildings and environment
5. pleasant atmosphere
6. good choice of subjects
7. pupils stretched / reach potential
8. good extra-curricular activities
9. good / competent teachers
10. good relationship between pupils and teachers
11. encourages responsible attitude towards work
12. good relationships between teachers and pupils
13. good reputation

In Ethiopia (Seboka, 2003) found that parents considered the following factors when choosing private schools.

Factor	No of Responses (N=120)	%
1. Proximity to residence	48	39.6
2. Access (Admission)	46	38.3
3. Income Level (school fees)	16	13.8
4. Quality	10	8.3

Lawley *et al* (2001) examined school choice in Australia and found that parents rated the following criteria as being of high or very high importance.

1. Helps to develop a happy and well balanced individual
2. Has quality teachers
3. Develops students to their full potential
4. Builds esteem and confidence in students
5. Encourages students to think for themselves
6. Enforces behaviour management in a fair and consistent manner
7. Has a safe physical environment
8. Develops student's individual strengths
9. Provides a nurturing environment
10. Has high quality educational facilities
11. Teachers and administrative staff listen to parents
12. Handles children with behaviour problems
13. Has an overall high community profile
14. Has pleasant and well cared for surroundings
15. Parents are involved in decision making
16. Has a reputation for academic achievement
17. Has effective computer technology
18. Has class sizes of under 25 students
19. Prepares students for higher education
20. Provides flexibility in curriculum choices
21. Prepares students for employment
22. Allows students to develop skills in specialised fields

It is clear from the earlier discussion on 'who in the family chooses?' that the preferences of the child play an important role when the choice of high school is made. Phelan *et al* (1992, 695) found that students focused more on the process factors when they judge the quality of a school. They found that students value teachers who recognise and treat them as individuals, they seek emotional safety in

classrooms and want teachers who care. Students also evaluated the teaching process. They preferred classes where they were actively involved in the lesson. Another important aspect which the students evaluated was the physical and social environment of the school.

The factors which Phelan *et al* found to be important to students when considering the environment were:

1. accessibility of the principal.
2. general attitude of the staff as a group.
3. perceived degree of physical safety.
4. types of interactions between student groups.
5. student behaviour generally.
6. availability of extra-curricular activities.
7. general condition of the school facilities.

West *et al* (1998) identified the following factors as being 'essential' when parents selected secondary schools:

1. Child's happiness
2. Suits child's needs
3. Atmosphere /ethos
4. Discipline
5. Child's choice
6. Quality of education
7. Pupils stretched academically
8. Homework policy
9. Easy to get to
10. Small class sizes
11. Examination results

In Buenos Aires, Potter & Hayden (2004) identified similar factors.

An examination of these findings reveals a number of interesting similarities.

2.4.2 The presence of both 'push' and 'pull' factors

While in many cases parents exercise choice to gain access to a particular school that they deem to offer a quality education, there are also cases when choice is exercised

to avoid a neighbourhood school which parents are dissatisfied with. Parents choose schools other than the neighbourhood schools because of dissatisfaction with their neighbourhood school's educational services and/or administration (Tenbusch, 1993) and because they want to avoid 'poor performing schools with the "wrong" kind of pupils' (Taylor 2001) .

This is often referred to in the literature as push factors (reasons for rejecting the local school) and pull factors (attracting parents to a school).

2.4.3 The role of reputation.

Reputation can be defined as how the school is generally regarded. It involves the perceptions of other people and their judgement of the school. It exists in informal groups linked to the community that the school serves. Within this informal group information, which may not be available through other sources, is communicated. While reputation often extends beyond the confines of the community, this is often of a general nature and specific information remains within the confines of the informal group. Parents who are not part of that particular community may thus not have access to all the relevant information which exists within the group. (Meissner *at el* 1997, 11) found that 'there is a common belief that the reputation of the school goes a long way to attracting parents to a school.' In the absence of other (reliable) sources, reputation takes on a more important role.

2.4.4 The factors parents claim to use are multiple and complex

Typically studies identify between 7 and 25 factors. Many of the factors identified from the literature as being important in the decision-making process are difficult to

quantify. When considering school atmosphere or culture Meissner *et al* (1997, 9) had the following to say, 'Quantifying the important factor of atmosphere or culture of a school is not as easy and a number of parents indicated that the only way to judge the atmosphere of a school is to visit the school'. This has implications for the types and sources of information that parents use. Many of the factors considered to be important by parents are not easily qualified and therefore cannot be easily communicated by the school. This adds further importance to social and informal networks as a source of information and once more emphasises the role of 'reputation'.

Even factors that at first appear to be relatively simple, for example academic results, are, on closer examination, complex. Different measures of 'academic results' could include pass rates, average results, subject distinctions obtained, number of students passing with matriculation exemption[6] and A-aggregates obtained.
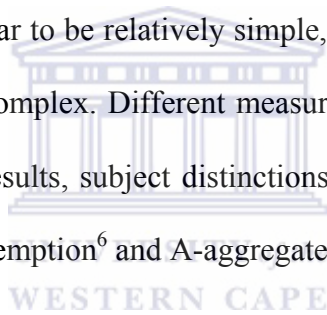
A survey conducted by du Toit (1997) asked parents and students to rank 84 factors, identified from the literature, with regard to their contribution to the organisational success of the school. Using a 5 point Likert scale only 13 of the factors were rated as not being of great importance (rating 5) or of much importance(rating 4) by less than 50% of student respondents. Similarly only 5 of the factors were rated as not being of great importance (rating 5) or of much importance (rating 4) by less than 50% of parent respondents.

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[6] Required to study at University

At this point a caveat is necessary. Meissner *et al*(1997) point out that parents are seldom 'up front about what they look for in a school' while Schneider & Buckley (2002,7) state that 'when asked, parents say that their choice behaviour is motivated by academic quality', but warn that when examining the preferences revealed in studies which examine *behaviour*, academic quality plays a smaller role that initially found and that race and class play a greater role than the survey results reveal.

Willms (1997,4) emphasises the role played by social class in school choice in Scotland when he states,

> 'When choosing between schools of similar social intakes, parents had difficulty determining which school was more or less effective that the other.'

2.5 When is the choice of high school made?

The issue is not only when do parents become aware of the problem but also, perhaps more importantly, when do they initiate behaviour to address the problem. This is one of the least explored and least researched aspects of school choice. Lawley *et al* (2001, 2) indicate that they could identify no research which addressed the question of when problem recognition occurs. In their own research they found that '… approximately 30 percent of respondents having made their choice by the time the child had finished grade one and another 34 percent of the respondents having made the decision when the child is entering the last three years of primary school (grade 5,6 and 70 (Lawley 2001, 6). Smedley (1995) indicates that 'the choice of secondary school occurs within the last four years of primary school'. West *et al* (1996) found that 81% of families started thinking about choice of secondary school at least two years prior to the end of primary school.

2.6 Which sources of information inform the choice of high school?

A study by Hunter (1991) identifies a number of sources of information used by parents when choosing a high school. A summary of these finding appears below:

Sources of information on secondary school chosen by parents

Source	N	%
'Changing schools at 11' (area information booklet)	248	86.1
Open day/ evening at secondary school	221	76.7
Secondary school brochures	200	69.4
Other parents or children	174	60.4
Primary school head	150	54.9
Secondary school head	146	50.7
Child's siblings have attended	126	43.8
Other sources	129	44.8
Valid cases	288	
Missing cases	1	

The table above only indicates which sources were consulted, when Hunter examined the importance that parents attached to these sources a different picture emerged. Many respondents said that they did not find many of the sources useful. Ninety percent of the parents who had attended an open day/evening found it to be useful. Twenty-five percent of the respondents who had read 'Changing schools at 11' found them not to be useful in deciding on a secondary school. Matson (1993) found that families seldom collected information in a systematic fashion before making a choice decision.   Much of the information, which parents considered useful, came from word-of-mouth communication with other parents, other children and teachers (Vinnig & Petersen 1994; West & Verlaam 1991; Matson 1993; Lawley *et al* 4). Glenn (1993) states that 'informal communication networks' are the most important and trusted source of information for many parents. Parents placed less value on information contained in promotional material (Lawley *et al, 4*). Gorard (1997, 5) found that 'for most respondents the most important source of information used in

making a choice about schools is a personal acquaintance , whether another parent, or a child at the school'. 'And that 'prospectuses and examination results *are* used , and acknowledged by many parents, but few feel that they are really useful, despite the publication of league tables and the pressure to use them as performance indicators.'

2.7 What is the context within which School Choice occurs?

2.7.1 The International Context

Tikly & Mabogoane (1996, 7) have correctly stated that the context within which choice operates in developing countries differs from the context of developed countries. In a similar vein Kitaev (1999, 109) argues that the IMF and World Bank have tried to apply theories and concepts originating in developed countries to developing countries where economic and social conditions are substantially different.

The question must then be posed, 'In what way do education markets differ in developing countries?'

Firstly, in terms of demand, there is an important difference between developed and developing countries. While developed countries have stable or even declining populations, developing countries have high population growth rates (Vawda & Patrinos, 1999; Kitaev, 1999). High growth rates coupled to programmes to promote enrolment, developing education markets are likely to be characterised by excess demand. The impact on the education market is that the likelihood that schools will 'go out of business' is low, thus removing part of the competitive pressure to improve as proposed by school choice proponents.

Secondly the ability of supply, in developing countries, to respond to this increased demand has been severely constrained by two factors. The first factor reflects the economic strength of the countries involved. Even though developing countries spend a high proportion of their budgets on education, there is insufficient funding available for education. This is a result of the 'pie' i.e. the total amount of funding available, that must be divided among the different categories of expenditure, not being large. Thus a high proportion being allocated to education does not necessarily mean a large amount of funding.

This problem is exacerbated by the second factor namely the structural adjustments 'recommended' by the IMF, the World Bank and other donors (Kitaev 1999,110). Conditions attached to granting of loans required a reduction in public sector funding.
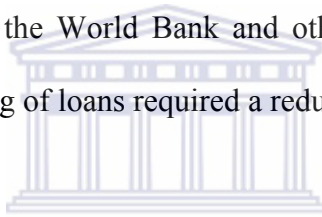
The third aspect is the development of private sector education and to what extent this development represents a situation of choice. To understand the impact of private schools it is necessary to trace the development of these schools. Mission schools and high quality, high cost private schools[7] have existed in many African countries since the beginning of the 20th century. After obtaining independence, many[8] African countries responded by nationalising the private schools (Obanya 1998).

The inability of developing countries to meet the demand for education has meant that there has been a reversal of this tendency and the resulting changes in policy allowing and in some cases supporting private education has resulted in the development of a

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[7] Serving the ruling classes.
[8] Obanya identifies four groups of countries based on the degree of privatisation. Three of the groups had a significant degree of privatisation.

strong private education sector in many African countries such as Tanzania (Lassibille *et al* 1999).

Private education plays a significant role in much of Africa as illustrated by the table below:

Country	% enrolments in private sector schools
Mauritius	77
Tanzania	55
Madagascar	45
The Gambia	21
Côte d'Ivoire	19
Senegal	15
Chad	15
Benin	9
Mauritania	4
South Africa	2
Kenya	1
Country	% secondary school enrolments
Zimbabwe	85
Botswana	78
Gabon	40
Burkina Faso	35
Togo	14
Burundi	11
Niger	10

Table 1: Private enrolments in selected African countries
Sources: Vawda & Patrinos (1999); Lassibbile, Tan & Sumra (1999); Seboka (2003);Nzomo et al. (2001); Kitaev (1999); Hofmeyr (2000)

Private schools enrol an average of 30% of pupils in African countries (Lassibbile, Tan & Sumra (1999, 5).

The nature of the private sector in the African context needs to be examined. Whereas the private sector in education developed mainly as a result of concerns regarding quality and family preferences in developed countries, the development of private schools in developing countries has often been the result of excess demand.

Thus in developing countries private schools are supplementing public sector schools rather than complementing them. Although Seboka (2003) states that 'the starting point for school choice is the availability of private schooling', it could be the case in developing countries that the presence of private schools does not necessarily mean that choice exists if there are no alternatives available in a specific geographic location.

Unlike in developed countries, developing countries private schools do not necessarily mean high quality, well resourced schools. There are large variations in terms of quality and costs. Kitaev(1999,143), for example, found that private schools in Mauritius were considered 'definitely worse' than public schools.

Seboka (2003) found that in Ethiopia enrolment in private schools tended to increase as income levels increased.
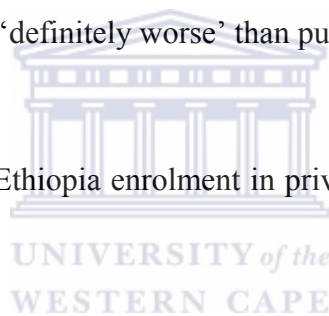
The existence of 'choice' in many developing countries, especially African countries, has often been the result not of deliberate choice policies but rather the convergence of other educational policies (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006).

2.7.2 The South African context.

The impact of Apartheid on South African society, in general, and on education, in particular, has been well documented. The purpose of this discussion is not therefore to describe in full detail the tragic consequences of Apartheid but rather to examine the specific impact of Apartheid on the ability of parents to be 'good consumers' who make wise choices.

It is clear that even after more than a decade of democracy, gross inequalities still plague our society. South Africa can be described as an upper-middle income country with a 'notoriously' unequal distribution of income and high poverty levels (van der Berg 2002, 2). Jansen & Taylor (2003,5) quote a National Treasury document indicating that the poorest 40% of the population earned only 11% of the income and the wealthiest 10% of the population earned 40% of the income. This dualistic economy reflects on the one hand a developed and largely white economy and on the other hand an underdeveloped and largely black economy. This dualism is mirrored in the education system as will be examined later.

In 1990, Crawford examined the dilemma facing the black parent regarding school choice. This dilemma resulted from tension between the opening of better resourced, previously white schools and a rejection of the process of legitimising the Apartheid system by accepting places at these schools without full and equal participation in the political process. The cry of 'no normal sport in an abnormal society' was extended by many progressive black parents to include education. With the repealing of the Apartheid laws and the advent of the new democratic South Africa this dilemma has been resolved.

The ability to choose is also shaped by various educational policy documents such as the South African Schools Act (1996) and the Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools (1998). As is the case in many other developing countries there is no deliberate policy regarding school choice but rather the convergence of the National Education Policy Act, the South African Schools Act and the Employment of

Educators Act. Woolman & Fleisch (2006) refer to this as South Africa's 'unintended' experiment in school choice.

While the South African Schools Act makes provision for only two types of school, namely public and private, the reality is that great inequalities exist between different public schools.

South African schools still bear testimony to unequal provision among the different racial groups in the past.

ORDINARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (1994)	
House of Assembly (White)	3204
House of Delegates (Indian)	464
House of Representatives (Coloured)	1958
Department of Education and Training (African)	8190
Self-governing 'homelands'	6698
Independent 'homelands'	6372
TOTAL	**26 886**

Table 2: South African Schools – Former Classification
Source: Hofmeyr 2000, 5

This classification was, of course, accompanied by gross inequalities in terms of funding.

Comparative Education Statistics 1989

	White	Indian	Coloured	African
Pupil- teacher ratios	17:1	20:1	23:1	38:1
Under qualified teachers Less than 3 year tertiary qualification	0%	2%	45%	52%
Per capita expenditure including Capital expenditure	R3082,00	R2227,01	R1359,78	R764,73
Std 10 Pass rate	96,0%	93,6%	72,7%	40,7%

Table 3: Comparative Education Statistics 1989
Source: Hofmeyer & Buckland in McGregor 1992:22

An examination of this data reveals that 79% (21260 out of 26886 schools) were funded at a level of less than 25% of the level of the most privileged (White) schools.

Thus within the public school sector there exists great imbalances in terms of human, physical and financial resources. A very small percentage (11,9%) of schools were funded at the most favourable level. This has resulted in the large majority of students attending under-resourced, mainly poor quality public schools (Fataar 1997, 72). The result is creation of a two-tier system of public education (Sayed, 2001, Jansen, 2006). On the one hand, there are well-resourced, academically highly successful ex-Model C schools on the other hand there are the majority of under-resourced, academically less successful[9] schools previously serving those oppressed by the Apartheid system.

This problem cannot simply be remedied by funding all schools at the levels at which 'White' schools were previously funded. South Africa already spends, by international standards, a high percentage of its budget on education (Jansen 1998, 6). Expenditure on education represents more than 20% of government spending and 7% of the national income (NEPI 1993,55). The imbalances that exist in South African society go beyond the uneven expenditure on education. Other, pressing needs will have to be met with the limited funding available. NEPI (1993,55) summarises the dilemma which the post-Apartheid government finds itself in where it states

> '… the post apartheid state will face substantial demands for reconstruction spending in many areas, and economic stagnation during the 1980s has weakened the state's fiscal base.

They conclude that 'substantial increases' in education spending are 'unlikely'. The National Norms and Standards for School Funding make allowance for different levels of funding based on various criteria including the poverty level of the students

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[9] Although some historically disadvantaged schools have achieved high levels of success, the general trend remains unchanged.

attending the school. Funding is reallocated from schools which are classified in higher 'poverty quintiles'[10] to schools in lower 'poverty quintiles'. The result is that those schools that are classified as being privileged or serving more affluent communities receive lower state funding. The South African Schools Act, however, allows schools to charge fees. Schools can therefore make up for subsidy losses by charging fees. The procedure for setting the fees is set out in the Act and involves a decision taken by the majority of parents at the meeting. In this way the gap between the formally privileged and disadvantaged sector will remain big and, in fact, could increase (MacGregor 1998). Fees at public schools range from a few hundred Rand to annual amounts in excess of R12 500. These fees also need to be examined in terms of the gross inequalities which exist in economic terms in the Western Cape where an amount of R12 000 represents more than a third of the average income of 'Blacks' in the Western Cape (Cape Argus, 2002). By way of comparison it represents 16% of the average income of 'Coloureds' and 7% of the average income of 'Whites" in the same region. It is thus understandable that recent research suggests that school fees at many model C schools are prohibitive as far as many black[11], and especially African parents are concerned (Tikly & Mabogoane 1996; Woolman & Fleisch 2006).

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[10] The classification of schools into poverty quintiles is not without its problems. Due to the Group Areas Act some schools are located in up-market residential areas yet draw none of the students from that area. There are instances where schools drawing students from the same areas have been placed in markedly different poverty categories. Also where working-class parents have sacrificed to send their children to well-resourced schools they are funded at a level corresponding to more affluent families. It also assumes that poverty is evenly distributed throughout the population. This is not so.
[11] Tikly & Mabogoane refer to all those oppressed under the Apartheid system as being black.

Van der Berg (2002) illustrates the differences in attainment in relation to levels of school fees as follows:

	Number of Schools	Average matric pass rate
Total Sample	2768	55.5%
School fee group: <R20	651	43.9%
R20 –R49	1177	47.8%
R50 – R99	496	54.1%
R100- R199	82	69.7%
R200 – R299	243	91.9%
R1000+	119	97.2%

Table 4: School fees and average matric pass rates

School fees are not, however, the only costs associated with schooling. Other costs include uniform, text-books (which only a very few schools provide free of charge), stationery and transport.

The ability to draw on outside expertise and assistance could widen the gaps between formerly privileged and disadvantaged schools. As has been argued earlier, middle class parents will be able to make greater contributions in terms of time, money and skills. As a result of these additional resources schools serving more middle class parents have been able to employ additional teachers. They are also able to attract more qualified and experienced teachers by offering 'perks' usually in the form of increased salaries. Ladd (2002, 12) has argued that as there is a 'single salary scale' for teachers, teachers can improve their situation by moving to schools in which it is 'easier to teach'. In South Africa this situation is exacerbated by the fact that well resourced schools are in a position to offer 'perks', mainly in the form of additional salary, to its teachers. The net result is usually an increase in instructional quality as the situation is that the more qualified and more experienced teachers are teaching

smaller classes (which could also be considered to be a perk associated with teaching at better resourced schools).

