Understanding school choice: what parents prioritise in high schools

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Statement of originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the produce of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

SHARON MARGARET ARIS
July 2020

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand how parents make sense of high school choice, and how in understanding this, insights can be gained into the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in education that operate in the Australian school field. It does this by focussing on analysing the underlying bases of parents' aims from high school and how they seek to realise this through high school selection. It examines how different parents' assets, previous experiences and relationships to schools enable them to attain their desired high school selections. In doing so this thesis goes beyond previous frameworks for understanding parents' school choices to focus on how relations between families and schools, particularly in relation to academic achievement, influence all actions in the school field.

This study draws upon two theoretical frameworks: Bourdieu's field theory and Legitimation Code Theory. These are used to describe and analyse 28 parent interviews from a single geographic case study area in Sydney, comparing the outcomes parents sought from high school with how school choice was envisaged as working by policy makers. Four groups of parents with differing approaches to high school choice are identified: credentialists, socially-disposed parents, all-rounders and consolidators. The approach of each parent group to high school choice and the basis of the outcomes they seek from schooling provide important insights into how parental school choice creates different advantages and disadvantages in schooling.

This thesis makes a number of contributions. Through enacting a relational framework it creates a model for surfacing previously hidden features of the school field including revealing why some newly migrated parents so readily adapt to the Australian school field, while other parents struggle to be seen. It creates a language that enables descriptions and analyses that get beyond empirical description to the relational principles that underlie parents' choices. It also reveals a field that is so geared to enacting academic performance it too easily leaves behind students who will not easily boost a schools' ratings in this regard. Finally, it offers suggestions for new possibilities for the field.

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For Rob, Olivia and Dashiell

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Wrapped in the white, pink and blue-striped flannelette hospital blanket all newborns in New South Wales, Australia, are equitably swaddled in, my daughter was barely hours old when I was first asked: 'Where are you thinking of for school?' This was not a conversation I had been expecting with a baby so new, but a question like this only matters this early if there is scarcity. If there are 'good' and 'bad' school options and the good ones are difficult to get into. In this case, the 'good' schools implied in the question were schools that were paid for. Paying starts early. To be guaranteed a place in the school in 13 years' time, children's names are placed on a paid list as soon as they are born.

As it turned out this questioning was not unusual. All around me at family and neighbourhood gatherings in white, professional middle-class Sydney the same question was being asked: 'Where are they going to go to school?' It would also be wrong to pretend I had not considered this. Before we bought our house I had checked the catchment areas of the local public schools, making sure we were in area for one with a 'good' reputation. Therefore, the real question for me was not 'what school?' but 'will a government public school be good enough?'

But how do you start looking? I started with what I knew. My high school was private, aspirational and religious. It was filled with good people, but had an insularity I was in no hurry to repeat for my child. She would not be going there. What about the insights gleaned when first out from this system and in undergraduate study? I remembered those early university days when the first question asked was 'where did you go to school?' and realizing how quickly many elite private school graduates sorted themselves away from everyone else. Confident, sparkling and intimidating. Not the kind of people I wanted my child to become either. Government public schools seemed to be more community-minded, but they come with a risk – you don't pay, so don't have a say. There was also school reputation and the local public schools 'everyone' avoided, the ones with students who were seen as not disciplined, not aspirational and not on a tight enough leash in the tricky teenage years. Added into this was my professional experience. As a youth worker and now a tertiary teacher I had often seen the gulf between young people who emerged confidently from school and those who fell out,

convinced they weren't good enough or smart enough. I knew those who fell out were more likely to be coming from under resourced schools. Then finally, what about the individual? It seemed crazy to be making decisions when who your child *was* and their talents, dispositions and needs were years away from being known. In this confusing whirl of questions my parent peers were splitting different ways. Some chose local public high schools, no questions asked. Others veered away, demurring 'I believe in public education, but I can't make my child be a social experiment'. Some sent their first children to public schools and later ones to private. Or vice versa.

Australian urban schooling is uniquely segmented and notionally, parents do not want for choice. There are three school sectors – public, Catholic and independent and within these a plethora of choices: single sex or co-educational; no-fee, low-fee, high-fee; comprehensive or specialist; alternative pedagogy or standard instructional design. It is also among the most unequal of school systems across the OECD (OECD 2102). One in three high school students attend a non-government school (Australia Bureau of Statistics 4221.0 - Schools, Australia, 2017); advantaged students are much more likely to attend school with other advantaged students compared to similar countries like Canada. The same is true for disadvantaged students. (Perry 2017); the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students is equivalent to three years schooling (PISA 2015, 2016 in Cobbold 2017); the highest performing schools and the lowest performing schools in Australia have more than 80 percent students from a Language Background other than English (Windle 2015, pp.18–19).

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This raises the question, in such a complex school field, how do parents make sense of choosing a school? How do the choices each family makes, affect others around them? In this study this is addressed in the following research questions:

1. How is parental school choice constituted in the NSW school field, including how is it described and regulated?
2. What do parents seek from high schooling for their children?
3. How do parents seek to realise their aims from schooling through high school selection?
4. What do parents high school choices reveal about the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?

To understand these questions it is useful to think of parental school choice as a phenonema and a policy direction sustained by changing series of discourses. As a phenomenon school choice is not new. From the foundation of the colony of NSW parents have chosen between highly segmented school forms, each with different institutional structures, instructional styles, religious-affiliations and class-associations (Campbell & Proctor 2014; Forsey, Davies & Walford 2008). Over time these forms transformed into institutional elements whose influence has ebbed and flowed, yet continue to assert themselves in the contemporary school field. Divisions remained after state schooling was established and funded from the 1860s (Campbell & Proctor 2014) and after comprehensive public schooling – designed to cater to all – emerged in response to the baby boom, migration boom and economic shocks following the Second World War (Maddox 2014; Peel & McCalman 1992). School attendance in public education peaked at 75.9% in 1975 and from then on, a growing percentage of students have flowed to the private sector. By 2017, 34.4% of students attended a non-government school (Australian Bureau of Statistics 4221.0 – Schools, Australia, 2017). It was primarily middle-class parents who made this shift to private schooling (Campbell 2005; Proctor 2008). This is further explored in Chapter 4, The School Field.

The idea of school choice as a deliberate policy is often traced to the United States of America (USA), where a voucher system for education was first proposed in the 1950s (Friedman 1955). The policy logic of a school marketplace was later articulated there by Hoxby (2001), who predicted all schools brought into competition with each other would be forced to raise their standards, creating a 'rising tide' for all. In Australia, similar notions, first badged as 'economic rationalism', took hold in the public sector (Pusey 1991) leading to what Connell (2013) has described as a 'neoliberal cascade' of market ideology policy reform enacted across many government departments including education. This is further explored in Chapter 2, Literature Review.

The discourses that have supported and sustained school choice have varied over time also. In the USA, Lubienski (2008) has described how parental school choice was first promoted on access and equity grounds by progressives and on civil rights grounds by conservatives who then borrowed the economic logic that injecting a competitive effect into schooling would improve the quality of all education. In the United Kingdom (UK) it has been associated with supporting both consumerism in education and parental responsibility (Bowe, Gewirtz & Ball 1994). In Australia, it has been particularly championed as a parental right (Buckingham, 2001,

2010, 2016; Donnelly 2009) and as a policy providing parents with a sense of control in education (Forsey, Davies & Walford 2008, pp. 9–10).

1.3 SCHOOL CHOICE AS A FIELD OF STUDY

The ubiquity, contradictions and tensions inherent in school choice has led to an expansive field of school choice study worldwide. A substantial body of work (see Chapter 2) has demonstrated multiple factors parents choose 'for' and 'against' which can also be associated with parental demographics. Studies using the lens of social reproduction – most commonly social class, but also ethnicity – have described middle-class parents' as having a seemingly organic relationship with schools, while working-class families are described as more likely to be alienated or ignored in the school environment. Scholarship focussed on neoliberalism has highlighted how the effects of marketisation are felt across an entire field, whether or not all families within it choose to actively participate by enrolling outside their local high school. These elements – history, policy, class, ethnicity and marketisation – all provide important starting points for understanding the intersecting factors, institutions and discourses that inform parents' school choice practices.

Although many studies have described key elements affecting school choice, including where elements intersect, few have addressed the underlying mechanisms of how these act together. Fewer still have differentiated specific local area effects from generalised descriptions from other studies or have moved beyond preconstructed categories to describe parents or their actions.

1.4 NEED FOR DIFFERENT CONCEPTUAL TOOLS

To be able to analyse the relations between the varied elements that influence parents' school choices, this research develops a new way of thinking through intersectional relationships. Specifically, it develops a new way of describing and analysing the relationships between parents and schools that are enacted in school choice, enabling multiple factors to be brought together, breaking with the reliance on descriptions of empirical experiences. This has required a specific set of conceptual tools to enable this relational thinking. In this thesis these are developed through the conceptions of field theory by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) and Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (Maton 2014, 2016a, b). Field theory provides a framework through which to describe the school arena, the relative positions of key institutions and actors within this, what is at stake, and the influence of actors'

prior experiences and current assets in shaping their dispositions, influencing their actions in the field. Analysis of the relations between these elements is operationalised using specialisation codes from LCT. This provides a language of description and analytic framework to enable the underlying principles for these school elements to be analysed and compared in order to demonstrate which parents experience advantage and disadvantage.

This thesis derives its findings from a qualitative analysis of the key factors that led parents in the research case study area 'Doongara' to choose a high school for their child. Located in urban Sydney in an area with 20 high schools in close proximity, Doongara represents an ideal school marketplace. Key data is derived from 28 semi-structured interviews with parents and two key informant interviews with two school principals in this area. This is contextualised with data derived using secondary historic records into the key institution and social elements that have constructed the school field in NSW and a discourse analysis of contemporary NSW state and federal parliamentary discourses that engage with school choice.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THESIS

This research study is presented in eight chapters. Chapter 1, Introduction, includes the background to the study, statement of the research problem and the research questions. It outlines school choice as a field of study and describes the need for a new conceptual approach, outlining the overarching structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2, Literature Review, presents a review of the international and Australian literature of the field. This is thematically organised into three key sections: mechanics of choice studies, social reproduction studies and school marketisation studies.

Chapter 3, Research Design, presents the conceptual framework and methodology used in this study, provided by the 'thinking tools' from Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu 1984, 1986, 1993) and Legitimation Code Theory (Maton 2014, 2016a,b). Methods of data collection include historical inquiry from secondary sources, parliamentary speeches and semi-structured interviews with participants in the case study area "Doongara". Methods for analysis of data are outlined including historical inquiry, constellation analysis of parliamentary discourse, and analytic coding of the interviews using specialization from Legitimation Code Theory (LCT).

Chapter 4, Evolution of the Contemporary School Field, is the first of four analytic chapters. This presents an analysis in two parts. In the first part the historic trajectories of the key institutional elements that structure school choice in the contemporary school field in the NSW school field are described. In the second part, how school choice is idealised as working by parliamentary policy makers is described using constellation analysis and analysed using the specialization codes from LCT.

Chapter 5, What Parents Want, presents an analysis of the key outcomes parents described seeking from high schooling for their child. These are described as key capitals, and parents are grouped according to the capital they sought from schooling. Four groupings are described: credentialists, socially-disposed parents, all-rounders and consolidators. Using Specialization from LCT the specialization codes of these groupings are described and analysed.

Chapter 6, A Good School, presents an analysis of how parents in each grouping recognise their ideal school and the key practices they enact to secure enrolment into it. These parent choice practices are analysed using specialization codes from LCT to uncover the principles and intentions behind different actions in the field.

Chapter 7, Revealed Advantage and Disadvantage in School Choice, presents an analysis of which students and parents are particularly disadvantaged in the school field – parents of a child with a disability. The reasons for this relate to structures of the field, particularly the primacy of academic performance, which is described and analysed, problematising the notion of parental school choice. This is then used to lead into a discussion of how the relations of field, capital and habitus, operationalised in the legitimation codes, enable an analysis of how different students and families are positioned in the field, to the advantage of only some.

Chapter 8, Conclusion, summarises the main research findings in relation to the four research questions informing this study. It synthesises the findings presented in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 and uses this to speak back to the wider field of school choice studies. The implications of the study are outlined including how this analysis can be used to think forward to new possibilities for students in the field, particularly those whose positions place them at a disadvantage.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Building on the introduction this chapter seeks to make sense of the complexity of school choice by outlining a selective review of the key literature on the subject, establishing a rationale for this research project. It takes a thematic approach to the field of school choice studies. As well as providing an overview of some of the main findings from the literature and key theoretical and methodological approaches, it describes key questions raised by these findings and approaches.

This review focusses on three dominant themes which can be termed 'mechanics of choice studies', 'social reproduction studies' and 'school marketisation studies'. Mechanics of choice studies are largely positivistic and empirical in design and are most influenced by rational choice theory in their methodology. These focus on the main factors parents describe as important when choosing schools, how they choose them and how these relate to families' socio-economic profiles. Social reproduction studies, which primarily use qualitative methods, approach school choice as a subject through which to understand the mechanisms of social reproduction as realised in the relationship between families, social class and education, and to a lesser extent, ethnicities and cultures. School marketisation studies, variously quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods, have largely focused on the effects of neoliberal policies – particularly marketisation – on school, family and government practices. This chapter considers how these approaches aid an understanding of school choice as a phenomenon and as field of study, as well as more directly informing how these findings aid the research questions of this thesis.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD OF SCHOOL CHOICE STUDIES

School choice as a field of study is international, extensive, expansive and increasingly fragmented (Ball & Nikita 2014). While Australian students have long attended different categories of schools (Campbell & Proctor 2014), school choice as a field of study especially expanded from the 1990s as the governance practices of neoliberalism – particularly the marketisation of government services – were implemented in many national school fields, leading to the widespread phenomena of parental 'school choice' (Windle 2015). Recently,

Stephen Ball (with collaborator D. P. Nikita) argued more is known about school choice from educational research than almost any other contemporary topic (Ball & Nikita 2014, p.82). To illustrate the scope of this, in August 2019 using Google scholar, a search of 'school choice' yielded 4,460,000 results, while 'school choice Australia' yielded 3,070,000. Even limiting this to a single academic database, EBSOHost, and referencing two social sciences databases within it (Social Sciences Full Text (H.W Wilson and SocINDEX) 'school choice' yielded over 9,000 results.

The sheer number of studies is also reflected in the variety of approaches to school choice studies. The example of one the field's most prolific scholars, Diana Reay, is illustrative of this. Reay has approached parental school choice analytically with reference to: Bernstein (Reay 2005); Bourdieu and habitus (Reay 2004a; Reay, David & Ball 2001); Bourdieu and capital (Reay 2005); Bourdieu's habitus and field (Reay 1996); Bourdieu and symbolic violence (Reay 2007b); Durkheim and Bernstein (Reay & Ball 1998); a critique of individualisation (Reay, Crozier & James 2011); psychosocial or psyche and social class descriptors (Lucey & Reay 2002; Reay & Lucey 2000); social reproduction (Reay 1998b).

In this review key theoretical frameworks considered include: rational action or rational choice theory (RCT) (Cheal 2002), theories of individualisation (Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Cheal 2002), theories of risk society (Beck 2000; Urry 2004), the policies of neoliberalism (Connell 2003; Pusey 2003), the application of market and the theoretical constructs of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly of capital and habitus (1984, 1986, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) and social reproduction (Reay 1998a). In school choice studies, researchers frequently call upon more than one theoretical framework or publish multiple papers on specific data sets using different theoretical approaches to explain aspects of their observed phenomena. Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996, p.89) argued:

> Parental choice of school is not susceptible to one definitive analysis. Different kinds of analyses bring out and highlight different aspects and patterns of choice. There are recurring themes and patterns, like, importantly, the multifaceted relationships between social class and choice. But even these can be written about in different ways. Attempts to reduce choice making to one simple formula or metaphor will only lead to dangerous over-simplification and misrepresentation.

This creates a field rich in description but confusing at times in analysis. In this review, differing theories relevant to analyzing aspects of a phenomena in the field are described as

they arise from the literature being reviewed. However, this review does not critique all theories used in each study.

The types of school choice studies examined fall into three broad categories: studies where school choice is the specific object of study; studies where school choice is an object through which to examine other issues (often, social reproduction); and studies in which school choice is a feature of a broader set of family, school or education practices being examined, for instance, parent-teacher relationships. This literature review considers all three as is relevant to the thematic area being described.

School choice literature is dominated by works from two national fields – the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US). Scholars from these national fields primarily reference works from their own national field, leading to what Ball and Nikita (2014), after Beck (2007), describe as a field beset by 'methodological nationalism' with a majority of studies only locally focussed. Studies situated in other national fields, including Australia, typically reference their own national work and works from each of these dominant national fields. As a result, research from these regions treats studies as comparable across the field, with a resulting tendency to ignore local effects (Angus 2015). In this review particular attention is paid to school choice studies undertaken in the Australian context, which has specificities not found in other national contexts.

To make sense of the field of school choice studies, which is simultaneously national and global, wide-ranging in inquiry yet also situated in the very heart of intimate family life, this review of the literature draws thematically from three groups of school choice studies. I have termed these 'mechanics of school choice' which focus on the key factors parents ascribe their school choices to; 'social reproduction studies' which examine the relationship between school choice, class, ethnicity and social reproduction; and 'school marketisation studies', which examine the behaviour of both parents and schools as influenced by school marketisation policies. This focus has necessitated leaving aside other areas of the school choice studies field including: parents attitudes to school choice (Boulton & Coldron 1996; Davies & Aurini 2008; Gewirtz 2001); children's say in choice (Reay & Lucey 2003); choice attitudes, equity and social welfare (Forsey 2004; Walford 2006); narratives of neoliberalism (Bridges 1994; Bridges & McLaughlin 1994); models of school choice (Russo & Ranieri 2017); and motherwork, gender and school choice (Aitchison 2006; Reay 2005).

2.3 MECHANICS OF CHOICE STUDIES: WHO CHOOSES WHICH SCHOOL

What parents say they chose for in a school – which I have termed 'mechanics of choice' studies – are the most popularly understood form of school choice research. These studies focus on what parents' report 'choosing for', 'choosing against' and their processes of school selection. The empirical methods used to derive these descriptions most commonly are: self-reported surveys with parents about their school preferences; prospective interviews with parents on their intended school choices; retrospective interviews or retrospective surveys of parents where they recount their school choice processes; and observed choice studies of parents' school selection practices.

An underlying assumption of these forms of research is that distinct choice factors can be identified by parents and accurately reported. In these studies, school choice is largely reduced to a series of factors relating to school characteristics such as: academic performance, school demographics and location; school conditions; school sectors and perceived school values. In the sociological literature, surveys were most prevalent in the 1990s and 2000s, but this form of research and reporting still has currency particularly in economic and government planning literature (Gorard 1999; Mandic et al. 2017). Since then, the majority of research has been qualitative, particularly semi-structured interviews in a particularly situated local area. School choice 'factors' is also how school choice is popularly reported in mainstream and social media. This is exemplified in newspaper features such as 'Five tips for choosing a school – and three things to avoid' (Sonnemann & Goss 2019); high profile blogs describing 'How to choose the right high school' (Orr 2018); and universal magazines' biannual high-selling title 'Choosing a School for your Child, New South Wales', each of which provide long lists of factors for parents to use in their school choice considerations.