The Western Cape is often perceived as being better resourced than other provinces. Under the Apartheid system the Western Cape received a 'disproportionately high subsidy' as a result of the high number of 'White' pupils in the region (Jansen 1998, 7). As a result the Western Cape had the most favourable teacher-pupil ratio and highest per capita funding level of all the provinces.

While the Western Cape is the best resourced and usually obtains amongst the best matric results (van der Berg, 2002), the educational situation in the province is not a desirable one. Trevor Oosterwyk (Cape Argus 12 September 2003) reports only 18% of the adults in the province have matric, that almost half of all pupils drop out of school before they reach Grade 12, that only 10% of the adults have a tertiary education and that more than 21% of the adults in the province have no primary school education at all.

(a) Unusual migration patterns

The Group Areas Act created urban areas that were segregated on the basis of race and, as a result, income.[12] Subsequent to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, the new Constitution outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, religion and culture. However large economic inequalities remain and many residential areas have maintained the racial character of the Apartheid years. The well-resourced, previously exclusively White schools are obviously located in

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[12] For an analysis of the impact of the structure of Apartheid on urban location and education see Selod & Zenou (1999); (2002)

historically, and still mainly, White areas. As a result a number of authors (Hofmeyr 2000; Fataar 1997; Hoadley 1998) have identified what can be termed 'unusual pupil migration patterns'.

These 'pupil migration patterns' can be explained as follows:

> 'The dramatic changes in the composition of some schools since the opening up of the school system can broadly be described as follows. Middle class black and white students have moved to independent and privileged state schools freeing up spaces in 'boundary schools' (former Model C schools on the borders of historical group areas, which have been taken up largely by middle and lower middle class black, coloured and Indian students.' (Hoadley 1998, 2)

Hofmeyr (2000,4) adds that, 'Parents, realising the importance of education for the lives of their children, are making huge sacrifices to taxi them to schools far from where they live, often spending more on taxi costs than school fees.' Motala, Vally & Modiba (1999) found that the choice of school outside of the neighbourhood and the resultant patterns of pupil migration are relatively wide-spread throughout the system. This tendency to pupil migration is not restricted to middle-class parents and that many black, working-class parents sacrifice much to enrol their children in better resourced schools. Long journeys to and from school have a negative impact on the students. They often arrive at schools already tired and have a long journey home while other students have already reached home and are well rested. Many of the students travel using a mini-bus taxi which is a very uncomfortable mode of transport. Many of the taxis are badly maintained and are often overloaded.

It is important to remember that the well-resourced schools only represent a small proportion of schools (11,9%) and therefore will be filled very quickly. Therefore only a small number of families can benefit by enrolling in these schools. The

majority of 'black' students will be left in under-resourced[13], less successful and under-achieving schools. Hofmeyr (2000, 8) found that, 'it was also clear that the black pupils left in the African schools were from the poorest families, many of them with unemployed parents.' She further expressed the concern that 'class stratification will determine who will be left in the integrated schools and the inadequate African schools' (p9) and that an 'African underclass' would develop'. Once more it appears that those with the necessary resources benefit from school choice policies.

(b) Admissions Policies

The surplus demand and limited supply of well-resourced, successful schools identified in the preceding discussion firmly places the focus on admissions policies. Clearly schools that are perceived to give a quality education will be over-subscribed. In the researcher's experience[14] it is not uncommon to receive in excess of 600 applications for 160 Grade 8 places. Schools then select students taking into account the provisions of Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools (1998a).

There is no automatic allocation to the neighbourhood school in South Africa. All parents have to apply to schools to get a place. This means that all parents have to exercise choice, even if that choice is in the form of applying to the nearest school.

The admission policy of a public school is determined by the governing body of the school in terms of the South African Schools Act[15] (No. 84 of 1996) and must be

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[13] There is no doubt that some historically under-resourced schools have overcome the problems associated with a lack of resources but sadly this is the exception rather than the rule and the number of schools that have achieved such success remains small.

[14] This is at a school which although historically disadvantaged has obtained excellent examination results and enjoys a good reputation in the community it serves.

[15] Section 5(5)

consistent with the provisions of the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) and must 'not unfairly discriminate in any way against an applicant for admission' (Department of Education 1998a). The Admission Policy document also prohibits the administering of any test relating to the admission of a student (p.3)

The policy also makes allowance for the Head of Education, in consultation with the governing body of the school, to create feeder zones for ordinary public schools. The aim of the feeder areas, it is claimed, is to 'control the learner[16] numbers of schools and co-ordinate parental preferences.' Where feeder zones have been created preference must be given to students who live within the feeder zone (p.6), this does not imply that the student is automatically enrolled at the school or that application has to be made to the school which serves the feeder area if the parents prefer another school. Students who live outside the feeder areas may apply to any school, however, 'access to a chosen school cannot be guaranteed' (p.6). Hofmeyr (2000, 2) states that, 'The underlying principle is that public schools must be open to all children in the local area.' As is the case internationally, it will be the popular schools that are doing the choosing.

(c) Sources of Information

There are few official sources of information regarding the types of information required by parents when making a choice of schools. While the matric results are published, they are in a form which provides little information. The names of the successful candidates are published under the name of the school with a very broad indication of the quality of the pass in terms of whether the student achieved an 'A'

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[16] This is the term which the Education Department uses to describe students.

aggregate or obtained a matriculation exemption. There is no indication of the overall number of candidates per school, pass rates or average marks or aggregates of candidates.

Detailed results are available to schools. These results are usually posted on notice-boards at the schools and a summary of the results posted to parents of the school. These summaries usually include pass rates, average marks, subject distinctions and other details regarding the results which do not appear in the newspapers. In this way information regarding examination results finds its way into informal communication networks and contribute towards the 'reputation' of the school and will only be available to those who have access to these informal networks. Hoadley (1998, 11) also identifies the important role played by the 'informal local information network'. Few schools have attempted to communicate these results to the public, for example by means of advertisements, possibly due to the prohibitive cost. Where such advertisements have appeared they often contained limited information most often regarding overall pass rate and number of 'A' aggregates.

Much of the coverage of individual schools in the media is of a negative nature. These reports relate to violence, gangs, drug-abuse, lack of physical resources, physical and sexual abuse, under-qualified teachers, mismanagement, high teacher absenteeism and a general lack of professionalism.

In a more positive role the Sunday Times runs a Top 100 Schools feature since 1997. Hofmeyr (2000, 13) states that,

> 'Unlike the League Tables in the United Kingdom, the survey includes quantitative and qualitative sections and a sophisticated statistical formula that

calculates value-added elements. In addition schools are not ranked, and names are published in alphabetical order.'

A number of historically disadvantaged schools have also been identified by this survey. These schools charge fees much lower than ex-Model C schools yet have achieved a matric pass rate of above 95% and university entrance pass rate of more than 75%. This survey only provides information about 'top achieving schools' and thus is limited in its impact.

That examination results play an important role in school choice in South Africa is clear. Hoadley (1998, 1) argues that the impact of matric results not only measures the present level of success but also increases the probability of future examination success.
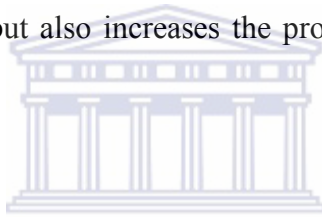
The information gathered about schools by the community are also based on visual perceptions of the schools.

> The principal at school A, as well as a number of students interviewed at both schools, drew attention to how the school was assessed within the community in terms of how many students appeared to wear the school's uniform. Another visual indicator of a school's quality in the eyes of the community rested on the times of day that students were visible outside the school gate, arriving late or leaving early.' Hoadley (1998, 12)
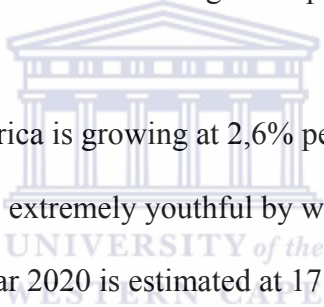
(d) Insufficient capacity / Excess demand

The education system in the Western Cape does not currently have the capacity to meet educational demand in the province. At a national level Tikly & Mabogoane (1996, 10) indicate that there were 1.8 million children 'out of school' in 1996. An article by Jeanne van der Merwe titled *Cape Town faces school crisis* in the Cape Times (January 29, 2003) indicates that the Western Cape Education Department will

have to build 300 classrooms in the next five years to meet the demand for education. This number is greater than the total number of classrooms built over the last seven years. The greatest shortage of classrooms occurs in the poorest areas including informal settlements. There is thus excess demand. Schools will therefore not be faced with a reduced enrolment but rather a change in the nature of the enrolment. The assumption that 'less successful' schools would be forced to improve because of reduced enrolment figures, reduced funding and the threat of closure may not apply. What will change is the nature of the intake and as Hoadley (1998) indicates, the nature of the intake impacts on the ability to achieve academic success.

The extent of this increasing demand resulting from population growth is illustrated by the following:

a) The population of South Africa is growing at 2,6% per annum (COSATU 1992:4)

b) South Africa's population is extremely youthful by world standards.

c) School enrolment by the year 2020 is estimated at 17 million (Unterhalter, Wolpe & Botha 1991:98).

These figures have added significance if it is taken into account that education in South Africa is already under pressure to meet the existing demand for education. A further factor contributing to the increased demand is that, because of the higher prosperity levels in the Western Cape, migration of families from other provinces seeking work is also occurring. There is an estimated annual average inflow, to the Western Cape, of 48 000 families from the Eastern Cape alone (van der Merwe, 2003).

Hoadley (1998,3) insightfully summarises School Choice in South Africa as follows:

> 'In the South African context school choice is bound up in class (and race) and locality, and is largely informed by the material environments which constitute and constrain the lives and opportunities of families.'

Hofmeyr (2000,18) perhaps best summarises the situation where she states that, 'The key issue is to what extent the negative 'push' factors can be limited by improving public school quality on a large scale.'

2.8 What process is involved in choosing a high school?

There is an extensive body of research pertaining to consumer behaviour and decision-making. At this point it will be useful to examine the different approaches developed relating to the types of decisions that consumers make.
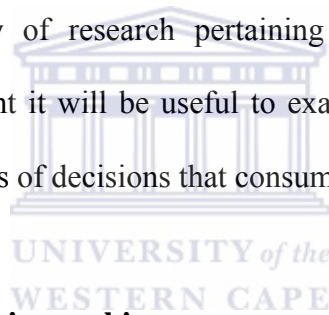
2.8.1 School choice as a decision-making process

The choice of school could be described as a medium to high involvement due to the large financial commitment and long-term nature of the decision (Hawkins, Neal & Questor, 1999). As illustrated in chapter one the financial, social, emotional and educational consequences of the choice of school are important.

As Schneider & Buckley (2002, 16) point out 'schools are complex, multifaceted organizations, and parents' preferences over the many different things that schools do are correspondingly complicated.' Parents will have to weigh up the perceived benefits relating to academic performance, quality of teaching, smaller classes and the availability of greater educational, sporting and cultural facilities and opportunities

against the higher costs, in terms of time and money, and possible social and emotional costs.

2.8.2 Consumer decision-making models – a general approach to consumer decision making

(a) Differing views of consumers

The literature identifies a number of models that explain consumer decision-making in markedly different ways. These models broadly define a framework within which consumer decision-making occurs. The four approaches most commonly identified are economic man, passive man, cognitive man and emotional man.

In theoretical economics the consumer is often portrayed as economic man i.e. one who makes rational decisions. To behave rationally, in an economic sense, consumers would have to have complete knowledge of all the available products on the market. Furthermore they would have to be able to rank each of the products in terms of its various characteristics and would then be able to select the one best alternative. Schiffman & Kanuk (1991, 551) argue that the economic man model is unrealistic for a number of reasons. These reasons include the fact that people are limited by their existing habits, skills and reflexes, their existing values and goals and by the extent of their knowledge. The economic model of man is often described as being too idealistic and simplistic.

The passive model envisages the consumer as being submissive to the self-serving and promotional efforts of marketers. Consumers are perceived as impulsive and

irrational purchasers. This approach is limited by its assumption that the consumer plays little role in the information gathering and decision-making processes.

The cognitive model depicts the consumer as a thinking problem solver. Linked to the process of choice is the concept of risk. By means of effective problem-solving the consumer seeks to reduce the perceived risk inherent in the choice process. Instead of attempting to acquire all information about all alternatives, as proposed in the economic model, the cognitive model posits that consumers will cease their information gathering efforts when they perceive that they have obtained 'sufficient information' about some of the available alternatives. Consumers often develop short-cut decision rules (heuristics) to ease the decision-making process. Realising that they often suffer from information overload consumers seek ways to simplify the process.(Schiffman & Kanuk 1991, 553) .
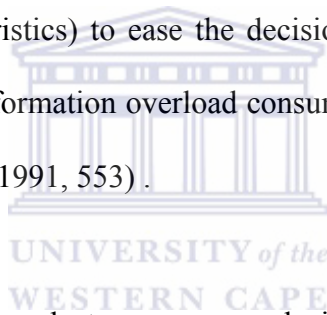
Emotional man: This approach to consumer decision making recognises that sometimes consumers associate deep feelings with certain possessions or purchases. When a consumer makes an emotional purchase, less emphasis is placed on obtaining repurchase information but rather more emphasis is placed on current mood and feelings. While this approach is appropriate for certain commodity purchases it is of little importance in the choice of schools.

<u>(b) A general model</u>

The consumer decision-making process has the following generally identified stages

(Schiffman & Kanuk 1991, 557; Williams 1982, 28)

- Need perception / recognition
- Information search
- Evaluation
- Decision making
- Action
- Post purchase evaluation

These stages correspond to the key issues identified in this study.

(c) Consumer decision-making models in education

Hemsley-Brown & Foskett (2001) propose a model for choice and decision-making in educational markets. They identify a number of important themes which they state 'weave together both the process and the outcomes of decision making (p.2). These themes are:

- The role of the family in choice
- The social context of choice
- Institutional context i.e. the role of teachers, schools and colleges in shaping choice
- The primacy of academic pathways in choice
- The importance of perceptions and images
- The psychological dimensions of the development, reinforcement and protection of self-image
- The role of failure, defaulting and dissonance in choice; rationality and sub-rationality in choice
- The tensions between stability and instability of choice outcomes.

They term the model the FOUR C's Model where the C's represent Context, Choice Influences, Choosers and Choice and that these components interact in the following way:
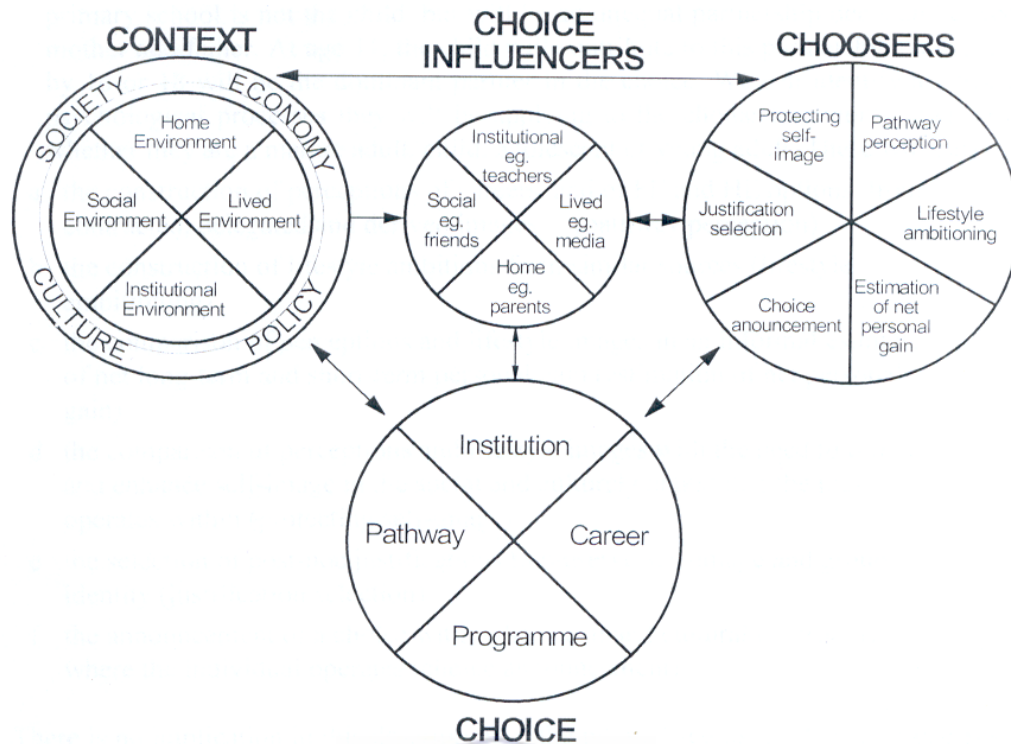
Figure 1: Hemsley-Brown and Foskett Model of School Choice
Source: Hemsley-Brown & Foskett 2001, 8

The components are explained as follows:

Context: The chooser functions within a context that is defined by aspects of their individual lives. The context provides the passive backdrop to choice. It comprises of people, processes, culture and values of the choosers which contribute to the whole environment of choice.

Choice Influencers: The context does not only provide a passive background but also explicit influencers in choice. These are represented in the model as Choice Influencers. Hemsley-Brown & Foskett (2001,8) state that they act 'as an important intervening filter on the perceptions of the environment that an individual chooser may have'. Choice influences could be people who assist the individual chooser in interpreting their environment, experiences and preferences for choice.

Chooser: The concept 'chooser' has been deliberately chosen to indicate that at different stages and under differing circumstances different people are choosers. The authors indicate that the process of choice is not necessarily 'rational and sequential' and that the process not need not be a positive one i.e. the decision is often to reject a particular school.

Choice: The result of the interaction of context, choice influencer and chooser is Choice. It is emphasised that Choice interacts with the other components and is therefore not 'fixed or irrevocable'.

This model reinforces the idea that school choice is a complex and dynamic issue where the experiences, values and perceptions of individuals interact with the social-economic and cultural context within the confines of applicable educational policies.
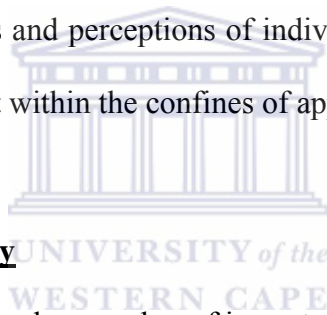
2.9 Implications for the study

The review of the research reveals a number of important implications for the study:

- School choice policy forms a framework within which school choice occurs, it does not explain how and why parents choose. As Schneider & Buckley 2002, 9) argue, 'We should note that the evidence of preferences based on actual behaviour is constrained by the rules governing choice'.

- Competition has existed in many educational systems for many years (Plank & Sykes 1999, 393). As Walford (1996, 7) argues, "All schools have been pushed into a situation more resembling the competitive market'. The key issue involves the following questions. "Should greater competition be encouraged?" and "What role should competition play?"

- The State still has an important role to play. Taylor (2001) states that 'It is often assumed that the introduction of increased school choice and market-based reforms would lead to a decreased role for the State in education'. This may, however, not be the case. It may mean that the role of the State has changed from one of providing education to one of regulation (Henig 1994). Do school choice programmes allow the state to abdicate its responsibility to provide quality education for all its citizens? Geoffrey Walford (1996, 7) states that claims of aiming for greater efficiency have 'actually masked declining government funding for schools'. In a similar vein Plank & Sykes (1999, 413) state that 'the current enthusiasm for educational choice strikes us as an instance of a broader effort to shift responsibility for addressing deeply-rooted social and economic problems out of the public sphere.' 'It is also a strategy to avoid the obligation to confront the difficult issues associated with poverty and inequality by leaving the "solution" of these problems to the market. 'Considered in terms of educational policy, choice thus denies (and diminishes) the capacity of the state to address these issues, and promises to resolve them through the operation of the market without the need for sacrifice or structural change in the prevailing opportunity structure.' (Plank & Sykes 1999, 413).