The majority of survey-based studies of parental choice rely on associations between choice factors and socioeconomic variables to make sense of parental responses. The methodology of such studies lies in economic theories rooted in paradigms from neoclassical economics (Coleman 1990) such as utility maximisation (Chakrabarti & Roy 2010) and consumption classes (Douglas & Isherwood 1980) with the principles underlying these broadly aligning with what is named as either Rational Action Theory or Rational Choice Theory (RCT). RCT assumes most human behavior can be explained as a result of individuals making rational choices as they seek to maximise their own benefits and minimise their costs (Cheal 2002

p.115). Applied in choice factor research, this means parents are presumed to logically choose a school based on a rational assessment of school quality and their capacities to access this, including financial capacity (Burgess et al. 2015; Bridge & Wilson 2015).

2.3.1 Key factors influencing school choice

From empirical school choice studies a common list of factors influencing parental school choice can be generated, though the relative importance of each varies according to the study reported[1]. These are:

- Academic outcomes and academic approach
- School reputation and school conditions
- Geographic location
- Transport and distance to travel
- Family and friends attending
- Ethnic mix
- Good discipline
- Child's happiness
- Child's choice
- Religion and values
- Individual factors relating to the child

Two strengths of this approach are that: it provides a common language for school choice, particularly given this is reflective of what is reported in the media; and that it provides a mechanism to measure a significant number of reported school choice processes and then make comparative associations between choice factors and social demographic information. This enables the relative significance of certain elements in relation to each other and/or to different groups to be reported. For instance, the importance of academic factors overall in parents' school selection decision-making is reported across a majority of studies and in some, was the most or second most selected criteria overall (Armor & Peiser 1998; Burgess et al. 2015;

[1] Adler, Petch & Tweddle, 1989; Armor & Peiser 1998;Bagley, Woods & Glatter, 2001; Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz, 1996; Bradley & Taylor, 2000; Burgess et al. 2015; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington, 2009; Coldron & Boulton, 1996; Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Coldron et al., 2008; David, West & Ribbins, 1994; Denessen, Driessena & Sleegers, 2005; Flatley et al., 2001; Goldhaber, 1999; Hughes Wikeley & Nash 1994; Hunter, 1991; McCarthy, 2007; Reay & Ball, 1997; Reay & Lucey, 2003; Saporito & Lareau, 1999; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Windle, 2009.

Flatley et al. 2001; Fox 1990). When associated with social demographic features, these studies have broadly demonstrated more advantaged parents appear more able to choose for academic reasons (Vincent 2001; Warren 2016; Yu & Taylor 1997). Less advantaged parents appear to place greater primacy on school location (Howell 2004; Kleitz et al. 2000), particularly transport and proximity to home (David, West & Ribbens 1994; Harris & Larsen 2014; Yu & Taylor 1997), discipline (Coldron & Boulton 1996), safety (Kleitz et al. 2000), child's happiness (Reay & Ball 1998) and child's own preference (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz 1995). Within ethnic groups certain factors are more important than others. For instance, in the UK, Hunter (1991) found discipline, good exam results, single-sex schooling and proximity to home were the most important factors in school selection for parents overall, but for parents from African or Caribbean backgrounds a schools' emphasis on good exam results was most important; parents of 'other black' ethnic background most often cited good discipline; while parents of English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish background did not favour any of these elements in particular. This is illustrative of two emerging issue arising from factor-based research: that local factors can have considerable effects; and that a nuanced description for parents' social and cultural classifications can yield significant differentiations.

2.3.2 Australian mechanics of choice studies and the 'public' versus 'private' frame

In Australia, factor-based research commonly seeks to differentiate the responses of parents who choose 'public' versus 'private' schools for their children (Buckingham 2010) and to associate these differences with parental demographics. For instance, a major survey commissioned by two leading broadsheet newspapers – the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* in Melbourne – reported parents' choosing public education considered the range of subject choices to be better, local location was important and their own public educational experience had been good. Parents seeking a private education cited discipline, religious or moral values, school tradition and a uniform code. Demographically, parents more likely to send their children to private schools were more highly educated, had higher incomes, more prestigious occupations and were more likely to vote conservatively (for the Liberal/National parties) (Beavis 2004). Other surveys have reported that private-school choosing parents sought a well-rounded education with a strong emphasis on learning life skills (Warren 2016); sought a partnership with schools (Beamish & Morey 2012); and were particularly influenced to attend Catholic schooling if this was parents' own religious background (Anderson 1987). Such results are consistent with cross-national research into parents sending their children to private schools (Davies & Aurini 2008; Dronkers & Avram 2010). Overall, while some private

school choice appears related to parents' religious background, the majority of nominated parental choice factors appears to relate to school qualities (Buckingham 2010).

Other Australian surveys have focused on differentiating choice factors common to all parents, from those favoured by private or public school choosing parents. For instance, Weston (1998) found all parents broadly agreed that of greatest importance was a school's academic curriculum, teacher attitudes and skills, control of violence, drugs or alcohol, approachability, and how well parents were kept informed in regard to children's progress. However, parents with children at Catholic schools were more likely to emphasise religion than parents in public schools or other private schools (p.57). Another found factors related to security, teacher quality and values were most important to all parents, while religion was rated as 'important' or 'very important' for 45.5% of parents choosing a non-government school (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science & Training 2007).

From these studies it is possible to cluster together at least three key groups of factors that appear to be associated with different parent groups school choices: elements related to academic studies, including curriculum, teaching and subject choices, which could be termed 'knowledge factors'; factors related to school discipline, values, values education and social and life skills, which could be terms 'social and relational skills'; and pragmatic factors, particularly geography and transport. These provide useful starting points for investigation to address research questions two and three in this study – 'what do parents seek from high schooling for their children' and 'how do parents seek to realise this through high school selection?'

2.3.3 Limitations of factor-based research

While factor-based research has provided insights into what parents in different social categories have described as important to them, it also has limitations that raise additional questions. These include: the degree to which parental socio-demographics can be reliably associated with different school choice factors; the reliability of parents' responses to survey and interview questions; gaps between parents' stated desirable schools and their capacity to realise entry into them; a lack of common definition of terms or the ability to elaborate these; parental use of proxy language; and assumed factors.

Despite studies overall describing the importance of academic factors to parents' school choices (Armor & Peiser 1998; Burgess et al 2015; Flatley et al. 2001; Fox 1990) a feature of some studies is the authors' surprise that academic or educational factors were not key choice criteria (Coldron & Boulton 1991; McCarthy 2016). When researchers have sought to differentiate the relative importance of academic factors between parent demographic groups, results have also been inconsistent. In some studies, academic performance is more important to parents with a college education (Schneider & Buckley 2002), parents with a higher income (Yu & Taylor 1997), middle-class parents (Vincent 2001) and Australian parents choosing an independent school (Warren 2016). Yet other surveys have reported few differences between different demographic groups (Elacqua 2005; Kleitz et al. 2000) and that the likelihood of parents choosing a school according to high academic performance decreased with education (Harris & Larson 2014). A meta-analysis of PISA results found while parents with the highest level of schooling and social advantage were most able to select for academically-oriented schooling, they did not select schools with academic tracking (in Australia, streaming) (Robert 2010). This demonstrates a key limitation of choice factor research: social demographics alone are not sufficient to explain the variations in response to even common factors. This raises additional questions as to how 'academic factors' are understood and interpreted by parents. Such questions are illustrative of critiques of survey-based studies, which have been described having four key limitations: prepared lists of factors pre-structure parental responses; the language of factors attributes a rational and conscious bases for choice that may not reflect actual parental processes; these presume factors are able to be separated and be unambiguous; and when reported out of context and without elaboration, factors are prone to misinterpretation or misattribution (Bowe, Gewirtz & Ball 1994a, pp.70–71). This points to the need for a research method that enables data to be collected from parents in a way that enables parental instigation of discourse rather than offering a pre-structured category, and also enables parents the opportunity to elaborate both the meaning and context of what they ascribe as important.

The reliability of parents' responses to surveys or in interviews has been questioned by analysis from mixed-method studies. This was illustrated in an observed choice study in the USA that used Internet tracking tools on a school ranking website, comparing parents' responses to questions on their school selection criteria with their online searches. This found while almost all parents endorsed the "right" academic values when questioned – saying they chose schools primarily according to academic performance – this did not reflect their actions in practice. While some parents' reported preferences matched their website searching, the majority

expressed a preference for academic performance but did not follow this in their search actions, instead searching for schools' demographic features. The authors suggest there are 'correct' school selection discourses parents will affirm in interview, but that other factors, particularly race and class, are more important in practice (Schneider & Buckley 2002). Other studies have differentiated between parents stated school preferences and their capacity to realise these, particularly for poor and working class parents who appear to have a gap between aspiration and realisation in school choice (Bell 2009) or more constrained choices (Harris & Larsen 2014).

Factor-based research is also presents limitations in relation to both how key terms are understood and defined, and difficulties with 'proxy language' where underlying meanings may be masked by the choice of words parents use to describe their selections. For instance, Coldron and Boulton (1996) found while 'discipline' was a key choice factor raised unprompted in a majority of their interviews, this term variously captured concerns with maintaining adult authority, a concerns with maintaining the 'moral order' and, for parents with a lower socio-economic status, the development of work habits associated with employability. In another study by the same authors, 'good discipline' referenced a 'cooperative' family form of discipline, rather than strict rules (Coldron & Boulton 1991, p. 174). Other research has indicated some factors may also function as proxies for other issues (Cheshire & Sheppard 2004; Coldron et al. 2008). For instance, Saporito and Lareau (1999) suggest some parents nominating geographic factors like 'distance to travel' likely used this as proxy for selecting for school demographics.

Finally, Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) caution just because a factor is not cited by parents, this does not necessarily indicate it was unimportant in their considerations. They illustrate this in relation to the factor of 'school reputation/recommendation' which in their surveys was most highly cited by sub-professional and sub-managerial families, but not more advantaged professional and managerial families. The authors observe the latter were likely able to emphasise other factors in the survey as through prior elimination they could already assume the schools they had under active consideration had good reputations (pp.77–78).

2.3.4 Summary: mechanics of choice studies

Mechanics of choice studies assume there are key school choice factors and parents can recognise and report these. These studies provide a useful selection of key elements parents

ascribe their school choices to be based on. The research overall indicates some important associations between different factors and parents' socioeconomic circumstances. These include more advantaged parents appear more able to choose for academic reasons, and less advantaged parents appear to place greater primacy on school location, discipline and safety. This research raises useful questions in relation to the importance of investigating academic factors and social factors in parental school choice, including the different forms this may take.

However, the utility of factor-based studies is limited by the often contradictory findings between studies, problems of definition of key factors or a lack of capacity to elaborate these factors, the reliability of parents' responses to survey questions (including a failure to distinguish a dominant discourse from an actual choice factor), gaps between the schools parents nominate as desirable and their capacity to realise entry into these, parents use of proxy language, the pre-structing of parent choice language and hidden assumed factors.

The result is a substantive gap in understanding why particular factors are linked to certain parent groups, what underpins these relations and what other social forces are influencing parental decision-making. There is also a methodological gap in gathering data that enables the description of wider social influences, and a descriptive gap to develop a stable set of descriptors that would enable cross-study comparisons of the wide range of parental factors identified above. Finally, the variations between factor-based studies and the discrepancy between parents' nominated choices and their revealed choices reduces the utility of drawing uncritically upon rational choice theory for this study. As this study is concerned with understanding how parents negotiate the complexity of school choice and how parents school choices can reveal some mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in the school field, this points to the need for a different approach. Specifically, an approach that enables parents' meanings, intentions and actions to be described as they arise from the data, rather than relying on predetermined factors and preconstructed parental categories.

2.4 SCHOOL CHOICE, CLASS, ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

How social divisions and inequalities become reinforced and reproduced through school choice is a major focus of school choice studies, which I have termed 'school choice and social reproduction studies'. These include: studies examining school choice and social class (Ball, 2003; Ball Bowe & Gewirtz 1996; Goldring & Smrekar 1995); studies examining the effects of parents' ethnicity or cultural background on parents' school choices (Ho 2011, 2015, 2017;

Sriprakash, Proctor & Hu 2015); and studies describing intersections between class and ethnicity (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; Hamnett, Butler & Ramsden 2013; Reay 1998b; Watkins 2017). Attention in this section has particularly been paid to the country or origin of these studies due to concerns about the generalised application of class-based research, discussed below in 2.4.1 *A problem of class*.

A majority of school choice studies focussing on how the mechanisms of social reproduction work with school choice draw upon work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who centred much of his work on the persistence of social inequalities, including in educational outcomes (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). In Bourdieu's work, some of the explanation for how social class is reproduced in differing arenas is through the uneven distribution of different forms of 'capital' or assets between social class groups (Bourdieu 1984) and it is this conceptualisation of capital, alongside that of 'habitus' or parent disposition, that is most frequently applied in school choice studies (Bridge & Wilson 2015). Bourdieu's description of cultural capital, which includes tastes, dispositions and the attainment of credentials (Bourdieu 1983, p.86), has offered a particularly useful distinction in choice studies that have sought to characterize the intellectual and cultural assets some families aim to inculcate in their children in schooling including through school choice (Aitchison 2006; Ball 2003a; Ball 2003b; Bridge & Wilson 2015).

An influential and oft-cited enactment of cultural capital is that of a 'concerted cultivation' or 'natural growth' approach to child-rearing by differing class groups in the USA by Annette Lareau (2002, 2003). In this framing, middle-class parents pursued the 'concerted cultivation' of their children, with children's time outside school highly regulated and filled with multiple organised activities which parents presented as important for the transmission of 'life skills' (Lareau 2002, p.748). In contrast, the children of working-class and poor families enjoyed more free and self-directed time in socially connected neighborhoods, with the description 'natural growth' reflective of parents' underlying belief that children thrived so long as love, food and safety were provided.

These descriptions have been derived from studies deploying a range of both qualitative and quantitative methods. As well as ethnographies as used by Lareau (ibid) and other studies using ethnographic techniques (Horvat, Weininger & Lareau 2003; Reay 1998b; Reay & Ball 1997), qualitative researchers have employed: interview-based research (Aitchison 2006; Ball et al.

1996; English 2009; Reay & Ball 1998); focus-group based studies with parents (Davies & Aurini 2008; Reay & Lucey 2003); focus-groups conducted with students (Crozier et al. 2008; Wang 2016); observational research (Bowe, Ball & Gewirtz 1994; Kenway & Koh 2013); and mixed methodologies (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; Power et al. 2003).

2.4.1 A problem of class

The concept of social class is used extensively throughout the literature on school choice. Social class is broadly understood as encompassing both notions of social category and identity (Campbell 2015; Forsey 2016). As a category it is often elided with socio-economic indicators, so for instance, parents with a higher education and professional or managerial work status are described as 'middle class', parents with high-school level education and/or in a semi-skilled positions as 'working class' (for instance, Lareau & Shumar 1996). While class as a concept is contested and critiqued in the sociological literature overseas (Mills 2014; Savage et al. 2013; Lareau 2008) and in Australia (Paternoster 2017) including in some school choice studies (Aitchison 2006; Ball 2003a; Forsey 2016; Tooley 1997), in the majority of school choice studies it is used uncritically. Where the critique is important for this study, this is noted.

School choice studies referencing social class have focused on three aspects of social reproduction:

1. the influence of parents' social class on what they aim for their children to achieve from schooling and what actions they have taken to achieve this;
2. the social and historic contexts within which parents made their school choices including parents' past and present experiences of schooling; and
3. the effectiveness of parents' school choice and broader educational strategies in achieving their schooling aims.

These are useful in providing a focus for inquiry in the present study, particularly informing elements of the second research question 'what do parents seek from high school for their children?'

Although class is conventionally designated according to three categories – ruling class, middle class and working class – school choice researchers overwhelmingly concentrate on the strategies of middle- and working-class parents. Studies focussed towards the practices of middle class parents range widely in how they categorise this group. Some elide the practices of middle-, upper-middle-class and ruling-class families, with Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg and

Cucchiara (2014) for instance, observing 'the distinction between a middle-class and an upper-middle-class family is not easy to draw' (p. 455). Others apply the designation 'middle class' broadly, including in the Australian literature. For instance, Pusey (2003) adopted the term "middle Australia" to refer to 'the broad urban middle class, and indeed just about all of us who live between the rich and poor' (p.3) while Connell et al. (1982) in the influential *Making the Difference* declined to describe a middle class at all, arguing that:

> Australia's middle managers, humbler professionals, technical experts and small business people do not have the stable interests which characterise both a working and a ruling class, and lack developed set of cultural institutions devoted to the expression and defence of fundamentally shared interests. (p.147)

Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) position the middle class in largely historic and relational terms, using socio-economic status and/or professions as proxies alongside ethnic descriptors in order to discern seven new variations of the 'urban middle class'; Hamilton, Downie and Lu (2007) adopt a 'categorical' stance, positioning the middle class as those households with gross disposable incomes between the 30th and the 80th percentiles as recorded in the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey (p.19). Considerably less attention has been paid to differentiating fractions within working-class families, though Lareau and Shumar (1995) distinguished between 'working-class' and 'lower-class' families, the latter delineating parents' status as public assistance recipients.

The wide application of class-based terminology indicates it still has utility in categorising differing sets of parent practices, circumstances and identities into parent groups. However, the breadth of definition, and the increasing fractionalisation within class category description indicates parent social practices are dynamic, complex and often more culturally and locally-situated than a class category can capture. In this study when referencing and reviewing existing literature I adopt the descriptions provided by the authors. Thus, a group may be described as 'middle class', or if the authors specify it, 'urban middle class', which I likewise do for markers of ethnicity, which may include terms such as 'white', 'Anglo', 'Scottish' and so on. Additionally where relevant, these are contextualised with descriptions of specific parental practices in order to compare features between studies.

2.4.2 Middle-class school choice: anxious, ambitious and positional

Schools have long been described as providing a key means through which ruling- and middle-class families pass on privilege to the next generation (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1998). A key body of research has situated school choice within a continuum of strategic middle class educational practices that lead all the way to professional life. In Australia middle-class employment has long been directly related to the attainment of qualifications (Connell et al. 1982) and school choice studies from Australia and the UK particularly continue to discern a key aim for middle-class parents being their children's achievement of credentials for a professional middle-class career (Ball 2003a; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; Power et al. 2003).

Contemporary middle class parents are also frequently characterised as anxious and insecure about both their own position and the future position of their children (Ball 2003a; Vincent & Ball 2001; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; Thrupp 2001). Parents are described as driven by the assumptions that in the contemporary economy entry into middle class professions is ever-more competitive, and that credentials alone are not sufficient. Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) illustrated how the dynamics of this insecurity can manifest itself directly in schooling, describing of how one group of middle-class families – who had intergenerationally focused on attendance in academically-selective high schools to provide 'the foundation for careers in an expanding public service, business and the professions' – now found themselves supplanted in these schools by an even newer fraction, largely from Asian backgrounds, who invested considerable resources particularly in supplementary schooling to get there (p.122).