- The impact of market based reforms will be determined by the specific design of the reform, the system it replaces and the social, economic and political environment .

- Much of the debate and empirical evidence relating to school choice is located within a First World context (Tikly & Mabogoane 1996; Kitaev, 1999). This context includes stable or declining population growth rates, a resultant surplus

capacity in the education system and schools which are relatively well-resourced. The debate needs to be expanded to the context of developing countries where there is excess demand for education due to high population growth rates, relatively youthful populations, great imbalances in terms of physical resources and relatively low levels of physical and human resources.

- Market-based reforms and competition may have their greatest impact where, as Ladd (2002) puts it, the playing fields are level and schools have the capacity to respond to the preferences of parents and the educational offerings of other schools. It may be that competition will encourage those schools who have the capacity to change to improve while those schools which do not have the capacity to adapt to meet the preferences will be relatively unaffected by market based reforms. Increased school quality may therefore be a prerequisite for effective competition rather than a result of it. The greatest benefit of choice may be to schools that have already attained high levels of success.

- If it is, as Plank & Sykes (2003, xv) state, that 'school choice is here to stay' then school choice programmes must be developed in such a way that the negative effects of imperfections inherent in educational quasi-markets on quality and equity can be eliminated. We must then determine under what conditions market reforms and increased competition will render the advantages that the proponents envisage.

- Various studies have found that educational markets develop a hierarchical structure and that competition usually occurs between schools on the same level within the hierarchy. This mirrors what happens in commodity markets.

- It has long been argued that parents see education as a means of upward social mobility, school choice perhaps represents a 'short-cut' i.e. build up social

networks with those at school is another reason for selecting schools with higher SES. Groundwater-Smith (2001,2) explains this phenomenon by stating that parents choose schools with students having higher SES motivated by possible gains in 'cultural capital' rather than 'cognitive attainment'.

- Many studies have used surveys that have produced a 'wish-list' of desirable characteristics that 'successful' schools should possess. Actual decision-making behaviour must be examined to determine those factors that were actually considered and what information was available to parents on which to make those judgements.

CHAPTER 3 … RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the decision-making process involved when families choose high schools. It will attempt to move beyond a simple identification and ranking of factors that are considered when choosing high schools and will seek to examine the actual process, sources of information and social dynamics involved in the process of choosing.

The term case study as applied in this study uses the interpretation of Simons (Burgess 1989:116) where she states

> 'Case study is not a method as is sometimes assumed, but a focus of study, whether that focus be a single classroom, institution of system. The essential feature is the case.'

With regard to the choice of methods she has the following to say,

> 'Choice of methods is related to the purpose of the study and the nature of the case. A wide range of methods (both quantitative and qualitative) may be utilized if they facilitate an understanding of the case.'

Many authors have indicated that when answering surveys, parents are often not 'up-front' about their reasons for choosing (or not choosing) a school. In this regard this study will not only examine the reasons that parents give for choosing a particular school but also the reasons for not choosing schools.

The purpose is to identify the underlying reasons and processes involved in the school choice process. Given the complexities involved in the decision-making process it

was decided to use a mix of both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Both questionnaires and interviews will be used to provide both width and depth of data.

The timing of the collection of data plays an important role. It was decided to collect the data, from the parents of Grade 7 students[17], during the period May-June by which time application had been made to high schools but before schools had notified the successful applicants. The rationale behind the timing of the data collection was to avoid a situation where acceptance at certain schools would impact on the parents' perceptions of their decision-making process and the factors they considered important.

3.2 The Characteristics of the Market to be Studied

In South Africa there is no automatic allocation of students to schools. Parents have to apply to schools of their choice and schools will then determine the who successful applicants are. Schools may determine their own admission criteria as long as they are not in contravention of the non-discriminatory requirements of the South African Schools Act.

The geographical area used in the study is located in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. This area was selected due to the proximity of working class and middle class areas and areas which housed different groups identified by the Group Areas Act.

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[17] Grade 7 is the final year of primary school.

Selected data appears below to give an indication of the character of the various suburbs included in the study.

Suburb	Population	Households	Annual Household Income (R)	Monthly per capita income (R)
Parkwood	11732	2338	21171	478
Fairways	3369	870	77496	1915
Plumstead	19534	7137	56746	2147
Southfield	3604	1046	66399	1707
Wynberg	15036	4903	47311	1734

Table 5: Suburban Demographics

Parkwood is essentially a working-class suburb. Housing consists of a mix of free standing, privately owned homes and Council-owned flats. It is separated by a road from Fairways which was considered one of the premier areas for 'Coloureds' under the Apartheid regime. The figures for Wynberg are somewhat misleading as it is a divided suburb. The area above the railway tracks (Wynberg Upper) is an extremely affluent suburb classified as 'White' under the Group Areas Act while the area below the railway line was classified as 'Coloured' and was essentially middle-class. With the democratisation of the South African society the demographics of Plumstead have changed from a Lower middle-class 'White' suburb to a Upper middle-class integrated[18] area.

Partly due to the policy under the Apartheid system of separate schools for the different 'race' groups, families in this area potentially have a choice of a large number of high schools. These schools reflect the deep-rooted inequalities which were created under the Apartheid regime. Although there are various programmes aimed at redressing these inequalities, they still exist. Human and physical resources

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[18] Integration of residential areas is essentially a one directional process. 'Blacks' moving to 'Coloured' areas and 'Coloureds' to 'White' areas but little or not 'Whites' moving to areas previously designated for other 'races.

are unevenly distributed. The schools differ substantially in terms of both the quality and availability of these resources.

These differences can be illustrated as follows:

School	Department under Apartheid Education	% of school temporary / prefabricated structures	Hall	Sports Facilities	Dedicated / properly equipped science labs	Additional Teachers Employed
School A	HOR	40%	Yes	One small field	No	6
School B	HOR	50%	Yes	One medium sized field	No	6
School C	HOR	Entire school	Yes	None	No	1
School D	CED	<5%	Yes	Multiple fields, swimming pool, squash courts, sports hall, tennis courts	Yes	16
School E	CED	0%	Yes	Large grounds, tennis courts	Yes	12
School F	CED	0%	Yes	Multiple fields, swimming pool, squash courts, sports hall, tennis courts	Yes	15

Table 6: Human and Physical Resources[19]

While the WCED has attempted redress by reducing the number of teachers allocated to 'rich' schools and reallocating these posts to 'poor' schools, this has only resulted in the schools gaining two or three additional teachers. Where schools are able to employ many additional teachers, class sizes will be smaller for example 30 per in grade 8 (School D) as opposed to 45 per class at School B.

The South African Schools Act gives the school the right, in consultation with parents, to charge school fees. These fees vary greatly as illustrated in the table below. Some schools provide textbooks while others do not. There is also a wide variation in uniform costs, where some schools have a very basic uniform costing

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[19] Data for tables 2 and 3 collected from information, visits and informal discussions with staff at the schools.

about R800 while others have additional uniform items such as blazers, tog bags, sports togs which can increase the uniform costs to in excess of R1500.

Cost of Education

School	Annual Fees	School provides textbooks[20]	Uniform	Total Cost
School A	R2100	Yes	R800	R2900
School B	R2100	Yes	R800	R2900
School C	R900	Yes	R800	R1800
School D	R10 500	No	R1700	R14 000
School E	R4 200	No	R1200	R6 200
School F	R13 200	No	R2000	R16 000

Table 7: Cost of Schooling

Parents also have to take transport costs into consideration. Most of the more prestigious schools are located in upmarket suburbs (due to the Group Areas Act even some of the schools which were administered by the House of Representatives are located in areas which are high income areas and these schools, in fact, draw no students from their immediate surroundings). Most of the schools are accessible by means of public transport and at least two of the schools have contracted bus companies to transports students to and from school. Transport costs are between R30 and R60 per week.

3. Permission to Conduct the Study

Once permission was granted by the Education Department, the principals of individual schools were approached and access to the schools was negotiated.

4. Selection of Schools

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the primary schools. Since the purpose of the stud was to include families from diverse socio-economic

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[20] Approximate cost of textbooks: R800 (as at January 2005)

circumstances, this sampling strategy was deemed suitable (Mouly 1970:190). Six primary schools were selected. Two were located within a working class residential area and served mainly working class families. Both of these schools were previously administered by the House of Representatives[21] (HOR) and were placed in the lower poverty quintiles[22] i.e. served communities with higher levels of poverty. A further two schools were located in a more affluent, middle class neighbourhood and served mainly middle class families. Both of these schools were previously administered by the House of Representatives and were placed in the higher quintiles i.e. served communities with lower levels of poverty. The schools previously administered by the HOR are located in areas designated as 'Coloured' under the Group Areas Act.

The final two primary schools are located in the previously designated 'White' area. This area is more affluent than the other two areas. While the first two areas have maintained their demographics from the Apartheid era, this area has shown a marked change in its demographics. These schools were placed in the 'least poor' quintile i.e. serving communities with the lowest incidence of poverty.

5. Questionnaire

a. Pilot study

The questionnaire was piloted among a group of parents not associated with the schools in the study in order to refine the instrument.

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[21] The House of Representatives was responsible for 'Coloured' Education. While this classification remains distasteful to the researcher the impact of the uneven and biased funding of education under the Apartheid system is still evident today.
[22] See page 64 for an explanation of the poverty quintiles.

b. Sampling procedure

Fifty-five Grade 7 students were selected from each school using an alphabetical list and randomly generated numbers.

c. Structure[23]

The questionnaire consisted of six questions and a biographical data section. The six questions were:

(i) Which high schools were considered by parents
Parents had to list the high schools which they considered sending their children to

(ii) Which high schools parents applied to
Parents had to list the high schools that they applied to

(iii) Which school was the first choice school
Parents had to list their first choice of high school

(iv) The most important reasons for selecting the school in (iii)
Parents had to list the most important reasons for selecting the school in question (iii)

(v) The importance of various sources of information
Parents had to rate sources of information that they had used in their decision-making process. These sources could be rated as being not important, important or very important. Provision was also made to indicate that the source was not used in the decision-making process.

(vi) The role played by various family members in the decision-making process

(vii) When the process began

The biographical data section had four sections namely
(i) whether the child was the first child attending high school
(ii) high school attended by the parent
(iii) high school attended by the parent's spouse
(iv) Relationship of respondent to child

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[23] See appendix A

d. Procedure

Questionnaires were sent home with students to be completed by parents and returned to the school. The researcher then collected the completed questionnaires from the school and sent an additional copy to those parents who had not returned the questionnaire.

e. Analysis

The various questions were analysed in the following ways:

(i) Which high schools were considered by parents

This question was used to determine the number of schools that parents considered, as well as, whether the schools considered shared common characteristics e.g. historical classification (Ex-Model C, HOR, etc). For the first purpose the mean would be determined while for the second purpose schools would be grouped according to their historical Apartheid classification and patterns would be identified.

(ii) Which high schools parents applied to

This question would be analysed in the same way as question (i). In addition differences between the responses to (i) and (ii) would be analysed.

(iii) Which school was the first choice school

(iv) The most important reasons for selecting the school in (iii)

(v) The importance of various sources of information

(vi) The role played by various family members in the decision-making process

Differences between the various categories were analysed by means of chi square[24].

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[24] Chi square is used to compare frequencies between groups. It can be used to determine if differences are statistically significant or simply due to chance.

6. Interviews

6.1 Purpose

The purpose of the interviews is to examine the processes underlying the choice process. It involves delving more deeply into the reasons, sources of data and choice revealed by the questionnaire.

6.2 Sampling strategy

A random sample was selected from the respondents who had indicated that they were willing to be interviewed and who were choosing a high school for the first time. Six parents were selected from each school. Therefore a total of 36 interviews were conducted.

6.3 Procedure

The interviews were of a semi-structured nature. The themes examined arise out of the questionnaire data and dealt with three key issues:

i) the first issue related to the 'most important' sources of information identified by families in the responses in the questionnaires. These sources were also the most complex of the sources. The questions posed were

a) Many parents indicated that a personal visit to a school was an important source of information when choosing a high school

    1. How important do you consider a personal visit to the school in gathering information about the school?

    2. When you visit a school what do you look for?

    3. How many schools did you visit?

b) Many parents indicated that observing student / learner behaviour outside the school e.g. on the way to and from school was an important source of information.

    1. How important do you consider the observation of student / learner behaviour outside of the school?

    2. What sort of things do you look for when observing student behaviour?

c) Many of the parents who filled in the questionnaire said that the reputation of the school was an important source of information.

    1. How important do you consider the reputation of the school in your choice of high school?

    2. What sort of information do you think reputation refers to? / What do you understand by the term 'reputation'?

ii) the second issue related to school fees and the extent to which school fees impacted on the extent of choice. The two questions that were posed were

a) What role did school fees and the cost of schooling play in your choice of high school and
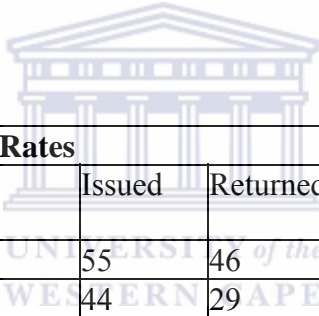
b) Were certain schools not considered because of the high cost associated with a child attending that school.

Each interview lasted between 25 and 50 minutes. Interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed.

CHAPTER 4 … ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

4.1 Response rates

Where schools had more than fifty-five Grade 7 learners, fifty-five learners were randomly selected and questionnaires were issued to their parents. If schools had fewer than fifty-five learners in Grade 7, questionnaires were issued to the parents of all Grade 7 learners. Questionnaires were issued to the schools and the schools then issued the questionnaires to the randomly selected learners. The learners then gave the questionnaires to their parents to complete. The completed questionnaires were returned to the school. Additional questionnaires were issued to schools, in case learners misplaced the original questionnaire. The following response rates were obtained:

Response Rates			
School	Issued	Returned	Response Rate
School A	55	46	83.64
School B	44	29	65.91
School C	55	47	85.45
School D	55	48	87.27
School E	55	48	87.27
School F	32	22	68.75
Totals	296	240	81.08

Table 8: Response Rates

4.2 Characteristics of the Respondents

Mothers completed the questionnaires in the majority (73.33%) of the cases, while fathers completed 14,58% of the questionnaires. Mothers and fathers completed the questionnaires jointly in 7.92% of the cases. In only a small percentage (4.17%) of the cases was the questionnaire completed by someone other than the parents.

Of the two hundred and forty questionnaires returned, 75 were from schools previously administered by the HOR[25] located in working class areas and serving working class communities, 95 from ex-Model C[26] primary schools and 70 from primary school previously administered by the HOR but located in middle-class areas and serving more affluent middle-class communities.
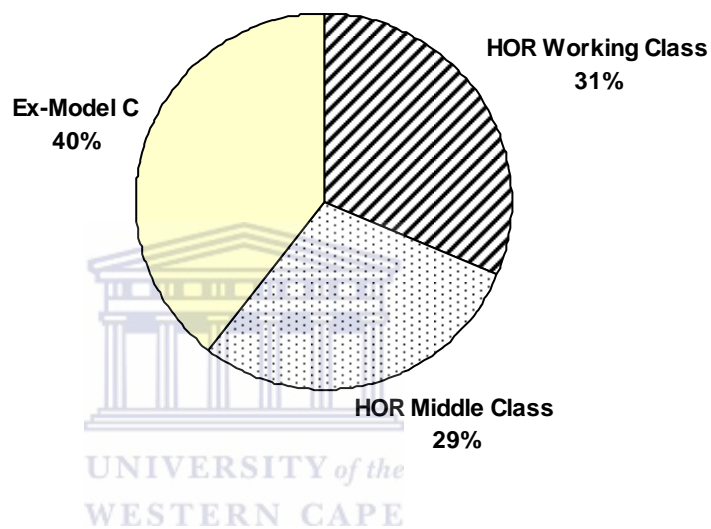
<div align="right">**Figure 2: Respondents per school type**</div>

The schools varied in size from 350 learners to 980 learners.

In slightly more than half (54.39%) of the cases the learners, who were going to high school the following year, were the first child in the family going to high school. Almost 70% (164 out of 237) of the families resided within 5km of the primary

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[25] Responsible for 'Coloured' education under the Apartheid system.
[26] Model C schools were formally state schools which converted to a state aided school. From April 1992, 96% of white state schools became Model C schools and their fixed property and equipment was given to the governing body of each school. Model C schools could set their own admissions requirements and these formally White schools admitted learners of other those classified as White under the Apartheid system.

school that the child attended. Most (60.25%) of the children for whom a high school was to be selected were female.

4.3 Analysis of data

Aggregate data was analysed to explore the process of choice but differences between different groups were also analysed. Differences in gender, SES, primary school attended and family structure were analysed. These differences would mainly be analysed by means of Chi-square.

4.4 Who makes the choice of high school?

There are two issues which need to be resolved. Firstly which families are exercising choice and who within the family chooses?

4.4.1 Which families choose?

This question is often posed as a means of determining the scope and impact of choice programmes. Where there is no automatic allocation of learners to schools, families are deemed to have exercised choice. In the South African context, all parents have to choose a high school for their children. There is no automatic allocation of learners to a particular high school although the Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools (1998) stipulates that the 'nearest' high school has to accept the learner if they apply to that school, however they are not compelled to apply to the nearest school. Thus all families have to choose. This still gives the more affluent an advantage as the most prestigious, best resources and academically most successful high schools are located in more affluent areas. The families residing in these affluent areas will thus have first choice at these schools. In fact, their children must be accepted if they apply to the school.

4.4.2 Who within the family chooses?

Choice is thus a wide spread phenomenon and it is important to understand how and why certain high schools are chosen and others not. The role of family members in the decision making process must be examined. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of the various family members in the decision-making process on a 3-point Likert-scale. In the case of a single parent family, respondents were asked to write not applicable (NA) next to the appropriate family member.

Family Member	Not Important	Important	Very Important
Mother			
Father			
Child			
Other (please name)			
Other (please name)			

Research (Lawley *et al*(2001), David (1994) and Aitchison (2002)) suggested that mothers play the dominant role in the choice of schools and that respondents tended to over-emphasize their own role in the decision-making process. Neither of these findings were confirmed by the data.

4.4.3 Who makes the decision?

The original thrust of the research was to determine the process of parental choice, how and why parents chose high schools for their children. The data suggests that the choice in fact is a family choice rather than only a parental one and that parents and children are actively involved in the decision-making process. Approximately 92% of

the respondents indicated that the choice of a high school was a joint one i.e. that both the child and the parents were involved in the decision-making process. This includes cases of single parent families where both the child and the parent were involved.

	Joint Decision	Not a Joint Decision	Missing Cases	Total
School A	42	3	1	46
School B	17	10	2	29
School C	46	2	0	48
School D	48	0	0	48
School E	43	3	1	47
School F	20	2	0	22
Total	216 (91.52%)	20 (8.47%)	4	240

Table 9: Type of decision

The fact that the decision is a joint one is indicative of the importance families attach to the choice of high school. There are still large differences in terms of resources, academic success, status, safety and discipline between high schools. There are important consequences both educational and social attached to the choice of high school. Furthermore, the advantages attached to enrolment at the most successful and well-resourced schools must be weighed up against the higher cost of education at these schools. High schools in South Africa are allowed, in terms of the SA Schools Act (1996), to charge school fees[27]. In the selected area high school fees varied from R400 p.a. to R12500 p.a. As indicated in Chapter 2, the financial implications of school choice for parents are not limited only to school fees but can also extend to type and associated cost of school uniforms, and in some cases, providing their children with text-books[28]. It could be argued that parents have a 'financial interest' in the choice of high school.