Studies have thus sought to describe the key educational practices deployed by middle-class families to continue this progression to the professions. Interview-based and ethnographic studies on the school selection strategies of middle-class parents have particularly highlighted a status-conscious positionality of their practices and their emphasis on schools with high academic performance, a broad curriculum and programs than can be matched to their child. Middle-class parents are frequently described as approaching schooling strategically and with long-term planning (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller 2013). Here children's education is itself conceptualised as an 'education career' that includes a number of strategic steps often commencing with choice of primary school (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz 1995). In Australia this is a process that can start even earlier, with subscription to a school enrolment list at birth almost a rite of passage for older, established middle class parents who wish their children to attend

the same elite private schooling as they did (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009, pp.86–87). The intertwining of such family and school processes have been characterised as creating an organic relationship between middle-class families, schools and prestige higher education institutions, so that the progress between each is seemingly natural. In a study in the UK these relationships were cast in contrast to the relations between high achieving students from less prestigious schools and backgrounds, who did not aspire to prestige Oxbridge study options (Power et al. 2003, p.87). A similar process was described Kenway and Koh (2013) in an ethnography of the Singaporean elite. Here elite schools favoured by the most privileged were described as preparing students from primary school ultimately for entry into US Ivy League and UK Oxbridge colleges. The assumption being that on their return students would be able to convert their acquired cultural capital into high-level and high-paying public service careers (Kenway & Koh 2013). The authors referenced Bourdieu's conception of a giant 'cognitive machine' that tests, judges, sifts, sorts and streams students according to prescribed values within the school system to describe how class and race privileges were converted via 'meritocracy' into an 'aristocracy of credentials' (Wacquant 'Foreword' in Bourdieu 1996 [1989]). These studies illustrate the utility of describing the alignments of educational and social practices by different families and the schools their children attend, and particularly of examining whether these are characteristic of all families and the schools they attend, or only some.

Positionality has been particularly observed in the parenting practices of parents focussed on entrance into academically selective schools. This has been characterised as a form of 'excellence' that relies on a particular form of 'exclusion and differentiation' between pupils, whereby students are pushed to achieve a point of high distinction that sets them apart not only from working-class peers but also other middle-class peers (Lucey & Reay 2002, p.334). Similar positionality has been observed in studies describing parents' search for 'the best' school education, which been characterised as a distinguishing middle-class strategy. Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) note:

> Finding the 'best' schools, the 'best' universities, the most suitable peer groups within which to lodge their children, is an increasingly common set of strategies observable in middle-class families.

This was affirmed in a cross-national study of school choice in the OECD which described searching for 'best school' as the key characteristic of educated middle-class parents (OECD 2006, p.97).

In studies focused on how middle-class parents work to ensure their children's access to 'the best' schools a range of parenting practices are described including: familiarising themselves with the specifics of admission requirements of desired schools, hiring tutors for test preparation, and moving to specific school geographic catchment areas (Aitchison 2006). Such practices have been described as being driven by parents' belief there was a shortage of suitable school options, including in Australia a diminished trust in government comprehensive schools (Campbell, Proctor and Sherington 2009), and that this was also the common practices of their peers (Sattin-Bajaj & Roda 2018). This suggests, more than generalised choice factors, there is a particular value in gathering holistic descriptions of specific attitudes to local schools and local peer practices in understanding middle-class parents school choices.

While the necessity of academic achievement is a dominant discourse, other studies of middle-class parents have documented their rejection of schools or academic-streams in schools, which are perceived as placing too great an emphasis on academic performance (Bagley, Wood & Glatter 2001; Reay, Crozier & James 2011; Robert 2010). Rather, these middle-class parents are described as favouring schools that promote the development of the 'well-rounded' child (Aitchison 2006; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009). This has been particularly associated with elite schools that appeal to upper class parents through sport and or cultural programs (Kendall 2002). Researchers have framed such concerns as instances of cultural capital development or 'concerted cultivation' (Davies & Aurina 2008), cosmopolitanism (Maxwell & Aggleton 2015) and cosmopolitan identity (Wang 2016) and as being overtly positional (Crozier, James & Reay 2011; Power et al. 2003). Such alignments are again exemplary of the seemingly organic relations between advantaged parents and elite schools, where relations between them are mutual and naturalised (Campbell 2015; Thrupp 2002).

Associated with well-roundedness is middle-class parents' search for a school that matched their child. This was illustrated in the UK by Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996) where the most privileged and skilled parent choosers, almost exclusively from the professional middle class, described in interviews how school choice enabled them to 'match' their child's 'traits, needs and talents' with the particular school that was 'right for them' (p.94). These formulations of well-roundness and 'right match' have been contextualized with broader notions of a 'career as a life project' whereby the individual manages, and accepts the risk, of their own

progression, a philosophy associated with risk management or prudentialist approaches to child-rearing (O'Malley 1992; Rose 1999).

Researchers have also characterised how school demographics have factored into the concerns of middle-class parents both in relation to 'best schools' and positionality. For instance, in the UK Crozier et al. (2008) outlined how middle-class parents who sent their children to public education specifically chose 'safe' state comprehensive schools, which were often characterised by a low proportion of non-white peers. Conversely, a study into the actions of middle-class parents choosing *for* schools with diversity in the UK found parents articulated the benefits of this as a positional advantage their children gained from developing the social skills to negotiate a diverse world (Crozier, James & Reay, 2011; Reay et al. 2007). Such studies demonstrate the utility of looking beyond the 'factor' of demographics – either selecting for like-peers or diversity – to the underlying parental aim, which remained stable and aimed as the development of cultural capital for positional advantage.

In these formulations of middle-class practice, parents are presented as anxious, strategic and positional in their school choice actions, confident a range of programs will be available in their school of choice to meet their child's needs and abilities. However, the differing approaches to academic achievement and academically-oriented schooling, and the competing cohorts trying to attain a place in this, raises additional questions as to the outcomes parents are seeking from these schools and how parents respond to changes in the field, including the emergence of other parent groups with rival strategies.

2.4.3 Working class school choice: least-worst options and constrained choices

Studies focused on the school choices of working-class parents are less numerous than those focussed on middle-class parents. Besides the specific work on working-class discourses of school choice of Reay and Ball (1997) most studies have largely been derived from broadly-focused qualitative interview and focus group research on differing class strategies (Pusey 2003), specific research concentrated in individual schools (English 2009; Reay 1998b), studies on working-class school sets (Yu & Taylor 1997) or working-class area ethnographies. Researchers have frequently sought to contrast the practices of working-class parents with those of middle-class parents (Lareau 2003; Ball 2003a; Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz 1996).

Studies of working-class parents have described them as academically aspirational for their children in school, but that this is expressed as the desire for their children to have better educational opportunities than did their parents. That is, working-class interviewees reference and react against their own negative educational and workforce experiences to inform their educational aspirations for their children (Reay & Ball 1997). For instance, in Australia Pusey (2003) described the working-class subjects in his study as 'keenly, and often resentfully, aware of the impact that [lack of] education has [had] on their life chances' (p.55). This echoes Connell et al.'s (1982) earlier description of working-class parents who, stuck in repetitive, manual labour, perceived educational qualifications as a ticket to a better kind of job, and strongly supporting their children staying at school as long as possible to 'put a floor beneath' their future economic circumstances. Connell (2003, p.235) elaborated such aspirations in a later study, describing working-class families as more concerned to get their children to complete the minimum qualification to enter the labour market, rather than pursuing meritocratic projects. These studies suggest that the aspirations of working-class parents need to be understood both in relation to the context of their own lives and relative to those of their middle-class counterparts, with nuanced depictions for each.

Studies have also illustrated that while working-class parents describe aspiring to choose schools for academic reasons, their final choices include a higher proportion of low-performing, non-selective schools (Bell 2009). In one study in the US, rather than choosing 'for' schools with a good record of academic achievement parents recounted choosing 'against' schools with an even poorer record (Yu & Taylor 1997). Another UK study documented working-class mothers' avoidance of schools they considered likely to provide a home for the kind of racism they had experienced in schooling (David et al. 1997, pp.402–403). Similarly, Ball, Bowe and Gewitrz (1995) in the UK described many of the working-class parents in their study expressing the prosaic notion that academically, all schools were 'basically the same' and it was other qualities that would make a difference to their child's school experience. These studies suggest many working-class families have a different experience of school choosing than middle-class families. This raises a number of questions particularly relating to the constraints on choice experienced by working-class parents, the restricted choice-sets of schools they find available to them and why some parents take a defensive 'least-worst' choice approach.

The importance of understanding local context was demonstrated in a school-specific study in the outer-suburbs in Australia. Here the practices of a group of parents, described as working-class, who sent their children to a new low-fee non-government school were outlined. Parents were described as choosing this school over local government school options as they were aspirational their children would be provided with access to a "better life" through the schools' emphasis on particular cultural capitals – specifically a Mandarin Chinese language program and music instruction (English 2009). This aligns with the values of middle-class parents described earlier. This raises questions about the degree to which working-class parents in other studies have had their choices constrained by availability, or whether these reflect aspects of 'identity'. Further, it raises questions as to whether specific factors that enable school choice exist in relation to geographic and/or the broader Australian context for working-class families.

A particularly useful contrast between working-class and middle-class school choices was provided Reay and Ball (1997) in the UK who described how similar-seeming school choice practices, such as matching schools to children's needs, are put to different purposes by middle-class and working-class parents. Working-class parents emphasised the importance of support for less-academically oriented students while middle-class parents focused on the development of talents. The authors interpreted this as revealing different 'rational choice' logics, describing middle-class parents as playing a 'game they expect to win' (p.96) – the prize being study at a desirable higher education institution – while working-class parents focused on 'avoidance of failure'. This points to the necessity of gaining an elaborated description from parents as to the reasoning they use for their school choices, rather than relying on factor-based accounts.

These studies of working-class school choice also raise many questions as to how these parents school choices have been characterised previously, as well as what particular constraints influences the choices they can make. There are also important questions about the national location of class-based studies, with working school choice studies dominated by the work of educational sociologists in the UK. It is unclear how applicable these characterisations are to the Australian context. In addition, the variation between studies suggests current generalisations of working-class school choice studies have not captured all the elements of underlying significance.

2.4.4 Internal practices in schools: middle-class versus working-class parents

A particularly useful area of ethnographic educational scholarship where school choice isn't the key focus, but provides insights useful for school choice studies, is research into parents' social networks and social interventions in schools. Broadly, middle-class parents have been characterised as: having strong social networks based in schools (Rowe & Windle 2012); being able to make schooling decisions, including school choices, in information-rich contexts (Coldron et al. 2008; Kosunen & Seppänen 2015; Lareau & Shumar 1996); and as having strong networks that extended across different community schools (Bell 2009). Such networks, almost invariably mother-driven, are described as not only exchanging information but also as aiding in the troubleshooting of problems and of developing plans for meeting teachers and other school staff (Lareau & Shumar 1996). Parents are described supervising, monitoring, questioning and intervening in children's schools (Lareau & Shumar 1996; Reay 1998; Vincent 2001) and as being active in school governance, including being willing to appeal against disciplinary exclusion (Harris, Eden & Blair 2000). Observing parent-teacher conferences in the US Weininger and Lareau (2003) described the:

> deftness with which the middle-class parents were able to react to the unfolding situation, whether steering the conversation in a particular direction or couching a criticism of the teacher in an innocuous sounding platitude. This "feel for the game" likely contributes to their effectiveness and cannot easily be inculcated. Furthermore, it is difficult not to suspect that these parents' capacity to assert themselves vis-a-vis the teacher also derives in part from their social position and from the teacher's knowledge of it (p. 400).

That is, individually and collectively middle-class parents have been observed to assert themselves in school communities as active participants in their children's education, supporting but also acting to shape the manner in which schools respond to their children's education. Relations between middle-class parents and educational professionals have been described as having 'sense of commonality' (Vincent 2001, p.350) and 'cosy intimacy' (Gillies 2005, p.846).

Working-class parents' external social networks have also been characterised as strong, with empirical research revealing their child's friendships and sense of belonging in the local school were particularly important to parents' school choices (Reay & Ball 1998). In Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz (1995, 1996) the premium parents placed on local knowledge, the opinion of friends, relatives and that of their children lead the authors to describe school selection as more a collective than individual choice (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz 1995, pp. 107-109). Working-class

parents have also been characterised as having particularly positive reactions to teachers and schools that prioritised accessibility and friendliness, especially towards less academically adept students (Reay & Ball 1998). A similar phenonema in his Australian research led Windle (2008) to note a paradox whereby particularly strong bonds were maintained between students and teachers in some poorer-performing schools 'forged on a sociability that is constructed outside of the culture and cognitive framework of engagement with the traditional academic curriculum,' (in Windle, 2015 p.82). That is, students positive experience in these schools was decoupled from notions of the schools' academic performance.

However, other studies, have highlighted working-class parents' lack of agency and efficacy with school professionals, with parents' efforts often overlooked and historically presented as deficient (Gewirtz et al. 2005; Gillies 2006; Reay 1998c; Thomson 2002), the effect which has been to masking positive practices undertaken by them (Gewirtz 2001). For instance, US ethnographic research described while working-class parents' social networks were supportive, without a professional network of middle-class families, they were less able to effectively band together to make demands on schools (Horvat, Weininger & Lareau 2003, p.331). Likewise, Reay (1998) in the UK has described how both middle-class and working-class mothers raised academic concerns with schools with a similar frequency. But working-class mothers received less satisfactory responses and were more readily ignored. Other studies have noted the intersection between working-class parents and racial stereotypes including the frustration of working-class mothers' that schools appeared to have 'given up' on their children (David et al. 1997, pp. 406-7), a similar effect noted with Aboriginal parents in regional NSW (Lowe 2017). Other forms of alienation include the recollections of working-class parents of a sense of discomfort at school open nights, some forming the impression schools were trying to attract middle-class families, and that they and their children were 'unwelcome and unwanted' (Bagley, Woods & Glatter 2001, p. 317). Lareau (1989) in the US documented how working-class parents often considered they would be most helpful to their child's education by 'turning over responsibility' for education to educators, emphasising the separation between home and school.

Collectively, these accounts illustrate that far from the organic relationship between home and school described between middle-class parents and schools, working-class families are frequently alienated from school environments, despite their efforts at engagement. This highlights the importance of placing parents' school choice actions within a wider context of

their lives (Reay 1996). It also raises questions as to how relations between different types of families and schools can be characterised, particularly in relation to the power to effect change or have their concerns acted upon.

2.4.5 Social reproduction and ethnicity

An emerging body of studies has described the effects of social reproduction in schooling as it intersects with parents' ethnicity and culture as well as social class. These studies are largely observational or interview-based, with research often centring on specific population groups. A particular focus in the Australian context has been on the practices of parents from Asian cultural backgrounds, who have been characterised as deploying highly strategic approaches to schooling and school selection. This includes settling in residential areas near good schools, enrolling in supplementary schooling and extended outside-school study aimed at achieving admission to academically selective schools (Sriprakash, Proctor & Hu 2015). Attention has also focussed on the effects on other populations in schools to this group, which other parents regard as academic competitors (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009). Ho (2015) has characterised 'an anxiety that the children of Asian migrants are now doing 'too well'', with such students' success seeming to threaten the position of the white middle class, particularly in elite and high performing schools (Watkins, Ho & Butler 2017, p.2284).

Attention has focussed on a range of educational practices both in schools and outside of schools. For instance, Asian parents have been critiqued by non-Asian (and typically Anglo-background) parents for shifting the ethos of schools away from western liberal models of education that emphasise the 'whole person' to a narrower instrumental focus on exam performance (Butler, Ho & Vincent 2019; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; Ho 2011; Tsolidis 2015; Watkins & Noble 2013). This was brought together in an ethnographic study by Watkins and Noble (2013) who documented the school and home-study practices of Chinese-, Pasifika- and Anglo-background families. In this, the authors highlighted the extended study hours of Chinese-background students and the high performance expectations of their parents, which they characterised as the exhibition of a 'scholarly habitus'. This was particularly contrasted with the home-study practices of Pasifika students, who were described as more likely to struggle in the classroom and engaging in few extracurricular or study pursuits. This suggests descriptions of schooling and school choice practices need be considerably more nuanced and differentiated from the broad generalised 'ethnic' descriptors used in many

studies. It also points to the significance of taking into account students home-study as well as school-study practices when accounting for academic success.

These intersections, between different middle classes and ethnicity – were brought together in the Australian context in a mixed methods study by Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) who distinguished seven different 'middle classes', each with different school choice priorities. These were:

- An old middle class that remained attached to private schools which were often attended by the previous generation, who focused on the acquisition of social and cultural capitals, tailored to their child's individual talents and needs;
- A new professional middle class, attached to ideals of meritocracy but increasingly driven by the need for positional advantage and the acquisition of social distinction. This group frequently sought (preferably selective) government schooling, or in the absence of 'safe' government school choices, private schooling;
- A Catholic middle class largely loyal to Catholic schooling, though some bypassed this in favour of other elite private schools;
- A flexible cosmopolitan middle class who sought adaptability and flexibility for their children, weighing up selective or specialist public schooling or corporate schooling;
- A self-made middle class who had not been 'made' by education, but by their own small business endeavours. Often disappointed by their own government schooling, they were active consumers who frequently choose non-government schools;
- A first generation middle class who, as the children of migrants, were often first-in-family professionals. While mostly government school educated, this group demonstrated little school sector loyalty and school choice decisions were made in relation to local circumstances and to secure pathways to extended education for their children;
- A marginal middle class, largely first-generation migrants with little school history in Australia or overseas to draw upon who were culturally concerned about schooling, particularly the social behaviours of other students.

These groupings illustrate the challenge of describing middle class school choice practices, particularly the range of intersecting practices, influences and identities that constitute parents as a group. This also illustrates that while the educational imperatives that shape middle-class parents school selections may be broadly shared – particularly the imperative to choose a 'good school' and anxiety for future generations – the intersections of family history, inherited

wealth, professionalism, religion (particularly Catholicism), migration, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship all influenced family approaches to schooling and school choice. These studies illustrate how social reproduction needs to be understood beyond social class, but also how strongly associated social class is with factors including whiteness and ethnicity.

2.4.6 Summation and Limitations: Class, ethnicity and models of social reproduction

This survey of the literature related to social reproduction reveals schooling and school choice appears very different to middle-class and working-class families. Middle-class families are distinguished through the studies for the range of attributes they seek from schooling, their positionality and seeking of the 'best school' and also their anxiety. They are also noted for their confidence advocating in the school environment. Working-class parents school choices are more frequently characterised as constrained, with parents sometimes seeking the 'least worst' option, rather than the best and the lack of effectiveness they can experience in schools in having their concerns addressed.

However, as noted earlier, class relates to both identity and practice (Ball 2003a; Forsey 2016). A particular challenge is discerning the extent to which descriptions of class practice, particularly from overseas, apply in the Australian context. Furthermore, as observed by Power et al. (2003) a focus on the preservation of privilege by institutions and families means any discontinuities or interruptions that may be occurring become obscured or ignored. The disruptions in the Australian context by a new Asian middle-class who are strategically focussing their practices on academic performance and academic schooling indicates the necessity of moving away from institutionalised depictions of class to a more nuanced depiction of intersecting practices and differing family and cultural groups. This is offered in the work of Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) which illustrates how the Australian middle classes are fractional and fragmented, with new fractions continuing to emerge. Yet despite the rich empirical details, these descriptions of ever increasing fractions also point to a need to find a way to characterise the dynamics and principles underlying these practices, otherwise further descriptions of newer emerging practices, disruptions and groups can only fractionalise the depiction further into with ever-increased need for empirical description, ultimately obscuring rather than revealing the mechanisms of reproduction. Finally, while the work of Bourdieu has been referenced frequently, this has been most commonly applied to isolated elements of 'capital' or 'habitus' (Reay 2004). However, Bourdieu insisted his schemata of field, capital and habitus were interrelational (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu &

Wacquant 1992). This creates a conceptual gap in the methodology of these studies which lack explanatory power. Thus, without a language of description and a dynamic model within which to describe the differing relations that continually emerge between parents' histories and current circumstances such classifications in themselves remains static. What remains unclear is what exactly underlies key class relations and how these relations intersect within a dynamic system.