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[27] The DOE has introduced the concept of 'no-fee' schools whereby schools serving the poorest families will not charge school fees but will receive additional funding from the Department.
[28] Strangely it is the Ex-HOR schools, which generally charge much lower fees, that provide free text-books. This makes the cost differential between schools even bigger.

It can be concluded that the choice of high schools is made by families rather than by parents. This conclusion is supported by Gorard (1997) and Elliot(1981).
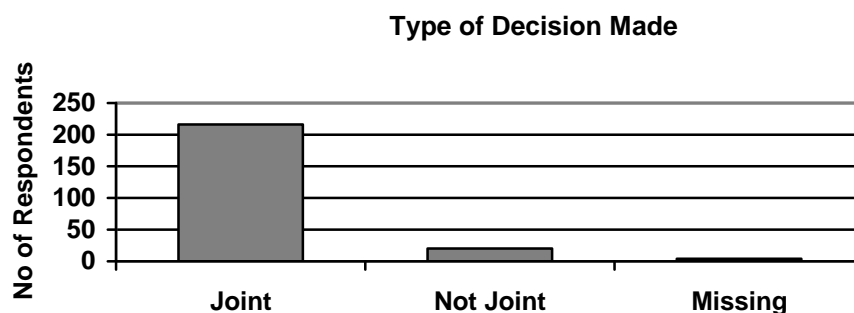
Type of Decision Made

It is interesting to note that in working-class families the decision was less likely to be a joint one than in middle-class families.

Joint decision per social class

	Joint	Not Joint	Total
working-class middle-class	59 157	13 7	72 164
Chi Square = 12.2619	DF 1	$p \leq 0.001$	

Table 10: Type of decision per social class

These differences can be attributed to:

(i) the different socio-economic circumstances where many families living in that they have a situation where, while they are not single parent families such a situation is reflected with one parent, often the father living and working in a different area.

(ii) a more traditional definition of gender roles

(iii) longer working hours, more time spent travelling and working conditions associated with less skilled work.

4.4.4 Importance of the family members

While parents and children appear to be involved in the vast majority of choices, one must also examine the importance of each role-player in the decision-making process. In each of the cases the relationship between the rankings of the various role-players was determined. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of the various family members in the choice of high school. In almost two-thirds (65.25%) of the cases respondents indicated that the parents and child had equally important roles[29]. The only other decision-making pattern that obtained more than 10% of the responses was where the parents jointly played a more important role than the child.

Roleplayers

School	Equal	Child	Mother	Father	Mother Child	Father Child	Mother Father	Missing Cases	Total
School A	23	7	3	0	2	0	10	1	46
School B	14	1	4	1	2	1	4	2	29
School C	33	2	1	0	4	2	6	0	48
School D	35	1	1	0	4	0	7	0	48
School E	33	4	2	1	1	2	4	0	47
School F	16	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	22
Totals	154	16	14	1	11	4	31	4	240
%	65.25	6.78	5.93	0.42	4.66	1.69	13.14		

Table 11: Roles played by family members
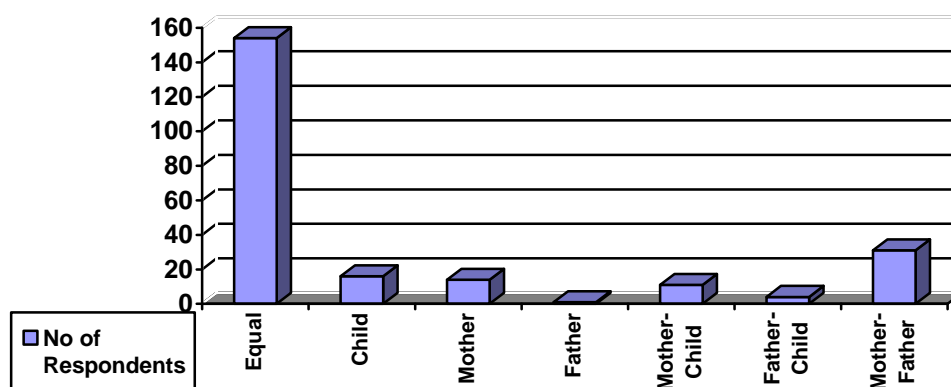
Figure 4: Roles played by family members

A number of families (64 out of 227) also involved other people in the decision-making process. These included grandparents, siblings of the learner in Grade 7,

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[29] This includes single parent families where the child and parent had equally important roles.

community and/or religious leaders and, in a few cases, employers. Generally where a person other than the child or parent was involved, the contribution of that person was rated as being important or very important by the respondents.

As would be expected single parent families were more likely to involve other people, outside the immediate family, in the decision-making process.

	Others involved	Only immediate family involved	Total
Single Parent	12	7	19
Both Parents	52	163	215
Chi Square = 13.3438	DF 1	p ≤ 0.001	

Table 12: Involvement of non-family members

This is indicative of the importance that is attached to the choice of high school. The financial, social and educational consequences are of such a nature that single parents may feel that they need to involve other people in the decision-making process.
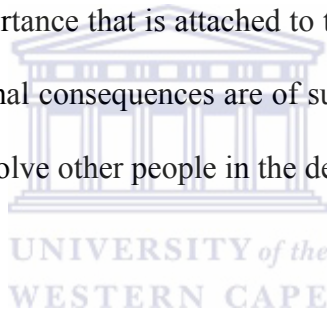
4.5 When is the choice made?

The question as to when the choice of high school is made is one about which little research has been conducted.

The following question was posed in the questionnaire.

When did you <u>seriously</u> begin the process of finding out about and choosing a high school for your child currently in Grade 7?

When your child was in Grade 7	
When your child was in Grade 6	
When your child was in Grade 5	
Before your child was in Grade 5	

The following responses were obtained.

When seriously begin process						
School	Grade7	Grade6	Grade5	Before Grade5	Missing Cases	Total Cases
School A	16	22	4	3	1	46
School B	14	10	3	2	0	29
School C	14	28	3	3	0	48
School D	13	25	6	4	0	48
School E	8	29	2	7	1	47
School F	5	11	3	3	0	22
Totals	70	125	21	22	2	240
%	29.17	52.08	8.75	9.17	0.83	

Table 13: When choice process began
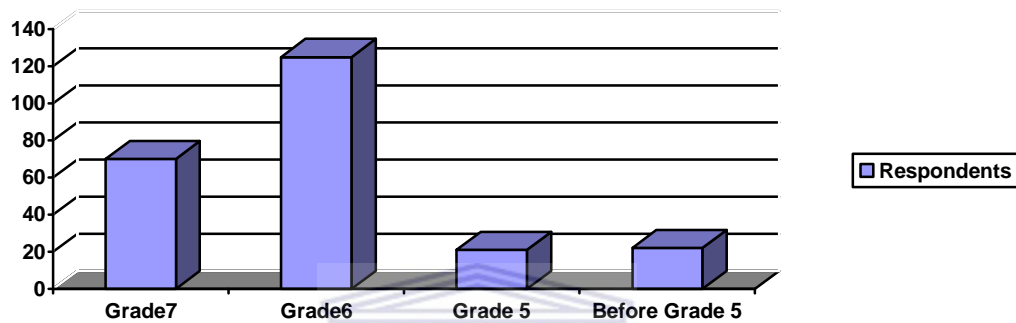
Figure 5: When choice process began

More than half (52.08%) of the respondents indicated that they started thinking seriously about the choice of high school in Grade 6. Only 18.75% of the respondents seriously considered the choice of high school before Grade 6. This finding confirms the findings of Lawley *et al.* (2001) and Smedley (1995). Lawley, however, also found that 30 percent of the respondents had made a choice of high school by the time the child had finished Grade One. This early selection of high schools was not confirmed by this study as less than 10% of the families had begun the process of choosing a high school before Grade 5.

Almost 30% of the respondents indicated that they seriously considered the choice of high school in Grade 7. This has serious implications for the choice of high school as a number of high schools especially the more attractive and popular ones have closing dates for applications as early as mid-March.

The data indicate that working-class families were more likely than middle-class families attending primary schools previously administered by the House of Representatives to start seriously considering the choice of high school in Grade 7.

	Before Grade 7	Grade 7	Total
working-class	47	30	77
middle-class ex-HOR	56	13	69
Chi square = 7.09	DF 1	$p \leq 0.01$	

Table14: Timing of school choice by school type

This is most likely the result of working-class families having a smaller evoked set[30], considering fewer schools and applying to fewer schools. They are also more likely to attend the nearest high school. They may perceive their decision-making process as being a relatively simple one with few options and therefore do not see the need to start the decision-making process at an early stage. Middle-class parents, attending primary schools previously administered by the HOR, are more like to start the search for high schools before Grade 7 as they consider a wide choice of high schools as they are more likely to consider ex-Model C schools as well as high schools previously administered by the HOR. The ex-Model C schools generally have closing dates (for applications) very early in the year, compelling families to initiate the decision-making process at an early stage. Parents thus see their decision-making process as being more complex with more alternatives and thus requiring more time.

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[30] The 'evoked set' is a concept used in consumer behaviour indicating the group of products that consumers include in the decision-making process.

4.6 Sources of Information

4.6.1 Which sources of information are used to inform the choice of high school?

A key issue in the choice of high schools involves information. What information families need, what information they have access to and which sources are used to acquire the necessary information are important factors influencing the decision-making process.

A number of sources of information, identified from the literature, were listed and respondents were asked to indicate whether they had used that source in their decision-making process and also to rate the sources as being *not important*, *important* or *very important*. Space was provided for them to list other sources of information that they had used.

4.6.2 How many sources used?

The sources used by parents to inform the choice of high school are numerous and varied. Parents used on average seven (mean = 7.14) sources of information although there was a high degree of variation (variance =6.78) amongst respondents.
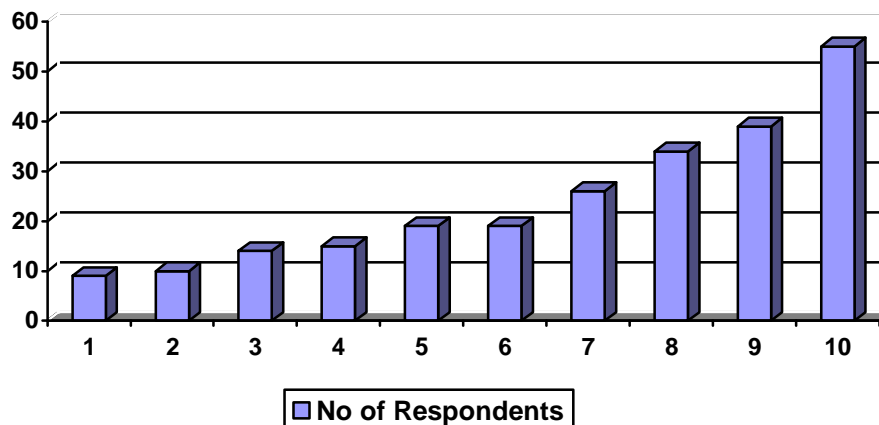
Figure 6: Number of sources used

As would be expected there was a significant difference between the number of sources used by parents of a first child in the family going to high school and parents where older siblings were already attending or had attended high school. Parents who had children going to high school for the first time used more sources of information than parents who had previous experience of choosing high schools.
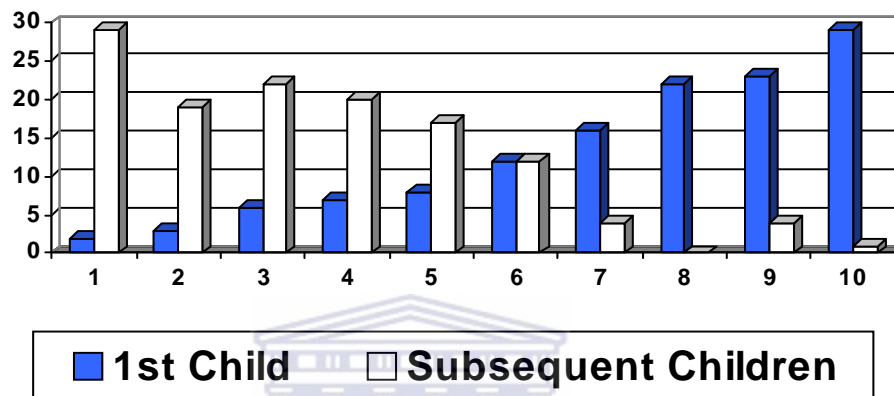
Figure 7: Sources used – First child and subsequent children

These differences can be explained in two ways. Firstly where parents had undergone the decision-making process previously, certain information regarding schools is already known and therefore parents do not need to consult all the sources again. It could also be the case that during the decision-making process for the second or subsequent child, parents due to their experience, rate certain sources as being less important and therefore do not consult those sources.

4.6.3 How many sources were rated as being very important?

Parents rated three (mean = 3.28) sources of information as being very important. Once again there was a high degree of variation amongst respondents (variance = 5.08)
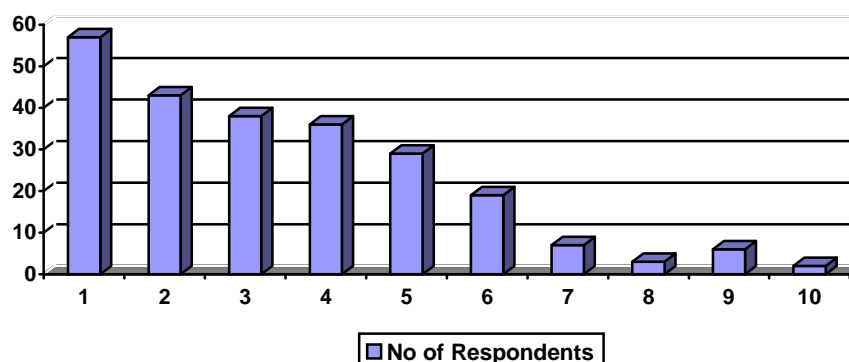
4.6.4 Analysis of individual sources used

An analysis of the most important sources of information revealed three sources considered as being very important by more than 40% of the respondents.

	Used	1 – Not Important	2 - Important	3 – Very Important
Brochure	159	12	73	74
Open Day / Visit	182	14	58	110
Observation of student behaviour	208	14	70	124
Parents of Grade 7 parents at current primary school	132	45	56	31
Parents of learners at the high school	160	31	77	52
Learners at the high school	184	19	87	78
Teachers at primary school	155	26	64	65
Learners at the primary school	153	31	70	52
General reputation in the Community	213	13	75	125
Family member attended the high school	146	29	52	65

Table 15: Analysis of individual sources

These are Open Day or Visit (46.6%), observation of student behaviour (52.5%) and general reputation in the community (52.97%). Interviews were conducted to give depth to this data. A random sample was selected from the respondents who had

indicated that they were willing to be interviewed and who were choosing a high school for the first time. Six parents were selected from each school. A total of 36 interviews were conducted.

<u>(a) Open Day or Visit</u>

Parents placed great value on a personal visit to the school. In some cases where schools did not have an open day or open evening, parents still arranged to visit the school. Some parents made a concerted effort to visit the school under 'normal conditions' to see how the school functioned. They made a decision to collect and return application forms in person rather than asking a friend or returning application forms by post. This was especially true where schools had an information meeting at the primary school. As one parent put it, 'I wanted to see for myself'.

When asked what they looked for when they visited the school a number of dimensions were mentioned. Firstly parents indicated that they could get an overall impression of the school by looking at the condition of the school. This included things such as whether the school was clean, to what degree vandalism had occurred, whether there was graffiti etc. A second area which parents looked at during their visits to schools was the aspects that school chose to feature on the walls, in display cabinets and on notice boards. This included learners' work e.g. art work, science projects as well as recognition of learner achievements in both sporting and academic spheres.

Families also evaluated how they were spoken to and how the principal and staff interacted with them at the open day as this 'will give us an idea of how they will talk

to our children'. Parents also evaluated the 'enthusiasm' of the staff during the visit. Where learners were present at the open day their behaviour and attitudes were also evaluated.

Where the parents visited schools during 'business hours' they also looked at learner behaviour and dress and how the teachers interacted with the learners. They considered how they were treated by learners and staff. Special mention was made of the role played by administrative staff i.e. secretaries and bursars.

Parents did not visit many schools, usually between one and three. These visits only occurred once families had implemented the initial process of elimination and had arrived at the set of high schools that they 'seriously considered'. A few parents indicated that they did not need to visit the schools as they 'know the schools in the area'.
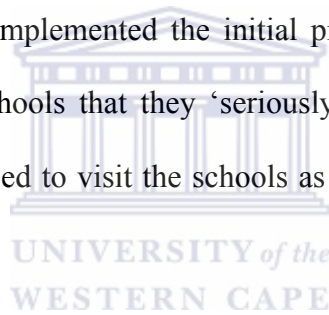
(b) Observation of Behaviour

The respondents indicated in the questionnaire that they considered the observation of learner behaviour to be an important source of information. This was confirmed in the interviews.

They observed learner behaviour to and from school, on public transport and generally within the community.

Parents indicted that they deduced many things from observing learner behaviour. They evaluated behaviour, dress and language used by learners.

Firstly they indicated that behaviour showed the learners' attitude towards the school and whether they had 'pride in the school'. The majority of the parents interviewed mentioned the way that the learners were dressed. They judged the attitude of learners towards the school by the way that the uniform was worn. Where the learner wore the uniform 'correctly' and did not wear 'other' clothing items, parents judged the school favourably and assumed that learners had 'pride in the school'. Parents also indicated that they considered uniforms to be very important as it helped them to 'identify the schools that children attended'.

Parents used observed behaviour both to include and exclude schools from the set of schools they would apply to. As indicated earlier, parents were limited in their search for information to the schools attended by learners in their neighbourhood and to the school they could observe on their way to and from work.
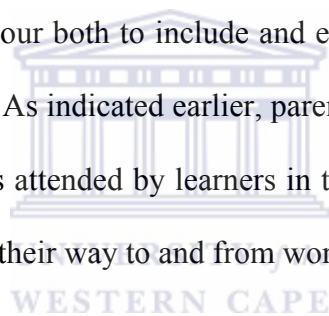
(c) Reputation in the Community

In the case of the reputation in the community there was a feeling that 'you can't fool everybody all of the time'. The information embodied in the concept 'reputation' was of a general nature dealing with whether the school was a 'good school' or whether the educators or management of the school were 'good'. In many cases, while reputation was considered to be important, there was very little specific information about the school. It was also noticeable that where people resided close to the school more specific information was known by families. Here the role of opinion leaders in the communities was highlighted. It is often the case that, as families in a community choose and attend a particular high school more and more information becomes

available about that school and that the information becomes more specific. People in the communities inject information into the various social networks they belong to and that knowledge is assimilated into the reputation of the school which exists in that particular community. Where more families have attended a particular high school the depth of information and knowledge increases.

Respondents said that while schools 'said that they did certain things', it was people who had dealings with the school 'that knew what was actually happening inside the schools'. They felt that most people wanted the same things from schools and thus they valued the judgements of others.

When asked what they understood by reputation most of the parents interviewed mentioned the same aspects namely good education, good teachers and that children were happy and that they learned there. Parents also indicated that reputation involved not hearing 'funny stories' about the school. These 'stories', parents indicated, usually related to violence or substance abuse. Another aspects mentioned by a number of interviewees was that the school was 'strict' and had 'good discipline'. As one parent put it 'reputation tells us what kind of school it is'.

An interesting observation by one of the parents was that 'reputation was built up over a long time' and 'that you know that they will be there for a long time and will continue to do the right things'. Parents however, continue to monitor developments at the school as quite a number indicated that they considered the impact of a new principal at one of the schools.

An examination of the most important sources listed above reveals the importance of the human element. Families considered sources as being important if they had made a personal judgment of the school or if such a judgement was made by people who they considered trustworthy. All of the most important sources would be more reliable and detailed if the person belonged to the social networks most closely linked to the school.

(d) Role of teachers at the primary school.

While the questionnaire responses indicate a less important role for teachers at the primary school that the learner is currently attending, anecdotal evidence suggests a more important role. When negotiating access to schools informal discussions were held with Principals and Grade 7 teachers. In all of the cases they indicated that they 'advised and guided' the learners with regard to the choice of high schools. This 'guidance and advice' was often couched in indirect terms and would be in the form of providing more information about schools that the teachers considered appropriate choices and less information about schools teachers considered to be less appropriate choices. This took the form of both 'general discussions' about 'good high schools' and individual discussions regarding individual learners' choices. Their influence was thus directed towards the learners rather than the parents, and the parents were possibly not aware of the influence of the primary school teachers on the preferences of the learners. As indicated previously the child played an important role in the decision-making process.

4.7 Reasons for choice of high school

Parents were asked to list the most important reasons for choosing their preferred high school. The most important reasons in terms of number of respondents were reputation (43%), discipline and safety (39%), academic results (39%), ease of travel (37%) and extra-murals (23%). Only 'a family member had attended the school' out of all the other reasons given was listed by more than 10% of the respondents as a reason for choosing a high school.

Reason	No of Respondents	% of Respondents
Reputation	97	43%
Discipline and Safety	87	39%
Academic Results	87	39%
Ease of Travel	84	37%
Extra-murals	52	23%

Table 16: Reasons for choice of high school

An examination of the most important factors as rated by respondents per school provided similar results.

	Ease of Travel	Discipline / Safety	Sports / Extra-murals	Academic Results	Ethos	Reputation	Family	Missing Cases
School A	46.8%	44.7%				38.3%		
School B	50.0%			29.2%		37.5%	25%	5
School C	34.8%	50.0%		52.1%		41.3%		1
School D	40.4%	31.9%	42.6%	29.8%	27.7%	51.1%		1
School E	32.6%	50.0%	32.6%	47.8%		32.6%		
School F	31.8%	57.1%		57.1%		52.4%		1

Table 17: Reasons mentioned by 25% or more of the respondents per school.

4.71. Ease of Travel

Ease of travel was mentioned by more than 30% respondents at each of the schools. And by 37% of the respondents overall. Ease of travel did not necessarily imply the nearest school or even to physical distance. Proximity to public transport as well as

transport arrangements facilitated by the school were considered to impact on the convenience of travelling to the preferred high school.

Overall fewer than 30% of the respondents indicated that their first choice of high school was the high school nearest[31] to their residence. The majority of respondents therefore indicated a willingness for their children to travel to attend high school. However, most of them were not willing to travel far. Seventy-four per cent of the respondents preferred a school within a 6km radius of their residence.

As would be expected families attending primary schools located in and serving working class communities were more likely to attend the nearest high school.

Preferred high school in terms of distance by Social Class		
	Nearest high school	School other than nearest
middle-class	36	122
working-class	33	40
Chi Square 11.98188	DF 1	p ≤ 0.001

Table 18: Distance to preferred school by social class

Working class families were also less likely to choose a high school that entailed travelling more than 6km.

Preferred high school: Ease of Travel By Social Class		
	Not Willing to Travel	Willing to Travel
middle-class	104	52
working-class	65	7
Chi Square 14.31812	DF 1	p ≤ 0.001

Table 19: Ease of travel by social class

These differences can be explained both in terms of the lack of working-class families having privately owned transport, as well as, the additional transport cost involved in

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[31] Where there was more than one high school within, for example walking distance, all the schools within walking distance were considered the 'nearest'.

using public transport. The range of high schools available to working class families in this area is often limited by distance and the cost of travelling.

4.7.2. Discipline and Safety

Discipline and safety were mentioned by slightly less than 40% of the respondents as a reason for the choice of high school. However an examination of the schools considered and applied to as well as, the interviews, reveal an even greater importance attached to these factors. Schools were not considered and did not therefore form part of the evoked set because they were not considered 'safe' by parents. This was usually because the schools did not meet the parents' expectations as far as discipline was concerned. This was often a reason for not applying to the nearest high school. The set of schools which families applied to had already met the requirements relating to discipline and safety.
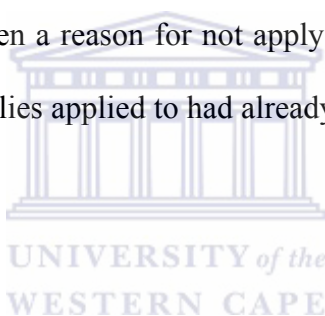
4.7.3. Reputation

Reputation was seen as both a source of information, as well as, a reason for choosing a high school. Families placed great importance on the 'reputation' of the school. If the school had a 'good' reputation, families would consider such a school favourably. They reasoned that reputation is built up over a period of time and that as it was the accumulation of knowledge from various sources by various individuals it was a trustworthy indicator of school quality.

4.7.4. Academic Results

While some respondents mentioned academic results 'in general' and 'for the whole school', most of the respondents who mentioned academic results as a reason for choosing a high school made reference to the matric[32] results. Matric results are

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[32] The school leaving examination at the end of Grade 12.

published in newspapers and are usually available in the public domain, for example the *Sunday Times Top 100 schools survey* and are accessible to the general public. The results for the other grades in a school will most likely be communicated to parents via a newsletter. This information will thus be easily available to those who form part of the social network. Those families who are not part of the social network will not have access to this information.

Importance of Academic Results By Social Class		
	Yes	No
working-class	18	49
middle-class	69	90
Chi Square = 5.4402	DF 1	p ≤ 0.025

Table 20: Importance of academic results by social class

Middle-class families place a larger emphasis on academic results. It may be that middle-class families, realising that they have a wider choice of schools, also have higher expectations in terms of academic performance whereas working-class families, perceiving that they have a more limited choice, focus more on issues such as safety.

4.7.5. Fees / Cost of schooling

While the cost of schooling was not mentioned by a large percentage of the respondents, the impact of school fees and the cost of schooling on their choice of high school was clear. The set of schools charging fees in excess of R10 000 p.a. was only included by 26(10.83%) of the respondents in the list of schools 'seriously considered'. These schools were applied to only in 19 (7.91%) cases and were the first choice only for 14 (5.83%) of the respondents. Yet these schools have superior facilities, have smaller class sizes and obtain the best academic results, both reasons which parents indicated they considered important and were all located within the

boundaries used by families to determine the evoked set. In some cases they were nearer and were easier to travel to than schools which were seriously considered. It is clear that the initial process of elimination depends to a large extent on the cost of schooling and what parents can afford to spend. Further evidence of the importance of cost of schooling on the initial screening process lies in the fact that of the 26 respondents who included schools with fees in excess of R10 000 p.a. in the set of schools 'seriously considered' only 14 (53.8%) indicated such a school as a first choice.

Respondents tended to apply to schools in the same 'price range'. This provides evidence of the formation of a hierarchy based on fee structure which families may be using as an indicator or quality of academic results and resources.

4.7.6. Extra-Murals

The literature suggested that working class families would place greater emphasis on non-academic factors including extra-mural activities. The data suggest quite the opposite. Middle-class families placed greater importance on extra-murals than working-class families did.

Importance Extra-murals By Social Class		
	Yes	No
working-class	8	59
middle-class	44	128
Chi Square = 5.27	DF 1	$p \leq 0.025$

Table 21: Importance of extra-murals by social class

It may be that middle-class families, realising that they have a wider choice of schools, also have higher expectations both in terms of academic performance and

extra-mural activities whereas previously argued working-class families, perceiving that they have a more limited choice, focus more on issues such as safety. It may that middle-class families have greater expectations in terms of what can and should be provided by schools.

4.8 What process is involved in choosing high schools?

When examining the process of school choice a number of key stages were considered. Firstly families had a number of schools which they 'seriously considered' sending their children to. Secondly families decided to apply to a number of schools. Finally families had a 'preferred choice' i.e. the high school they would send their child to if all their applications had been successful. The model below illustrates the choice process identified from the analysis of the data. Families have indicated that, in most cases, when schools are applied to, they have already decided on a preferred first choice.
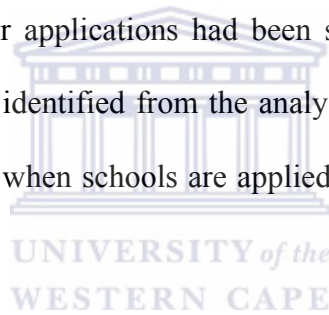
Model of the Family School Choice Decision-making Process
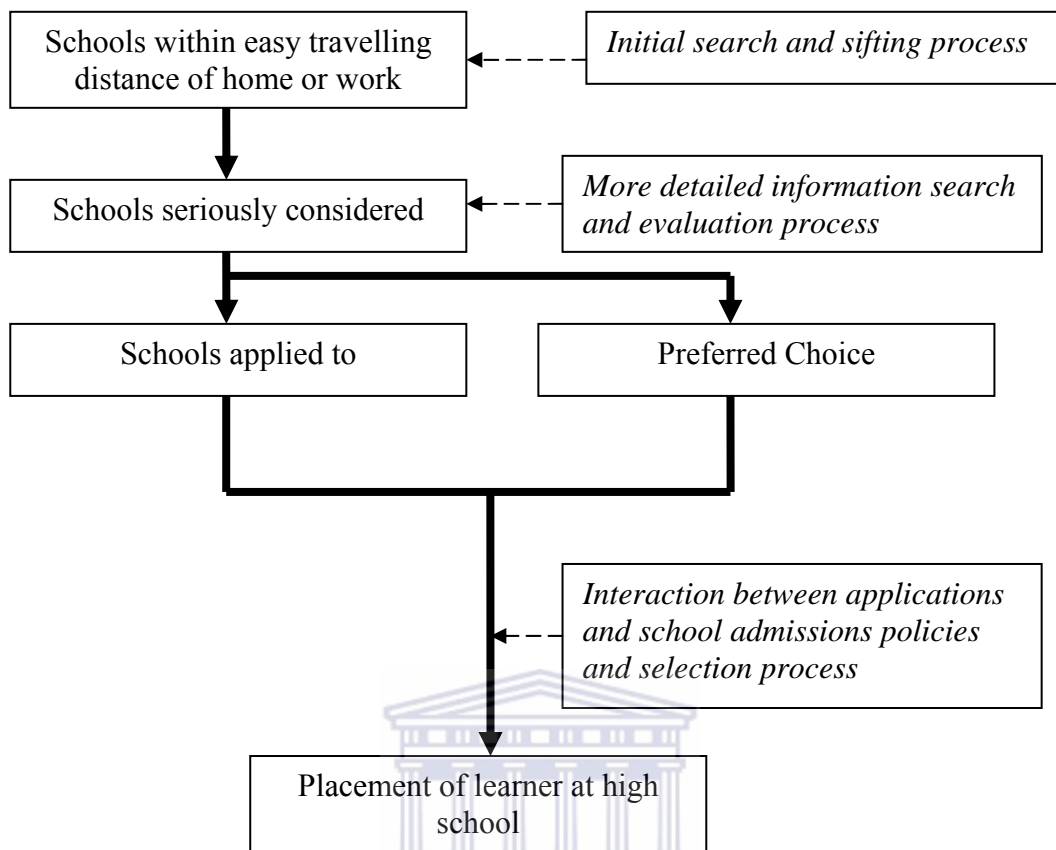
Figure 9: Model of Family School Choice Decision-making Process

4.8.1 Schools Seriously Considered

A surprising finding was the small number of schools seriously considered when choosing a high school. There were at least 12 high schools within easy travelling distance in the area, yet on average only 3 (mean 2.93) high schools were seriously considered. Less than a quarter (22.08%) of the respondents claimed to have considered more than three schools. Almost two-thirds (65%) seriously considered only two or three schools and only 13% indicated that they only seriously considered one high school.

Number of Schools Considered

School	5 or more	4	3	2	1	Total
School A	6	3	18	13	6	46
School B	3	5	8	7	6	29
School C	7	3	18	15	5	48
School D	6	3	18	16	5	48
School E	6	3	17	16	5	47
School F	1	7	7	3	4	22
Totals	29	24	86	70	31	240
%	12.08	10.00	35.83	29.17	12.92	100.00

Table 22: Number of schools considered
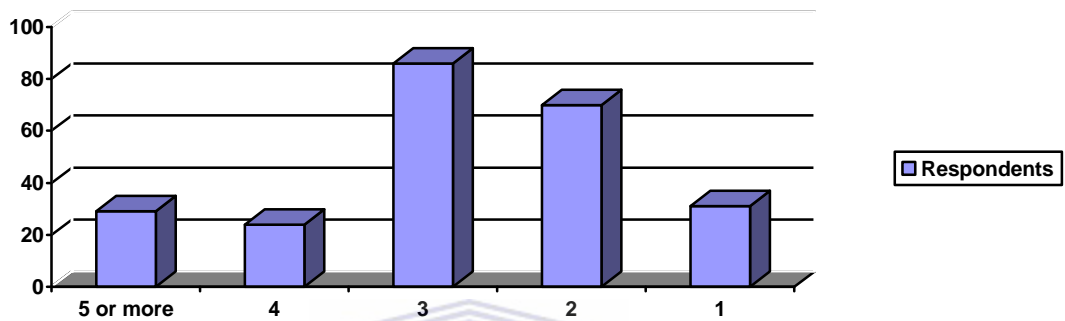
Figure 10: Number of schools considered

This indicates that there is a prior selection or screening process, and that the 'evoked set' i.e. the set of schools seriously considered has already met certain criteria.

4.8.2 Schools applied to

Respondents were asked to list the high schools they had applied to. Provision was made for five schools but respondents were told that they need not use all the spaces provided or if necessary they could list more than five high schools.

School	5 or more	4	3	2	1	Total
School A	0	2	5	19	20	46
School B	0	3	7	9	10	29
School C	0	0	14	17	17	48
School D	2	8	7	16	15	48
School E	1	7	14	16	9	47
School F	1	0	9	8	4	22
Totals	4	20	56	85	75	240
%	1.67	8.33	23.33	35.42	31.25	100.00

Table 23: Number of schools applied to
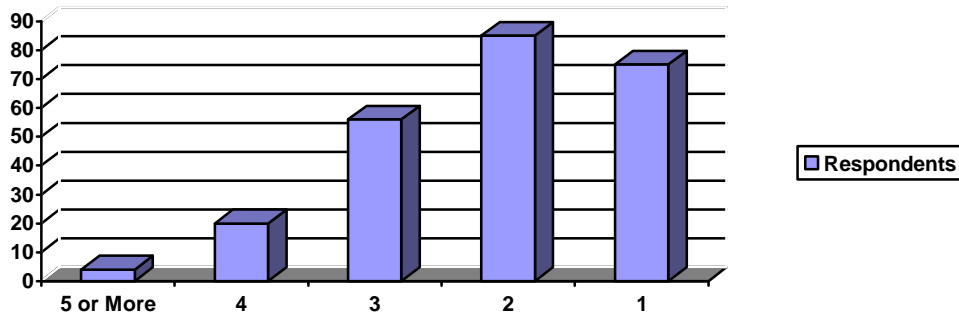
Figure 11: Number of high schools applied to

Respondents applied to an average of 2 (mean=2.14) high schools. Two-thirds of the respondents applied to fewer than three schools, although the primary schools and the Western Cape Education Department advise parents to apply to at least three high schools. There is thus a filtering process.

Almost one-third (31.25%) of the respondents indicated that they only applied to one high school. This is a matter of concern as schools are allowed to determine their own criteria in the case of over-subscription and no feeder areas have been defined. The EMDC reports a number of learners who did not have a place at a high school and, in fact, the WCED has embarked on a media campaign to encourage parents to apply to schools at an early date[33].

Applied to

School	HOR	Ex-ModelC	Mixed (both HOR and Ex-Model C)	Total
School A	35	2	9	46
School B	20	1	8	29
School C	0	36	12	48
School D	1	31	16	48
School E	23	4	20	47
School F	13	8	1	22
Totals				240

Table 24: School applied to – historical classification

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[33] This campaign was run during August / September 2005 when most of the more popular schools had already completed the application process and had finalized the acceptances of new Grade 8s.

Families tended to apply to schools that shared a historical classification with the primary schools that the children attended. Families with children at ex-HOR schools serving middle-class families showed a greater tendency to apply to high schools with a different historical classification.

	Same Historical Classification	Different Historical Classification	Mixed (both types applied to)	Total
working-class HOR	55	3	17	75
Ex-Model C	67	1	28	96
middle-class HOR	36	12	21	69
Total	158	16	66	240
Chi Square = 21.03	DF 4	$p \leq 0.001$		

Table 25: Choice of schools with same or different historical classifications

4.8.3 Preferred (First) Choice

When asked to indicate their preferred school if they had been accepted at all the high schools they had applied to, respondents indicated a high degree of consistency. The choice of primary school appears to be a good indicator of the type of high school parents will choose. In the primary schools previously administered by HOR and serving working class communities, eighty-four percent (62/73) families chose a high school previously administered by HOR. In Ex-Model C primary schools 93.35% (87/93) respondents indicated a preference for an Ex-Model C high school. Families with children at primary schools previously administered by HOR and serving middle class communities showed a wider variation in their choices with 48 out of 68 (70.59%) preferring a high school previously administered by HOR.

School	HOR	ModC	Missing	%
School A	38	8	1	84.44
School B	24	3	2	88.88
School C	0	47	1	100.00
School D	6	40	2	86.96
School E	28	18	1	60.86
School F	20	2	0	90.00

Table 26: First choice schools by historical classification

One of the questions addressed by the research was whether families who had experience of the process of choosing high schools i.e. where an older sibling had attended or was attending high school, differed in the way that they engaged in the decision-making process. There is clearly an additional initial stage in the decision-making process. Families will evaluate whether their prior decision was a correct one and whether the prior choice of high school would be appropriate for the child currently in Grade 7.

	Other children attended / are attending high school	First choice of high school differs from siblings choice	Missing Cases / Special Cases[34]	% choosing high school different from siblings
School A	25	17		68.00%
School B	13	9		69.23%
	38	26 (68.42%)		
School C	16	9		56.25%
School D	23	15		65.22%
	39	24 (61.54%)		
School E	25	19	2	82.61%
School F	7	5		71.43%
	32	24 (75.00%)		
Total	109	74	2	69.16% (N=107)

Table 27: percentage choosing high school different from siblings

Parents showed low levels of satisfaction with the schools their older children had attended and showed a great willingness to consider schools other than those attended by their older children. One hundred and nine of the respondents had other children

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[34] Special cases include a choice of high school for learners with special needs or Technical Schools.

who had attended or who were attending high school. While choosing the same high school as attended by older siblings would seem to have advantages related to convenience, familiarity, possible reuse of uniform and books and a reduction in fees, respondents showed a high level of willingness to choose schools other than those attended by their other children. Almost 70% of the respondents indicated choice of high school different from the high schools attended by older siblings of the learners currently in Grade7.