2.5 SCHOOL MARKETISATION: NEOLIBERALISM, SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

Neoliberalism is one of the most common lenses through which the drivers and effects of school choice has been analysed across the school field. It can be understood as both a philosophy and technology of government. As a philosophy neoliberalism can be characterised as advancing the classically liberal ideals of the private over public, individuals over collectivities, self-reliance rather than welfare, and self-discipline rather than bureaucracy (Forsey et al. 2008, p.12). As a technology of government it advances the economic agenda of the free market (Connell 2010, 2013; Pusey 2003) including the assumption that the application of competitive market forces to any sector will result in more productive and efficient outcomes than produced using government regulation (Angus 2015, p.396; Ball 2003b, p.31). In the school choice literature, neoliberalism is almost as dominant an explanation for the effects of choice – particularly social stratification – as social class and in many studies the two are linked, particularly in explaining the school choice practices of middle-class parents (Reay, Crozier & James 2011). In this section I focus specifically on studies that provide insight into how marketization has constructed relations between schools and families. Most specifically, how institutionally and systemically schools are constructed within marketized school systems and how these respond to this; and how parents are constructed within marketized systems and how they respond.

Studies examining parents and schools' responses to marketisation have used a range of research approaches to examine this including: quantitative approaches, such as examining school enrolment data – often cross-referenced to family demographic data; qualitative approaches including interviews and focus groups; and mixed methods using both. Most studies are situated in a single geographic area. Studies focused on the practices of schools have mostly been analysed with reference to theories of neoliberalism. Studies examining the responses of parents to markets have frequently referenced theories of risk society and individualisation. As outlined in section 2.2 (above), these frameworks are not mutually

exclusive. Some also intersect with social reproduction approaches or mechanics of choice approaches, thus some studies referenced here have also been discussed in earlier sections.

2.5.1 Neoliberalism and the whole of field effects of school choice

The effects of a competitive school marketplace have been illustrated across multiple domains, studies broadly demonstrating: areas with high school choice have corresponding high levels of social stratification in schooling including in the UK (Allen 2008) and the USA (Bifulco, Ladd & Ross 2008; Cullen, Jacob & Levitt 2005); and that schools perceived as having greater resources attract students from more advantaged families (Goldring & Smrekar 1995). Some studies thus associate processes of class-maintenance with competitive school choice policies and broader narratives of neoliberalism (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz 1997). Some of which have been detailed in the previous section 2.4.5 *Social reproduction and ethnicity*, particularly the work of Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009). In this section studies that examine the effects of a competitive school marketplace across a region are detailed, which particularly informs how research question 4 'what do parents' high school choices reveal about the mechanism of advantage and disadvantage in the school field' is addressed.

Studies on the effects of marketization emphasize how this produces sector-wide effects. For instance, a state-wide study on school enrolment patterns in Victoria illustrated how, in the face of private sector competition, government schools shifted from offering a comprehensive school model to focussing on specialty schooling that oriented towards either academic or vocational specialisations. The effect was academically specialist schools became clustered in areas with populations of families with the highest socio-economic status, while vocationally specialised schools clustered in areas of low socio-economic status. The result was schools with the greatest increase in numbers of university entrants were located in the areas with the highest socio-economic status. The effect on school enrolments in disadvantaged areas was the most talented students travelled out of area to attend more academically-oriented schools, enabling government schools in wealthier areas to become higher achieving and thus more competitive (Edwards 2006). Another study in Victoria from this same period demonstrated high demand public high schools recruited from between 40 to 50 different 'feeder' primary schools across a wide geographic area. This was at the expense of government schools in areas with low socio-economic status – described as low-demand high schools – which recruited from only a few primary schools from a very restricted geographic area, becoming residualised and shedding 'numbers at a growing rate' (Lamb 2007, p.17). A similar study in New Zealand

demonstrated residualised high schools having a higher proportion of students with special learning needs including those from poorer families, students with disabilities, indigenous students, those from mobile or transient families and those with a lower level of English proficiency (Waslander & Thrupp 1995).

The intersecting effects of this produced similar results to class-based studies described earlier. In a mixed methods study focussing on school enrolment patterns in Melbourne, Windle (2015), described 'socially-restricted' and 'socially-exposed' schools based on the school populations they attracted, demonstrating how the former exercised power across the entire school system including in the kinds of study programs students could experience. For instance, the most advantaged and highest performing public schools rivalled elite private schools in their social selectivity having almost no students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. Both public and private schools in this group were able to offer fee-paying enculturation programs (p.102). At the same time, schools with enrolments from least advantaged families shrank, one consequence being these found it harder to support cultural and enrichment programs, the remaining families lacking the capacity to support such activities through paying additional fees (pp.114–116). Connell (2003) summarised such effects as a 're-segregation of the education system along class lines, and renewed marginalisation of working-class education' (p.237). Similar effects have been noted by researcher studying concentrations of ethnicity in schooling. This includes that private school attendance by Australian-born students is higher in areas with proportionally larger migrant populations (Mavisakalyan 2012) which Ho (2011) has characterised as a 'white flight' effect. Similar effects have been demonstrated the UK by Hamnett, Butler & Ramsden (2013) and the US by Goldhaber (1999).

These studies provide an insight into how the effects of marketization can be felt across an entire the school field even if only some families are actively pursuing school selection. These point to the utility of comparing parents school choices in the same geographic area and collecting rich description of not only to academic performance but the broader educational outcomes parents may be seeking.

2.5.2 How schools act within marketized systems

In Aitchison's (2009) interview-based study with mothers selecting inner-Sydney high schools, the crucial final step in school selection was the offer of a place in the nominated first preference high school. This highlighted that school choice was a two-way process, with

students also chosen by schools. Campbell, Proctor & Sherington (2009) describe how for high-demand private schools, admission is only assured to parents who pre-book a place on a paid wait-list, often many years prior to admission. In New South Wales, admission to high-demand selective schools is by competitive exam, while enrolment into public high schools – while nominally open to all – is only guaranteed to families living in the schools' catchment zone. Thus, if a family wishes to choose a school outside their public school catchment area, through admission requirements it is the school that ultimately exercises choice (Walford, 1996). This raises the questions – how do schools select students? How do parents work to ensure entry into schools?

This issue of student selection by schools has been usefully examined in the USA by Nechyba (2003, 2006) who used economic modelling to illustrate how private schools sought academic performers by offering scholarships to high-achieving students from low-income families, offsetting this cost by charging high tuition to lower ability students from high income families. Enrolment and economic modelling in the USA has also demonstrated fee-free public schools sought to attract high performing students through the provision of academically-selective streaming (Epple & Romano 2002; Lubienski 2006). This has led researchers to conclude that systems where schools' performance rankings are published, the most desirable students are ones with a track record of academic success (Angus 2015). Likewise, researchers in the UK have described class streaming and the provision of cultural activities as likely directed towards such recruitment (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe 1993). Using empirical data, Campbell, Proctor & Sherington (2009) in Australia described a similar phenomenon of private schools targeting academically gifted or high-performing sports students with scholarships.

This modelling demonstrates not all students are equal when it comes to school enrolment. For this research project this indicates a valuable focus for data collection is not only family demographic information but also more specific information on student interests, dispositions, needs and talents, gathering information as to how parents sought to address these in their school selections and what school options they found open to them as a result.

2.5.3 Which families negotiate the market best?

When describing how families behaved in marketized education systems and particularly which families appeared to negotiate school selection most successfully, researchers have frequently focused on how the conditions of marketisation better align with middle-class

parents' priorities and practices than those of working-class families. For instance, drawing upon interviews and survey data from a large mixed methods study Power et al. (2003) in the UK described how, as the labor market has become more meritocratic, middle-class families have become more qualification-oriented. Parents thus pursued enrolment in private schools or high-performing government schools as 'the best' schools to position their children for future qualification pathways. They describe this as producing a 'class meritocracy' within education: meritocratic insofar as the most exclusive schools produced students who achieved the highest school results, thus earning their students places in 'the best' universities; class-based in that access to private schools particularly was largely determined by fortune of birth. This echoes a similar contention of Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996), also in the UK, that middle-class families have always been able to 'work the system' to their advantage including understanding the best strategies to use in order to 'play the market'.

Conversely, in a survey of a culturally diverse, low-income neighbourhood in Melbourne, Windle (2015) found only a minority of families (42 per cent) considered more than one secondary school option, which was almost invariably the closest public school. This was in contrast to parents with a high socio-economic status, non-migrants and those who spoke English, who were most likely to consider multiple schools and undertake searches using MySchool, the online Australia-wide comparative school performance website administered by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the independent statutory authority responsible for the national curriculum and assessment. Windle attributed this to differences in belief about the significance of choice of school to a child's future success: the former group of parents overwhelming attributing a child's success to how hard they studied, rather than the school they attended, the latter the group most likely to believe that the school chosen would affect their child's future. These studies are useful as they highlight that just because a school market has been constructed, this does not mean all parents will approach school choice in a consumerist manner or with the same set of beliefs about what school choice achieves. This insight is useful for informing questions 3 and 4 of this study, which examine both what parents want to achieve from high schooling and how they seek to realise this in high school selection.

2.5.4 Understanding relations between school choice, segmentation and stratification

Studies of marketisation indicate that rather than a single reducible factor it is a combination of parental demographic factors, parent desire and available schools that results in differing

school selections. To describe and model parents' selection processes, in an interview-based study of 70 parents, Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1995) conceptualised different categories of schools as 'circuits of schooling' and matched parents – categorised in social-class groupings – to a school circuit. Four circuits were described: the first were local, comprehensive schools which recruited almost exclusively from the local population; the second were cosmopolitan, high-profile, elite schools some of which were selective and a recruitment zone that extended beyond the immediate locale; third were elite independent schools; and fourth, Catholic schools. Depending on parents' relative social class advantage they were described as choosing for or against schools within a particular circuit, based on a series of factors which constrained or compelled them in their choice. This conceptualisation enabled the researchers to describe both the 'push' and 'pull' factors that operated in families' choice processes. For instance, working parents favoured 'child's choice' but were also constrained in their capacity to travel beyond the local area. From this, the authors characterised working-class families as largely confining their considerations to local, community comprehensive schools. Middle-class choosers were broken into fractions which variously considered cosmopolitan, high-profile, elite government or, depending on their financial circumstances, independent schools. This led the authors to reflect that only the middle classes – historically already advantaged – were able to take advantage of the school marketplace (p.75).