4.8.5 Variety of schools indicates as being first choice

The primary schools in the area did not appear to have any special relationships with particular high schools. Respondents from the same primary schools applied to a wide variety of high schools. Typically between 10 and 18 different high schools were applied to by respondents at the same primary school.
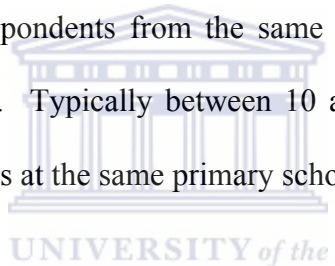
School	No of Different high schools Applied to	Number of Respondents
School A	11	46
School B	13	27
School C	13	47
School D	18	46
School E	17	46
School F	10	22

Table 28: Number of different high schools applied to
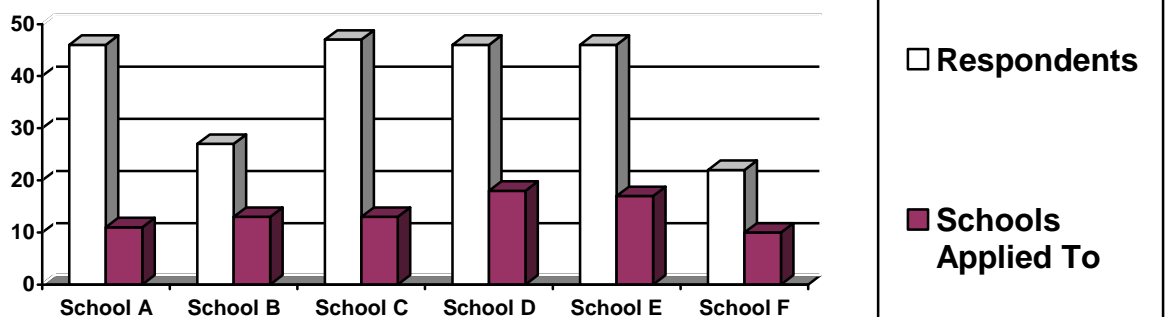
Figure 12: Number of different high schools applied to

4.9 The other side of the coin – Applications to high schools.

No analysis of consumer behaviour in the market can be complete without examining both sides of the market. While the focus of this research has been how and why parents choose high schools i.e. the demand side of the market it is also important to examine the supply side of the market as well. As West *et al* (1997) indicate it is often the schools that do the choosing, in a similar vein, Davids (indicates that the choice of school in the Western Cape, is an interaction between the parents' preferences and the admissions policies and selection criteria of the high school.

Applications to selected high schools in the area were analysed. These high schools differ in terms of their historical classification, the socio-economic status of the communities they serve and the costs associated with attending the school. Applications were analysed in terms of the number of applications, the degree of over-subscription (where applicable), the number and type of primary schools from which applications were received, the area from which the school draws most of its applicants. The successful applicants were not identified as this was beyond the scope of the research.

The majority of high schools in the area were heavily over-subscribed. It was only the school which served mainly working class families which resided outside the immediate area which showed a lower number of applications.

School	No. of applications	Grade 8 Places
School A	598	240
School B	362	154
School C	161	161
School D	469	168

Table 29: Number of applications to high schools
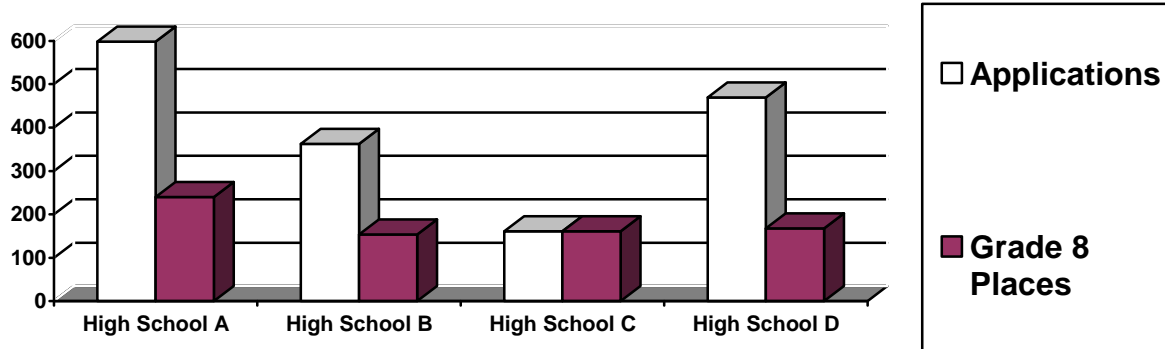
Figure 13: Number of applications and places at high schools

Where schools are over-subscribed the South African Schools Act allows schools to set admissions criteria as long as they are non-discriminatory and do not contradict the Act, the Admission Policy to Ordinary Public Schools and the Constitution. Thus as West (1997) points out, to a large extent it is the schools who choose.

The high schools in the area received applications from Grade 7 learners at a large number of primary schools. The four high schools surveyed received applications from Grade 7 learners at between 55 and 90 different primary schools.

School	No of different primary schools from which applications were received
School A	65
School B	55
School C	77
School D	90

Table 30: No of different primary schools from which applications were received

4.9.1 Area covered

An analysis of the area served by high schools confirms the data collected from primary school applications. The majority of applications come from within a 6km radius of the school in the case of three of the schools investigated. An interesting phenomenon is that there is often a clustering of the remaining applicants outside the immediate area served by the school. This clustering is often round public transport systems or where the school itself provides a transport service. Even in the case of

the one school, which its principal describes as a commuter school, where the learners do travel longer distances, the learners reside in areas clustered around an effective transport system.

4.10 Summary And Conclusions

- School choice is a fact of life in South Africa. All families have to choose a high school for their children as there is not automatic allocation of learners to high schools.

- School choice is a complex process which occurs over a period of time although this time period may differ from family to family.

- The extent of choice that families face is dependent on the supply of schools. To a certain extent the geographical area of the market is determined by acceptable schools being present in the area. Where there are no 'acceptable' schools in terms of the family's perception the geographical area within which schools are considered will be expanded.

- The Western Cape shows a shortage of high schools and therefore demand exceeds supply. It is only in the case of a high school being totally dysfunctional that there is any risk of the enrolment dropping. The argument that less successful schools face the risk of being closed due to lack of enrolments hold little water as demand exceeds supply.

- Choice is made by families rather than by parents in isolation or by children only. Some families may include other people in the decision-making process although this is more likely in the case of a single parent family. The preferences of the child do play an important role.

- There is an initial period where the intensity of the search process is relatively low. During this period schools are eliminated from the 'evoked set'. Schools may be excluded on the basis of cost, historical classification, make-up of the learner population, location or special nature of the school e.g. focus schools, schools offering special subjects, special needs schools and boys or girls only school. These criteria may differ from family to family but there is a process of elimination after which the family has a set of schools which they will 'seriously consider' and find out more about.

- This is followed by a period of high intensity search for information where more specific information about the particular school is sought. This period usually lasts from Grade 6 through Grade 7, although some families make a decision before this.

- The sources of information that families use are multiple and complex. As would be expected families, who have experienced the process of choosing a high school before use fewer sources of information that those families who are choosing for the first time. This is due to retained information and also the realization, on the part of parents, that some sources are not as useful as others.

- The most frequently used sources of information are general reputation in the community, observation of learner behaviour and a personal visit which could include the open day.

- Families were willing to 'shop around' for schools and showed low levels of satisfaction with the high schools that older children were attending or had attended. This was indicated by the fact that in spite of the convenience of having children attending the same high school, families often expressed a preference for a different high school.

- The set of schools that families 'seriously considered' was small. The majority of families only seriously considered three high schools.

- It is the schools that families 'seriously consider' that are subject to the high intensity search process. This is a more active research strategy and could include personal visits to the school and extra efforts to observe learner behaviour. More specific and detailed information will be sought about the schools under consideration.

- On average, families only apply to two high schools with a significant percentage only applying to one high school.

- The preferred school is the result of the interplay of various factors. Social class, race and culture play an important role in the process of deciding on the preferred school. It impacts on the range of schools families choose from and on the final choice. The cost of schooling is a limiting factor as is the distance people are willing to travel. Generally families choose schools within a relatively short distance from the place of residence (6km) although the nearest school is often not the preferred school. However, where the school is located on a public transport route learners seem willing to travel longer distances. It appears that the convenience of travel is more important that the actual distance travelled.

- The historical classification of a school also plays a role. Children attending ex-HOR schools that serve working-class communities are more likely to attend a school with the same historical classification. Families with children at primary schools previously administered by the HOR and serving more affluent communities show a greater mobility between high schools previous administered by the HOR and ex-Model C high schools. Children attending ex-Model C primary schools will in most cases attend ex-Model C high schools or only the

most prestigious and successful high schools previously administered by the HOR.

- There is evidence of the development of a hierarchy of high schools are far as families are concerned. Families tend to apply to and choose from schools in the same 'price range' i.e. that charge similar levels of fees and have a similar cost associated with schooling. The fee structures are closely linked to the historical classification of the school and the related level of resources.

- high schools also appear to be competing against other high schools on a similar level in the hierarchy.

- The majority of high schools in the area are heavily over-subscribed and thus the choice rests in the hand of the high school rather than in the hand of the families. However, where the high school is the one nearest the place of residence of the family the high school is compelled to accept the learner.

- There seems to be little 'linkage' between high schools and primary schools. Learners from the same primary school apply to many different high schools, up to 18 different high schools. High schools receive applications from learners at an even greater number of primary schools, as many as 90 different primary schools.

CHAPTER 5 - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Educational outcomes for the economically and historically disadvantaged learners in South Africa are unacceptably low. Whereas low levels of educational outcomes are most often associated with 'minorities' in First World Countries, they are associated with the majority in South Africa. This creates an even bigger challenge. The inequalities created by the Apartheid system are still evident in South African society today. These differences are also reflected in the school system. The functioning of education under the Apartheid regime has been well documented elsewhere and it is not the intention to describe that functioning here, however, there are still marked differences between schools formerly administered by the different Education Departments under the Apartheid system. Many of the schools serving mainly historically disadvantaged communities are characterised by high dropout rates, high levels of violence and low test scores.
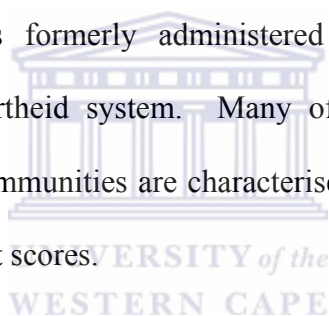
Given the poor levels of performance and the historical imbalances created by Apartheid education it is not surprising that the reform of the education system is seen as a priority. Furthermore the democratisation of South African society has led to the need to compete in the global market place as never before.

Among the many ideas for reforming education are those reforms based on the initial idea of renowned economist Milton Friedman. He proposed that the financing of education be separated from the administration of schools. His idea was that families be provided with vouchers, financed by public funds, to be used at schools of their choice. He argued that such a system would promote competition between schools,

that schools would have to compete for learners and that this would result in improved quality, lower costs and a more dynamic system (Kane 2003,47). The resulting school choice and associated market-based reforms have become one of the most contested reform strategies globally.

While school choice takes various forms including vouchers, magnet schools, chapter schools, tuition tax credit, second chance options, work place training and the use of educational management organisations, school choice, in its essence, can be described as any learner assignment policy that allows families to participate in the selection of a school rather than the more traditional methods of allocation, usually in the form of demarcated feeder areas. Essentially school choice involves families choosing which schools to send their children to.
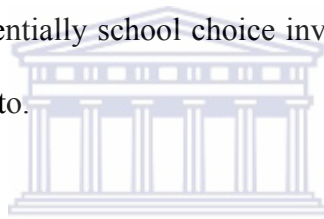
School choice and the associated market-based reforms is one of the most hotly debated and controversial topics in educational reform and policy discussions tend to be, as Ladd (2002) put it, 'highly charged'. School choice exists in many developed and developing countries. School choice exist in countries such as United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, England and Wales, the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden, and developing countries including India, Chile, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritania, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa.

5.2 Why Choice?

The rationale surrounding increased school choice and the related marketisation of education is embodied in two broad groups of arguments.

Firstly that choice is, in itself, a desirable outcome and is an essential thread in the fabric of democracy. In the South African context there is no doubt that the ability of families to choose which schools to send their children to, is an essential element of the democratisation of South African society. Any system of schools being linked to feeder or catchment areas will simply serve to perpetuate the gross inequalities created by the Apartheid system. After more than ten years of democracy the geographical and residential imbalances created by the Group Areas Act[35] still blight the many areas of South Africa and of the Western Cape. The proponents of school choice argue that expanded school choice is a vehicle for educational equity, that it gives parents in the lower income groups the same opportunity to choose as parents in higher income groups.
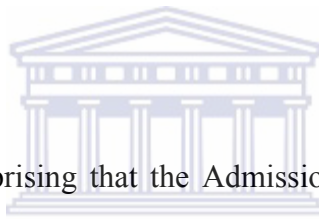
It is therefore somewhat surprising that the Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools (1988) compels schools to accept learners who reside in the immediate area. This, in effect, gives a wider choice to those who have the financial resources to purchase property in the more affluent residential areas where the best resourced and often more successful schools are located.

The second group of arguments relates to the possible benefits of an increased role of the market in the functioning of individual schools and the education system as a whole. The proponents of market-based reforms essentially argue that market forces will improve the quality of education. They argue that families will choose schools that offer quality education and that the schools that do not offer quality education

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[35] The Group Areas Act allocated residential area for occupation by the different race groups identified by the Apartheid system. Only persons of that particular 'race' group were allowed to reside in that particular area. In many cases these areas, to a large extent, have maintained their demographic profile.

will either have to adapt their educational offerings to meet the requirements of families or face the risk of going out of business. They argue that by making schools 'accountable to the market' (Holmes 2001,4) and by encouraging a competitive market in education, the overall quality of education will improve.

The issues around market-based reforms are complex. The contradictory evidence is indicative of the costs and benefits associated with the increased marketisation of education. The benefits must be weighed up against the costs, the perceived benefits of those who get to choose their schools must be weighed up against the frustrations of those left behind in less successful schools.

The assertion that increased marketisation and an increased role for competition will improve schools and the education system as a whole cannot simply be accepted at face value. The contention that the market will solve the shortcomings of the public school system is one that needs to be examined closely. A number of issues are key to an understanding of how educational markets function. It is imperative to understand how and why families choose schools (and do not choose other schools), what factors they consider when choosing schools, which sources of information they use and how the actual process of choosing occurs. It is also important to understand how schools react to the preferences of families and to the educational opportunities offered by other schools. Only then can we theorise on the impact of an increased role of market forces on the quality of education both at an individual school level and on the educational system as a whole.

There is no doubt that markets and competition do exist in education (Plank & Sykes, 2003). The key issue however, remains as to the role that should be allocated to the market. The market in education has been described by some proponents of market-base reforms as a panacea, a silver bullet and the 'rising tide that will lift all boats' (Chubb& Moe 1990, Boyd & Lugg 1988 and Hoxby 2002). While its opponents express concerns that it will dismantle a public school system that, while it is acknowledged that it has shortcomings, provides a valuable service (Astin 1993; Gewirtz *et al.* 1995; Hughes & Lauder 2002; Plank & Sykes 1990).

The proponents of School Choice claim that there are higher levels of parental and student satisfaction, higher levels of parental involvement, higher levels of academic achievement, higher levels of satisfaction for teachers and that the current educational system is bureaucratic, wasteful and inefficient. They further claim than innovation is encouraged. They state that market-based reforms will have a positive impact on the ordinary public school and public school system as a whole.

The opponents, on the other hand, raise concerns about academic skimming and segregation based on social class and race. They also believe that there are dire consequences for those who are 'left behind' i.e. those who do not or cannot choose and those whose choices are not granted.

The question also arises as to whether market based reforms are equally effective under all circumstances. Is the concept of the education market a universal one or are there conditions under which markets would be less effective? It may be that competition will encourage those schools who have the capacity to change to improve

while those schools which do not have the capacity to adapt to meet the preferences will be relatively unaffected by marked based reforms. Increased school quality may therefore be a prerequisite for effective competition rather than a result of it. The greatest benefit of choice may be to schools that have already attained high levels of success. Competition may therefore affect individual schools in different ways and this may go some way in explaining the conflicting and contradictory evidence regarding the impact of increased competition on school success.
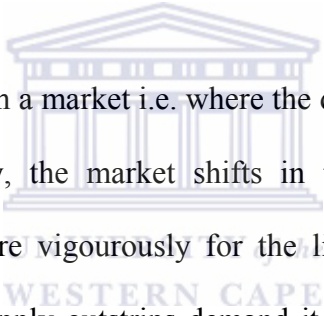
Much of the debate and empirical evidence relating to school choice is located within a First World context (Tikly & Mabogoane 1996, Kitaev 1999). This context includes stable or declining population growth rates, a resultant surplus capacity in the education system and schools which are relatively well-resourced. In such circumstances the threat that underperforming schools could be shut down is a meaningful one.
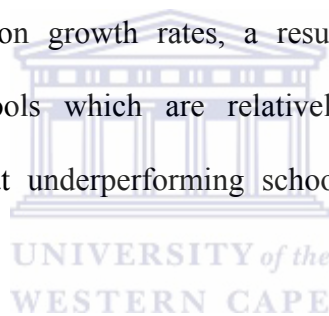
The debate needs to be expanded to the context of developing countries where there is excess demand for education due to high population growth rates, relatively youthful populations, great imbalances in terms of physical resources and relatively low levels of physical and human resources. Therefore the threat of underperforming, less successful schools being closed loses its potency as the excess demand virtually guarantees sufficient applications (although the nature and quality of the intake may change) for the continued existence of the school.

<u>5.3 The Market Framework</u>

Markets consist of four essential elements namely demand, supply, competition and prices. Each of these elements plays a vital role in the functioning of the market and will determine the effectiveness of the market. Demand indicates the preferences of the consumers and it indicates the quantities that consumers are willing buy at various prices. Supply indicates the quantities that producers are willing to sell and the price is the result of the interplay between consumer preferences (demand) and the product offerings of producers (supply). Inherent in the market is the concept of competition. Consumers compete for goods and services offered by producers and producers compete for consumers and resources.

Where excess demand exists in a market i.e. where the demand for goods and services exceeds the available supply, the market shifts in the favour of the producers. Consumers will compete more vigourously for the limited quantity of goods and services available. Where supply outstrips demand it is the producers who have to compete more vigourously to attract consumers and as a result acquire additional resources.

Those organisations that do not attract sufficient consumers will run the risk of going out of business. In order to reverse the trend of declining sales, these organisations will invest in market research to determine the preferences of consumers. Once those preferences have been determined further investments will be made in research and development to improve their product offerings and to achieve a closer match between the preferences of consumers and their product or service offerings. These

investments can be justified in terms of the increased sales resulting from the improved product offering that meet consumer preferences.

Those organisations that are successful will use the increased resources at their disposal to expand their organisations. This will in turn generate further resources which can be used for improved market research and product development.

The concept of the market in education is a contested one. The proponents of market-based reforms, while acknowledging that educational markets do differ from commodity markets, argue that increased competition between schools and greater reliance on market forces will produce similar results as in commodity markets and will increase the quality of educational offerings by individual schools and the quality in the education system as a whole. The critics of these reforms argue that the imperfections that exist in educational markets limit their effectiveness to such an extent that improvements, predicted by the proponents of market-based reforms, will not accrue.

Which of the scenarios outlined above is more likely to occur? As the proponents of market-based reforms mainly base their arguments on the efficiencies of the market, it would be logical to assess the possible impact of market-based reforms in terms of the four main components of the market identified earlier i.e. demand, supply, price and competition.

5.3.1 The Demand Side

The demand side of the educational market represents the preferences of families. These preferences are expressed in the ways in which families judge and choose high schools. A number of key issues have been identified in the literature which must be unpacked to gain insight into the process of judging and choosing high schools. The central issues include how choices are made and which sources of information are used to inform the decision-making process. One must also examine whether families have the same ability to choose. The ability to choose could be impacted by a number of factors including cost and access to information.

5.3.1.1 The scope of the demand

An essential argument in the rationale surrounding the market as the controlling mechanism in education is that 'bad' schools will go out of business and that the risk of them going out of business will force these schools to improve. This argument is, however, dependent on the assumption that the market has the capacity to absorb the excess demand created by less popular, less successful schools closing down i.e. that the other more successful suppliers can supply the services needed. Where the demand for education outstrips supply there is little risk that schools that cannot improve and meet the preferences of families will 'go out of business'. The evidence from this study suggests that schools face little risk being forced to close. The four high schools surveyed received a total of 1590 applications for 723 grade 8 places. It may be that less popular schools face a change in the profile of their enrolments but face little risk of being closed due to lack of learners. This reflects the situation where demand outstrips the number of places available and the various provincial education

departments are initiating plans to build a number of schools to meet this excess demand.

5.3.1.2 The nature of the demand

5.3.1.2.1 Who chooses?

(a) Which families choose?

School choice is a fact of life in South Africa. All families have to choose a high school for their children as there is no automatic allocation of learners to high schools. The respondents in this study exhibited a healthy desire to choose schools. Rather than choosing the nearest high school where, in terms of the SA Schools Act, they had to be accepted the majority (70.1%) of families in this study chose a different school. As would be expected middle class families (77.2%) were more likely to choose a school other than the nearest one than working class families (54.8%). This reflects the advantage that middle class families have in terms of financial resources and access to information gleamed from social networks associated with the more successful and therefore more popular schools.

(b) Who within the family chooses?

The initial focus of this research was to determine how parents chose high schools for their children. What has become evident is that the choice of high school is a joint decision involving different family members. Although many studies focused on the role of a single group of role players (Elliot 1981; Hunter, 1991; Glenn, 1993;David *et al.* 1994; Ball,1996; Goldring 1997;Dietel, 1998; Hoxby, 2000; Department of Education and Skills, 2001) the work of Lawley *et al* serves as a basis for the focus on the family group as the decision-making unit.

In the vast majority (92%) of the cases the choice of high school was a joint one. Significant differences existed between middle class and working class families. Middle class families were more likely (95.9%) than working class families (84.7%) to make a joint decision.

When exploring the dynamics of the joint family decision, the roles played by the various family members was examined. In almost two-thirds (65.25%) of the cases respondents indicated that the parents and child had equally important roles[36]. The only other decision-making pattern that obtained more than 10% of the responses was where the parents jointly played a more important role than the child.

It is indicative of the importance that families ascribe to the decision that some families, more likely single parent families, often involve persons outside the immediate family in the decision-making process. In this study family sometimes included grandparents, community or religious leaders and occasionally employers.

This adds to the complexity of the decision-making process and would make the subsequent analysis of the process more expensive in terms of both time and resources than in the case of the decision being made by only one person. These preferences are the result of the interplay of the various values, perceptions, concerns and experiences of the family members rather than those of a single role-player.

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[36] This includes single parent families where the child and parent had equally important roles.

5.3.1.2.2 How do they choose?

From the responses of families the following model of family school choice was developed.

Model of the Family School Choice Decision-making Process

Schools within easy travelling distance of home or work	*Initial search and sifting process*
Schools seriously considered	*More detailed information search and evaluation process*
Schools applied to	Preferred Choice

Interaction between applications and school admissions policies and selection process

Placement of learner at high school
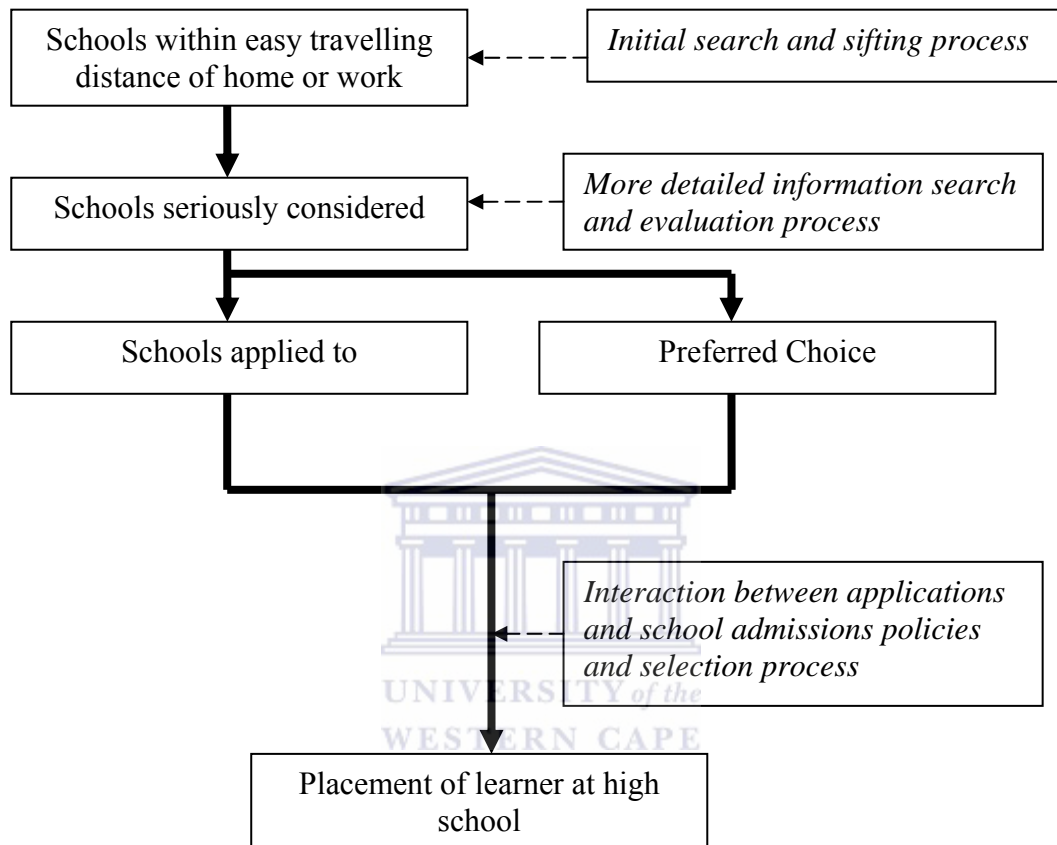
During the initial search phase a number of important trends became apparent.

Firstly families were willing to 'shop around' for schools and showed low levels of satisfaction with the high schools that older children were attending or had attended. This was indicated by the fact that in spite of the convenience of having children attending the same high school, families often expressed a preference for a different high school. Almost 70% of the respondents that had children current at high school

or had children that had attended high school indicated a choice of high school other than that which their other children had attended or were attending.

Secondly while families did not necessarily choose the nearest high school, the schools that were considered during the initial phase were relatively close (within 6km) to their place of residence. Seventy-four percent of the respondents preferred a school within 6km of their residence.

The choice of high school involved the whittling down of an initial 'evoked set' into a number of schools seriously considered to finally a set of schools that families applied to.
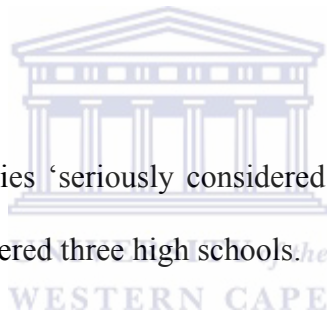
The set of schools that families 'seriously considered' was small. The majority of families only seriously considered three high schools.

It is the schools that families 'seriously consider' that are subject to the high intensity search process. This is a more active research strategy and could include personal visits to the school and extra efforts to observe learner behaviour. More specific and detailed information will be sought about the schools under consideration.

5.3.1.2.3 How wide is the choice?

Choosing a high school is often a complex and dynamic issue where the experiences, values and perceptions of families interact with each other and also interact with the socio-economic and cultural context in which they occur. This choice is further shaped by the constraints of the applicable educational policies.
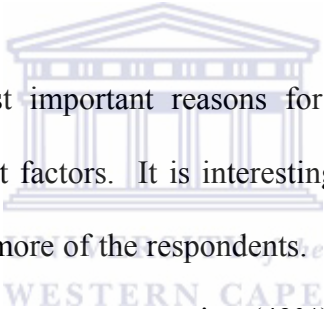
The Apartheid system created a situation where often numerous schools existed in a specific geographical area. This was as a result of the policies of the time whereby schools were only designated for a particular 'race' group and people were limited as to where they could reside in terms of the Group Areas Act. These borders of these areas were sometimes a particular road where on one side of the road it was a 'white' residential area and the other side of the road 'non-white'.

A surprising finding was the small number of schools seriously considered when choosing a high school. There were at least 12 high schools within easy travelling distance in the area, yet on average only 3 (mean 2.93) high schools were seriously considered. Less than a quarter (22.08%) of the respondents claimed to have considered more than three schools. Almost two-thirds (65%) seriously considered only two or three schools and only 13% indicated that they only seriously considered one high school. This is indicative of the degree of competition between high schools. If families are only considering a small number of high schools, then the effects of competition will be limited.

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5.3.1.2.4 What do they choose?

Families are not always 'upfront' about their reasons for choosing (or not choosing) a high school. The findings of this study supports the idea expressed by numerous authors, such as Meissner (1997) and Schneider & Buckley (2002), that it is necessary to examine actual behaviour to determine the factors that impact on choice rather than relying on the expressed preferences of families.

The factors that families consider when judging a high school is one of the most comprehensively researched aspects of school choice, for example Elliot (1985), Fox (1985), Petch (1986), MORI (1989), West & Verlaam (1991), Glover (1992), Phelan (1992), Woods (1993) and Hirsch (1995). Studies typically identify between 7 and 25 factors that are considered when judging school quality. However an earlier survey by the author (du Toit, 1997) asked parent and learner respondents to rate 84 factors impacting on their judgement of the level of school organisational success. Only 13 of the factors were rated as being unimportant by the learner respondents and 5 rated as unimportant by the parent respondents. This gives an indication of the multiplicity of factors considered by families when evaluating schools.

When asked to list the most important reasons for their preferred high school, respondents listed 32 different factors. It is interesting to note that no single factor was listed by fifty percent or more of the respondents. The most important reasons in terms of number of respondents were reputation (43%), discipline and safety (39%), academic results (39%), ease of travel (37%) and extra-murals (23%). Only 'a family member had attended the school' out of all the other reasons given was listed by more than 10% of the respondents as a reason for choosing a high school.

Based on the factors that families identified as being influential in their judgment and choice of high schools, it is clear that these factors are multiple and complex. There are often significant differences between the factors that parents and the factors that learners consider when judging and choosing schools. As the process of choice usually involves at least parents and children, there must be a process of reconciling the importance that the different role-players ascribe to different factors.

The complexities above only reflect the factors that families reveal in terms of questionnaires and interviews. This issue becomes even more complex when one examines the behaviour associated with choice.

One of the strongest arguments most proposed by those in favour of increased competition between schools is that schools are chosen on the basis of academic results and that increased competition will lead to improved academic results of underperforming schools. While some respondents mentioned academic results 'in general' and 'for the whole school', most of the respondents who mentioned academic results as a reason for choosing a high school made reference to the matric results. Matric results are published in newspapers and are usually available in the public domain while results for the other grades in a school will most likely be communicated to parents via a newsletter. This information will thus be easily available to those who form part of the social network. Those families who are not part of the social network will not have access to this information. In many cases parents simply counted the number of matric passes, exemptions and A-aggregates and based on this incomplete information, bereft of context, make a judgement on the academic success of the school.

It appears that educational factors are not the only factors that affect the choice of high school. In line with the findings of Willms(1997), Henig (1990), Weither & Tedin (2002), Glazerman (1997,1998) Hughes & Lauder (2002), Goldring (1997), Viadero (1995) Fitz&Gorard (2000) suggest that the social and racial composition of the learner population also seem to play a role. Further evidence of this trend is how,

in certain cases, the social and racial make-up of the learner population at particular schools has changed drastically over a period of five to ten years. On the other hand some high schools previously administered by the HOR and therefore exclusively 'coloured' under the Apartheid system have maintained virtually the same racial profile although they are located in areas designated as 'white' in terms of the Group Areas Act. These patterns are reflected in the social and racial composition of the schools in the area studied.

In some cases these schools, that have maintained their 'coloured' profile, achieve better academic results and charge much lower fees than the ex-Model C high schools in the area.
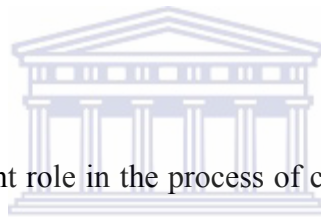
Social class plays an important role in the process of choice as it impacts on both the range of schools that families choose from, as well as, the final choice of high school.

The issues of safety and discipline are key in the process of judging and choosing high schools. Although discipline and safety were mentioned by slightly less than 40% of the respondents as a reason for the choice of high school, an examination of the schools considered and applied to as well as, the interviews, reveal an even greater importance attached to these factors. Schools were not considered and did not therefore form part of the evoked set because they were not considered 'safe' by parents. This was usually because the schools did not meet the parents' expectations as far as discipline was concerned. This was often a reason for not applying to the nearest high school. The set of schools which families applied to had already met the requirements relating to discipline and safety.

Often families excluded schools from the groups of schools considered based on the families' perceptions of discipline and safety at the particular school. Many of these perceptions were based on reports in the media and the reputation of the school rather than first-hand experience. It is interesting to note that perceptions regarding the degree of safety and discipline are closely linked to the historical classification of schools and that if a school was an ex-Model C school it was safer and had higher levels of discipline. The historical classification of the primary school that the child was attending had a great impact on the choice of high school. Families are more likely to choose a high school with the same historical classification was the primary school that they were attending. This tendency was strongest in the cases of Ex-Model C primary schools and Ex-HOD primary schools serving working class families.
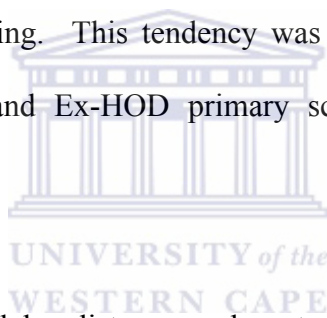
Choice is further constrained by distance and cost of schooling. While there is evidence of 'unusual migration patterns' (Hoadley, 1988), most families tend to choose a high school within a relatively short distance from their place of residence or place of work. The distance that families are willing to travel will, however, be affected by the choice available in that area. Where suitable choice are not available within the immediate area, families would be willing to travel greater distances.

The cost of schooling, including school fees, played a role by limited the scope of choice. While the cost of schooling was not mentioned by a large percentage of the respondents, an examination of the process of choosing revealed the importance of cost. The set of schools charging fees in excess of R10 000 p.a. was only included by

approximately 11% of the respondents in the list of schools 'seriously considered'. These schools were applied to only in 8% cases and were the first choice only for 6% of the respondents. Yet these schools have superior facilities, have smaller class sizes and obtain the best academic results, both reasons which parents indicated they considered important and were all located within the boundaries used by families to determine the evoked set. In some cases they were nearer and were easier to travel to than schools which were seriously considered. It is clear that the initial process of elimination depends to a large extent on the cost of schooling and what parents can afford to spend. Further evidence of the importance of cost of schooling on the initial screening process lies in the fact that of the 26 respondents who included schools with fees in excess of R10 000 p.a. in the set of schools 'seriously considered' only 14 (53.8%) indicated such a school as a first choice.

Respondents tended to apply to schools in the same 'price range'. This provides evidence of the formation of a hierarchy based on fee structure which families may be using as an indicator or quality of academic results and resources.

5.3.1.2.5 Where do they get their information from?

Central to the idea of choice is the ability of families to access and interpret relevant information. The quality of the decision-making is determined by the quantity and quality of the information they have access to.

The sources of information that families use are multiple and complex. As would be expected families who have experienced the process of choosing a high school before use fewer sources of information than those families who are choosing for the first

time. This is due to retained information and also the realization, on the part of parents, that some sources are not as useful as others.

Families used on average seven (mean = 7.14) sources of information although there was a high degree of variation (variance =6.78) amongst respondents. The evidence suggests that families learn from previous decision-making processes as parents who had children going to high school for the first time used more sources (between 6 and 10) of information than parents who had previous experience of choosing high schools (between 1 and 6).

Parents rated, on average, three sources of information as being very important. An analysis of the most important sources of information revealed that the three sources considered as being very important by more than 40% of the respondents were an Open Day or Visit (46.6%), observation of student behaviour (52.5%) and general reputation in the community (52.97%).

Families place most value on personal experience or the opinions of personal acquaintances. Here the concept of the social network described by Schneider *et al* (2002) is relevant. Much of the information about the functioning of schools, the informal structures and 'what really is happening at the school' is contained in social networks. Groups of people who have access to the schools have this information and share it with other members of the social network.

In the absence of better sources of information, especially those families that do not have access to the information contained in social networks, matric results are often used as 'public markers of school success' (Hoadley, 1988).

5.3.1.2.6 When do they choose?

It appears that the process of choice occurs over a period of time and that it can be divided into at least two phases. The duration of the phases can vary from family to family.

There is an initial period where the intensity of the search process is relatively low. During this period schools are eliminated from the 'evoked set'. Schools may be excluded on the basis of cost, historical classification, make up of the learner population, location or special nature of the school e.g. focus schools, schools offering special subjects, special needs schools and boys or girls only schools. These criteria may differ from family to family but there is a process of elimination after which the family has a set of schools which they will 'seriously consider' and find out more about. A small number of families choose a primary school based on their perception that a link exists between that primary school and the (at that stage) preferred high school. This phase is characterised by both incidental and deliberate acquisition of information. It is often in the form of informal discussions with other parents and is of a general nature regarding the school.

This is followed by a period of high intensity search for information where more specific information about the particular school is sought. This period usually lasts

from Grade 6 through Grade 7, although some families make a decision before this. Here the search for information is more deliberate and more focused.

Slight more than half of the respondents indicated that they started thinking seriously about the choice of high school in Grade 6. Less than 20% of the respondents seriously considered the choice of high school before Grade 6. Lawley *et al* (2001) found that 30 percent of the respondents had made a choice of high school by the time the child had finished Grade One. This early selection of high schools was not confirmed by this study as less than 10% of the families had begun the process of choosing a high school before Grade 5.

Almost 30% of the respondents indicated that they seriously considered the choice of high school in Grade 7. This has serious implications for the choice of high school as a number of high schools especially the more attractive and popular ones have closing dates for applications as early and mid-March.

The data indicate that working-class families were more likely than middle-class families attending primary schools previously administered by the House of Representatives to start seriously considering the choice of high school in Grade 7.

This is most likely the result of working-class families having a smaller evoked set[37], considering fewer schools and applying to fewer schools. They are also more likely to attend the nearest high school. They may perceive their decision-making process as being a relatively simple one with few options and therefore do not see the need to

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[37] The 'evoked set' is a concept used in consumer behaviour indicating the group of products that consumers include in the decision-making process.

start the decision-making process at an early stage. Middle-class parents, attending primary schools previously administered by the HOR, are more like to start the search for high schools before Grade 7 as they consider a wide choice of high schools as they are more likely to consider ex-Model C schools as well as high schools previously administered by the HOR. The ex-Model C schools generally have closing dates (for applications) very early in the year, compelling families to initiate the decision-making process at an early stage. Parents thus see their decision-making process as being more complex with more alternatives and thus requiring more time.

5.4 The Supply Side

Supply refers to the provision of schools, the alternatives available to families to choose from. For the vast majority of families in the Western Cape this represents a choice between public schools as the private school sector only represents about 2% of the total enrolment.[38]
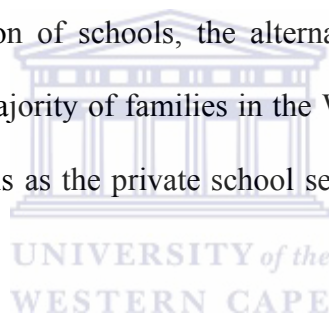
5.4.1 Nature of Supply

One can pose the question as to how high schools differ i.e. what choices are available. The majority of high schools in South Africa cover two phases[39] , namely the General Education and Training (GET) phase which includes grades 8 and 9 and the Further Education and Training (FET) phase covering grades 10 to 12.

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[38] The SASA only makes provision for two types of schools namely public schools and private schools although public perceptions may differ.
[39] In a very few cases there are middle schools and high schools that separate the GET and FET phases. However this is a very uncommon arrangement.

In the GET phase the subjects (learning areas) offered by schools differ only in terms of the two languages offered. All high schools have to offer the following in the GET phase:

- Primary Language
- Additional Language
- Mathematics
- Natural Science
- Economic and Management Science
- Technology
- Arts and Culture
- Human and Social Science (History and Geography)
- Life Orientation

It is in the FET phase where differentiation, in terms of subject offerings occurs. At the end of Grade 9 learners choose subjects for the FET phase. In most cases high schools offer similar subject choices and it is a minority of families that choose a high school on the basis of its FET subject offerings[40].
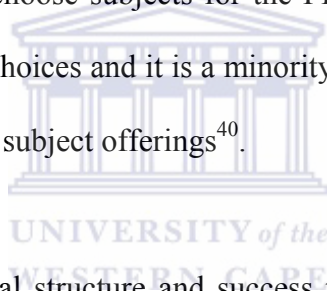
It is in terms of organisational structure and success that huge differences between schools exist. Using examination results as the most basic measure of school success reveals marked differences between high schools in terms of their levels of achievement.

5.4.2 Scope of Supply

In theory families can choose any high school, in reality their choices are constrained by time and cost of travelling. Rather than one large market, the educational market place appears to consist of a number of smaller markets covering a relatively small geographical area. Where the geographical area does not contain schools that are

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[40] Recently 'focus schools' specialising in particular areas such as maths and science , commerce, performing arts and technology have been introduced. One school per focus area in each EMDC (school district) has been established.

perceived as being 'acceptable', for whatever reasons, only then will families look further afield and this results in the 'unusual migration patterns' that authors such as Hoadley (1988), Fataar (1997) and Hofmeyr (2000) have identified.

The local educational markets differ greatly in terms of the number and variety of schools available. The number and variety are determined to a large degree by the legacy of the Apartheid Era[41]

5.5 Price – The Cost of Schooling

The third key component of the market is price. Market theory describes price as the result of the interaction of supply and demand. Given the excess demand in the educational market as a whole, the extremely high levels of over-subscription in terms of applications to the more popular schools and the provisions of the South African Schools Act[42], there are extreme variations in the cost of schooling. The total cost of schooling[43] at schools within easy travelling distance of the families in the study varied from R900 to R15 000 p.a.

Given the great income inequalities in South Africa and specifically in the Western Cape, the cost of schooling represents a severe constraint on the ability of families, especially poor families to choose which school to send their children to.

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[41] Specifically the impact of the Separate Amenities and Group Areas Acts.
[42] Which allows schools to charge school fees.
[43] Including fees, uniforms and books

One of the major concerns of the opponents of choice is that the markets in education would develop a hierarchical structure reflecting what happens in commodity markets.

This hierarchy can be viewed from different viewpoints. Schools can be divided into different 'price ranges' based on the cost of schooling. I have found that families who were part of this study 'seriously considered' schools within a particular 'price range'[44]. The fees charged by high schools seem to be closely linked to both the historical classification of the school and the socio-economic status of the parents of the current enrolment. Therefore the hierarchy does not only indicate cost but also race and socio-economic status.

5.6 Competition

Competition and choice have existed in many education systems for many years (Plank & Sykes 1999, 393). This is also the case in the South African educational system.

The impact of competition must be examined both on schools and on families. Just as schools compete for learners, both in terms of numbers and in terms of the quality of the intake, families also compete for places at the most successful schools.

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[44] The Department of Education has recently introduced the concept of 'no fee schools' where schools serving lower income communities will not be able to charge fees but would receive additional funding from the education department. I do not believe that this will increase the degree of choice but will simply add another level to the hierarchy.

5.6.1 Competition between schools

5.6.1 (a) Identifying preferences

In the absence of proper market research schools are dependent on the applications to their schools to identify the preferences of families. These applications indicate which schools are preferred but do not give an indication of the reasons for these preferences. Schools may be aware of their level of popularity (or unpopularity) but may not be aware of the reasons and therefore have to make assumptions based on the applications.

5.6.1 (b) Responding to the preferences of families

A key issue is the ability of schools to respond to the perceived reasons for families choosing (or not choosing) schools. Competition will only improve the quality of schools if, after somehow identifying the reasons for families choosing schools, they are able to satisfy the preferences of those families. It will be necessary to examine the responses of both the more popular (successful) schools and the less popular (successful) schools. The market metaphor will only be effective if competition forces less successful schools to improve or close and if more successful schools expand to take up the resultant excess demand in the market.

5.6.1 (c) Responses of more successful schools

The ability of schools to charge school fees linked to the popularity of more successful schools gives these schools the capacity to respond to the perceived preferences of families. The rationale associated with the market suggests that these schools would expand to take up the excess demand in the market. Evidence however, suggests that this is not the case. The more popular schools become more

selective in their intake which gives them a further 'competitive edge' in terms of academic achievement. The SASA allows schools to set their own admissions policies[45]. It thus becomes, as West *et al* (1997) puts it, 'the schools who do the choosing.'

Many of the more successful schools are known for their strong links with tradition rather than being innovative (Chubb, 2003; Holloway, 2000; Halpin *at al* 1997; Gorard, 1997; Lubienski, 2001). Where innovation does take place it is often linked to increased use of technology such as the current trend of using computers and interactive whiteboards in the classroom. These 'innovations' would be difficult to duplicate in under-resourced schools or schools with very large classes i.e. schools mainly serving disadvantaged communities.
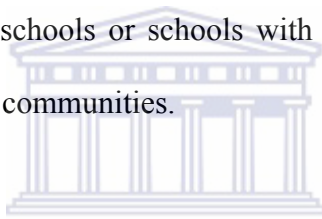
It is not only in the sphere of attracting the more academically able learners that schools compete. Schools also compete for teachers. As the SA Schools Act allows schools to supplement their incomes by charging school fees, popular schools are able to supplement the salaries of teachers enabling them to attract and keep better qualified, more experienced teachers especially in areas where skills shortages exist for example, mathematics, science and commerce[46]. An examination of the annual budgets of some of the more popular schools reveals budgeted amounts of up to half a million Rand to 'top up' the salaries of teachers[47]. These schools are also able to employ additional teachers paid for by funds raised by the SGB. It therefore becomes

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[45] As long as they are not in conflict with the SASA and Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools.
[46] This situation is made all the more serious by the convergence of two factors. The new FET curriculum has increased the need for more teachers to introduce additional subjects (learners must offer seven subjects instead of six and at the same time there are very few new teachers entering the profession.
[47] My personal experience. I have two children attending these successful schools.

far more attractive for teachers to teach at these schools as they receive higher wages, teach smaller classes and have access to greater resources. The argument that the innovative techniques and approaches applied at these successful schools can be copied by less successful schools holds little water as many of these successful strategies are dependant on the availability of resources and funding which the state is not willing to make available to schools that cannot generate sufficient funds on their own.

5.6.1 (d) Responses of less successful schools

How then do the less successful schools respond to competitive pressures? If it is, as the proponents claim, that schools are unpopular because of their inability to provide effective education programmes, it is unlikely that they have the capacity to change to meet the perceived preferences of families. They will not have the capacity to identify the preferences of families nor the resources, both human and physical, to change their educational offerings.

Competition between schools seems to be within the schools at the same level of the hierarchy. Anecdotal evidence indicates that schools, at least in terms of their own perceptions, see themselves competing against schools that are similar in terms of the fees they charge, their historical classification and the socio-economic composition of their learner populations. An interesting development is that the schools at the pinnacle of the hierarchy see other schools at the pinnacle as being their competitors, and although they do not compete for learners or resources, they do compete for prestige and improved reputation. It is clear that these well-resourced schools do

benefit from competition, although it is not the threat of declining enrolments that drives their quest for improved educational quality.

5.7 Implications for policy

School choice in South Africa prior to 1994 was severely constrained by the Apartheid legislation. Families were restricted to choosing between high schools designated to service the race group they belonged to in terms of the Apartheid classification. However, with the democratisation and normalisation of South African society, the range of schools from which families can choose has increased dramatically.

The fact that the reforms in education since 1994 have made an impact on the education choices available to families in South Africa is indisputable. The post 1994 period has seen a transformation of South African society with the removal of Apartheid legislation. The dismantling of the Apartheid legislative barriers has had a profound impact on the educational system. This freedom to choose which school to attend has propelled this issue of school choice and market-based reforms firmly into the forefront. There is evidence of what Hoadley (1988) terms unusual migration patterns due to a demand for schools that are perceived to be superior.

In addition to the transformation of society at large there have also been a number of policy reforms affecting the ability of families to choose schools. The most significant of these are the SASA, the Norms and Standards for Funding and the Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools. These reforms have not only impacted on families' abilities to choose but also on schools' ability to supply

education offerings to meet the needs of families. The convergence of these policies along with the Employment of Educators Act has resulted in what Woolman & Fleisch (2006) term South Africa's 'unintended experiment' in school choice.

5.7.1 The impact of SASA on school choice

One of the main areas where the SASA has impacted school choice is in terms of the increased focus on the decentralisation of management and the increased autonomy of schools by means of the School Governing Bodies. The SGB has the right, with consultation of the parent body, of setting the level of fees levied by the school. This has had a tremendous impact on the ability of certain schools to generate large amounts of additional funding to be used to employ additional teachers, maintain good teachers and to improve and maintain physical resources. Schools serving the more affluent communities are able to call on the support, via the governing body, of individuals with greater resources in terms of expertise, time and financial resources. In this way these schools have managed to maintain their competitive advantage over schools serving less affluent communities where the members of the governing body do not have the same resources at their disposal.

5.7.2 The Impact of the Norms and Standards for School Funding on School Choice

The Norms and Standards for Funding is an attempt to redress the imbalances in education created by Apartheid system. In terms of this policy schools are divided into 'poverty quintiles' based on certain criteria and that State expenditure per learner is based on the quintile in which the particular schools falls.

School quintiles from poorest to least poor	Expenditure allocation (% of resources)	Per learner expenditure indexed to an average of 100
Poorest 20%	35	175
Next 20%	25	125
Next 20%	20	100
Next 20%	15	75
Least Poor 20%	5	25

Table 31: Poverty quintiles
Adapted from Pampallis 2003, 152

The basis of this differential allocation i.e. the 'poverty quintile' is not without its problems.   Firstly the assumption that poverty is evenly spread throughout the population is an erroneous one. Under the Apartheid regime, it was the majority of the country's population who were oppressed. Therefore the concept of the poverty quintile creates arbitrary differences between groups who all suffered tremendously under Apartheid. Secondly the determination of which quintile a school should be placed in is not without problems. One example of this is where the property value of the residences surrounding the school have been factored into the determination of the quintile. Some schools, classified as 'non-white' under the Apartheid system, are located in affluent areas previously classified as white[48]. Therefore schools disadvantaged under the previous system have been placed in the 'least poor' quintile. A third concern is that the gulf in terms of resources between schools is so great that increased per capita expenditure is not sufficient to bridge that gap. There also needs to be an extensive programme of capital expenditure.

5.7.3 The Impact on the Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools on School Choice

The Admissions Policy, while stating that families cannot be discriminated against in terms of admissions policies, continues to advantage those families that are already

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[48] The original 'non-white' residents were moved out of the area in terms of the Group Areas Act but these schools continued to serves their original communities.

economically advantaged. By giving priority to those who live closest to the school, families with the financial means to live in the more affluent areas, where the most popular and academically successful schools are located, are at a distinct advantage when it comes to choosing a school for their children.

5.7.4 Implications for Policy

School choice is an integral part of the education system in South Africa. Given the political and social circumstances any linkage of enrolment to residential areas would serve to perpetuate the legacy of the Apartheid laws. School choice is therefore 'here to stay' and does form an important thread in the fabric of the democratic dispensation in South Africa. They key issue therefore is what role competition and choice should play. In this regard a clear motive needs to be established. Is the aim to promote educational quality and equity or is it aimed at achieving economic efficiency? Is a reliance on the market a mechanism for the State to abdicate its responsibility to provide adequate and equitable education for all its citizens by perpetuating the myth that families are free to choose schools for their children? For it is patently false that families are equal in their ability to choose and to have those choices honoured. The ability to choose is constrained by cost and access to information and must be seen within the context of unequal racial geography. This is not to say that there are no benefits to be derived from competition but that education cannot be left under the control of the vagaries of the market.

Central to the functioning of the educational quasi-market are the preferences of families. Responding to these preferences presents something of a paradox. On the one hand one could argue that these preferences are the result of the complex

interactions of the various role-players and it would take great expenditure in terms of resources to investigate, interpret and understand these preferences. On the other hand the preferences of families are expressed in terms of factors that are clearly identified in various studies and are well-known to those who manage schools. There are core values to which any school must aspire to be successful. These values are no secret and include discipline and safety, academic success and whole child development. Family preferences do not, however, only include educational characteristics of institutions but also reflect social status, historical classification and racial composition of the pupil population. Maile (2004) correctly argues that school choice is not simply driven by educational considerations and therefore educational change cannot simply be driven by the preferences of families.
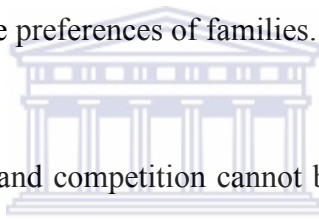
This is not to say the choice and competition cannot bring about an improvement in education quality. Ladd (2002) argues that competition and choice seem to work best where 'the playing fields are level'. I would like to take this argument a step further by stating that competition and choice can have a positive effect where schools have not only reached a degree of equity but also, and perhaps more importantly, a high degree of adequacy. Rather than increased competition and choice reducing the role of the State, it becomes incumbent upon the State to ensure that all schools reach a level where they are able to compete. This may to some extent explain the contradictory evidence surrounding the impact of choice programmes. Where the playing fields are very uneven, where schools are engaged in survival strategies competition would have little impact on their function. Where schools have achieved a level of adequacy they could benefit from the effects of competition.

The market metaphor in education is a restricted one. Educational markets do not function in the same way as commodity markets mainly due to the profit motive and the associated investments to generate further profits. Pampallis (2003;161) incisively captures the challenge facing education when he states;

> The solution for these children lies not in the opportunity to attend the historically privileged schools; this would be impossible if only because of the sheer numbers involved. The solution for them lies instead in improving the quality of the schools in the areas where they live.
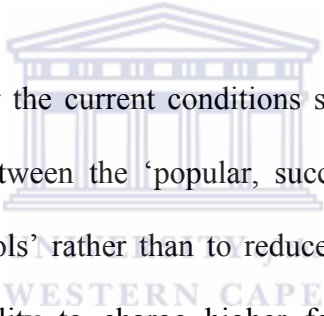
Therefore rather than reducing the involvement and investment of the State in education, a movement towards increased choice and competition, and the associated benefits, demand greater inputs on the part of the State. Furthermore the role of the State in the educational market needs to expand to include a regulatory aspect. Even in commodity markets there are controls to prevent competition from becoming harmful. After all, the ultimate aim of competition to eliminate competitors.
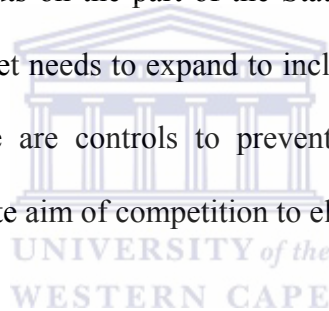
Increased school quality may therefore be a prerequisite for effective competition rather than a result of it. The greatest benefit of choice may be to schools that have already attained high levels of success.

Current policies aimed at increasing the role of choice and competition may be somewhat premature. Policy initiatives should focus on creating the conditions under which competition can have a beneficial impact on schools and the educational system as a whole. While these conditions are often taken for granted in First World countries it remains useful to remember that the socio-economic context is quite different in Developing Countries (Tikly & Mabogoane 1996, Kitaev 1999).

Therefore for any policy aimed at increasing the educational quality through competition and choice is doomed to failure unless certain basic prerequisites are met. Schools must be adequate before they can compete and become excellent. These conditions are no secret, they include human and physical resources of sufficient quality and quantity (including management), learning materials, discipline and safety for both teachers and learners and the instilling of a culture of teaching and learning in all schools, regardless of where they are located. Where schools are engaged in survival strategies competition will have little impact on them, however once they enjoy a degree of success the pressures of competition could lead to further improvements in quality.

In its current form and under the current conditions school choice and competition serve to increase the gap between the 'popular, successful schools' and the 'less popular, less successful schools' rather than to reduce it. Higher levels of success means schools have the ability to charge higher fees, employ more and better qualified teachers and maintain and improve resources at levels that less successful schools cannot hope to emulate. There are, however, examples of schools who are not as well resourced, but who have resources of an adequate level who have reached a situation where they do compete and have improved as educational institutions.

Choice and competition can have a positive impact on schools and the school system as a whole, not as a controlling mechanism but in conjunction with State support aimed at providing schools with the means to compete.

APPENDIX A
Questionnaire

1. Please indicate the schools which you <u>considered</u> sending your child to.
(The order is not important and you do not need to use all the spaces)

Name of School	For Office Use

	For Office Use

2. Please indicate the names of the High Schools which you have <u>applied to</u>.
(The order is not important and you do not need to use all the spaces)

Name of School	For Office Use

	For Office Use

3. If your child was accepted at all the schools you applied to, which High School would you choose?

4. Please list the most important reasons for selecting the school above.
(You need not use all the spaces)

Reasons for selecting a High School	For Office Use

How important were the following sources of information in helping you to make a choice of High School?
(Please tick the appropriate block for each of the sources)

Source of Information	Not used	Not Important	Important	Very Important
Brochure / Prospectus from High School				
Open day / personal visit to school				
Observation of learner behaviour outside school				
Parents of Grade 7 parents at current school				
Parents of learners at the High School				
Learners at the high school				
Teachers at current primary school				

5. How important would were each of the following family members in the choice of High School?
(Please tick the appropriate block for each person)

Family Member	Not Important	Important	Very Important
Mother			
Father			
Child			
Other (please name)			
Other (please name)			

In the case of a single parent family please write not applicable (NA) next to the appropriate family member.

For Office Use

7. When did you <u>seriously</u> begin the process of finding out about and choosing a high school?
(Please tick)

In Grade 7	
In Grade 6	
In Grade 5	
Before Grade 5	

8. Is this your first child that is going to High School?

YES	NO

(Please tick)
If NO please indicate the High School(s) that your other children have attended or are attending.

Name of High School(s)

9. Which High School did you attend?

10. Which High School did your husband or wife attend?

For Office Use	For Office Use

11. What is your relationship to the child

Mother   Father   Other

If you ticked 'other' in the question above indicate your relationship to the child in the space below:

12. Please indicate the residential area in which you reside by ticking the appropriate block.

Residential Area	
Plumstead	
Wynberg	
Parkwood	
Fairways	
Other (please specify)	

For Office Use

APPENDIX B
Interview Schedule

a) Many parents indicated that a personal visit to a school was an important source of information when choosing a high school

    1. How important do you consider a personal visit to the school in gathering information about the school?

    2. When you visit a school what do you look for?

    3. How many schools did you visit?

b) Many parents indicated that observing student / learner behaviour outside the school e.g. on the way to and from school was an important source of information.

    1. How important do you consider the observation of student / learner behaviour outside of the school?

    2. What sort of things do you look for when observing student behaviour?

c) Many of the parents who filled in the questionnaire said that the reputation of the school was an important source of information.

    1. How important do you consider the reputation of the school in your choice of high school?

    2. What sort of information do you think reputation refers to? / What do you understand by the term 'reputation'?

d) What role did school fees and the cost of schooling play in your choice of high school and

e) Were certain schools not considered because of the high cost associated with a child attending that school.

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