This model provides several useful methodological constructions. It brings together school choice factors with different school types, and also parent social categories. It points to parents' discourses on school choice as involving a process of both 'choosing for' and 'choosing against'. It points to the importance of parents being able to elaborate factors – enabling a relative weighting of factors to be explained and suggesting there is a particular order for choice. However, this was constructed for the UK school field and uses pre-selected social class categories to describe parents. It thus provides a useful guide for bringing elements together, rather than a template.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This literature review has outlined three key ways parents school choices have been described and understood in the literature. Each has provided a useful thematic focus for descriptions of the key issues raised in the broad research and useful methods for understanding this. Mechanics of choice research described the factors parents ascribed as the basis of their school choices. These studies provided both a useful list of factors informing parental school selection,

and demographic associations that point to the relative significance of these varying in relation to parents' social and economic circumstances. Social reproduction studies focussed on the relationship between social class and ethnicity and parents' school choices. These illustrated middle-class parents and schools frequently seem to share a common focus, including on high academic achievement, a 'well-rounded' curriculum and study programs matched to the individual child. There is also evidence of competitive fractions within the middle classes, including those which intersect with family ethnicity. Working-class parents have been characterised as operating within choice constraints, including having an achievement gap between their aspirations and what they could realise in school selection, and having less effectiveness when intervening with schools overall. Marketisation studies have described how competitive school markets are associated with schools becoming more stratified whether all parents participate in school choice or not. Families with the highest socio-economic status have been demonstrated getting their children into the highest achieving schools. Methodologically these studies have pointed to the utility of studying a specific local school 'market' to provide a context for describing what parents are choosing between.

This review also revealed substantive and methodological gaps in the field. Substantively, the inconsistencies revealed in methods of choice studies that relied on factor-based research indicate that although key factors are commonly reported, these are ill-defined, fail to capture the underlying characteristics parents are choosing for and may work to obscure particular factors. More disadvantaged parents while characterised as having more constrained school choice-sets, have not been well characterised in relation to the attributes they seek from schools, particularly as there is evidence they seek similar outcomes but appear to have less success realising these. Likewise, class-based research relies on pre-categorisations of parents, which is problematic in two regards. First, as class can be understood as both a classification and an identity, there are questions as to how helpful class-based research from overseas is in the Australian context. Second, as with factor-based research above, class-based research also runs of the risk of obscuring parent-school processes that fall outside class categorisations. Conversely, studies that worked to capture the nuance of multiple elements influencing parents' choices resulted in lengthy empirical description and fractionalisation. Therefore, a new way of conceptualising parent groups that does not rely on preconstructed categories, nor is reliant on empirical description for meaning, is needed. Marketisation studies also revealed the importance of understanding the effects of parents' school choices on other families and the schools around them.

There is thus also a theoretical gap that requires a new research approach that moves beyond a surface description of choice factors to a description of the underlying organising principles that inform these. This includes describing the principles that characterise differing parents underlying desires from schooling in a manner that can be compared, and that enable a depiction of why some families are more successful in realising their choices than other. This points to the need to develop an overarching framework able to encompass the relationship between these underlying elements that influence parental school choices and elements in the field itself that mean some families are better able to realise their choices than others. Once this can be conceptualised, the relations between these elements can be analysed. In the next chapter – Chapter 3, Research Design, a conceptual framework which enables such an approach using the theoretical frameworks provided by Bourdieu's field theory and Legitimation Code Theory is described.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY
Conceptual framework and Research Design

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This methodology chapter outlines the conceptual framework and research design developed in this study to analyse the phenomenon of parental school choice. This addresses the substantive and methodological questions raised from the literature review, particularly: the need for a language of description that can encompasses the multiple social, institutional, personal, historic and current forces that influence parents' school choices that enables analysis that gets beyond empirical descriptors; and an analytic framework that enables description of why particular parent school choice practices produce advantage and disadvantage in schooling. This is addressed employing an overarching framework derived from Bourdieu's field theory (1984, 1986, 1993) and operationalised using specialisation codes from Legitimation Code Theory (Maton 2014, 2016a,b). This then informs the development of research methods that include historical inquiry, discourse analysis of parliamentary speech, and a case study using semi-structured interviews. The data collection and analytic coding processes, including ethical considerations are outlined, as are strategies to enhance the quality of research.

3.2 RESEARCH AIMS

This study asks what parents want their children to get from high school and why. Then, following this, and how this can help us understand the basis as to why some students are more likely to experience of advantage or disadvantage in Australian schooling. As outlined earlier in chapter one, this has been formalised in the research questions:

1. How is parental school choice constituted in the NSW school field, including how is it described and regulated?
2. What do parents seek from high schooling for their children?
3. How do parents seek to realise their aims from schooling through high school selection?

4. What do parents high school choices reveal about the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?

3.2.1 Strategic directions following the literature review

The literature review (chapter 2) outlined how previous research into the mechanics of school choice was helpful for describing an array of factors that influence parents' school choices, some of which are associated with differing parent social demographics. This informs this study in providing a range of elements to be considered as influencing parents' school choices. Class-based social reproduction analysis described middle-class and working-class families as having different school choice experiences and outcomes. Middle-class families particularly were described as seeking out and benefiting from school choice and as appearing to have an 'organic' and mutually reinforcing relationship with schools. Working-class families were described as more constrained in the school choices available to them, and as experiencing less effectiveness in realising their aims in school settings. This is helpful for highlighting how school choice experiences can relate to family background as well as school factors and also points to the importance of understanding how schools respond to different families. Effects of marketisation research demonstrated even if only some parents actively participated in a school marketplace, this could lead to social stratification region-wide. This points to the importance of describing how marketisation and other neoliberal settings produce effects across local contexts.

However, substantive gaps also emerged from the research. Factor-based research has been demonstrated to have highly inconsistent results, difficulties defining key factors and a gap between parents' self-reported choice factors and their observed choices. These issues point to difficulties reporting research that decontextualises parents' school choices from their lived context. Nuanced class-based analysis has led to lengthy empirical descriptions, with the corresponding analysis leading to highly fractionalised class descriptions which are difficult to generalise from. This points to a need to see if there are regular patterns of parent practice that underpinned such empirical observations. Finally, marketisation studies raise the question – if the school choice actions of only some parents in a field affect the outcomes for all, how are the overall policy settings of neoliberalism establishing relations between schools and students so that only some students benefit?

3.2.2 The need for a relational toolkit

To understand the influence of these elements and intersections on parental school choice what is needed is a conceptual framework that can bring these together. This includes: factors that parents can describe and elaborate as to their relative importance in their school decision-making; descriptions of parents' past and present experiences in education, the workplace and social, cultural and economic contexts, and how these relate to their school choice decisions; a research context that enables parents' decisions to be compared, described and analysed relative to each other; and comparison of a school marketplace and the differing schools parents are choosing.

With reference to the research questions, three conceptual needs require further development. Specifically, there is a need:

- For a language of description which enables analysis that can get beyond empirical surface descriptions of factors, the precategorisation of class and complex categorisations of local variables such as ethnicity or migration to describe key patterns and principles that underlie parents' practices;
- A framework that can encompass, integrate and analyse the range of elements including parental choice factors, parent practices, key assets in the school field and wider social and institutional influences on schooling;
- For a way of analysing how wider institutional influences such as government policies of marketisation, or neoliberalism more broadly, create ideals against which parents in practice are assessed.

Once each of these can be conceptualised, then the basis of relations between them can be made explicit. To enact a coherent conceptual framework that provides this, the study first turned to Bourdieu's field theory.

3.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.3.1 Bourdieu's Field Theory

Field theory as conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu is particularly useful for this study for a number of reasons. First, Bourdieu was interested in understanding and describing the mechanisms that allowed stratified social systems to both persist and reproduce intergenerationally (Swartz 1997, p.6). Bourdieu characterised education as playing a

key role in the reproduction of social inequality via educational institutions, describing a transformative effect whereby social inequalities become translated into a narrative of educational meritocracy (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.129). Second, Bourdieu emphasised the importance of moving beyond surface descriptions of empirical entities to relational descriptors, thus enabling the generative principles that underlay the sensory world to be described and defined (Maton 2018, pp.250–251). Third, to reason through such processes, Bourdieu developed a series of 'thinking tools'. These were designed for and based upon empirical research to investigate, describe and develop a theory of social practice and society (Jenkins 1991, p.67). Key to this study are his conceptualisations of the dynamic and intersecting schemata of *field*, *capital* and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984). These provide a way of seeing and describing the different elements that influence social relationships and how they interact to produce social effects (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.97). Finally, Bourdieu emphasised that these thinking tools were relational, that is, they operated in relation to each other, and the relations between them were always in flux (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.96, 101). This therefore provides an approach that relationally integrates different elements within a dynamic model.

To understand interpersonal relations or explain events or social occurences, Bourdieu argued it was first necessary to describe the social arena or *field* within which these interactions or events occurred (Bourdieu 2005 [2000] p.148). Bourdieu described field as the primary basis of social research practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.107). Fields are conceptualised as relatively autonomous social universes and are comprised by a network of positions taken by the occupants, agents or institutions (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.97). Each field has its own system of values, logics, and regulative principles and practices, with distinct resources and different statuses at stake (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.17). Examples include the fields of politics, education or the media. Fields have their own *doxa* or what is 'taken for granted' (Bourdieu 1977, pp.165–7), and *illusio* or beliefs about what is important (Bourdieu 1996b, p.231). In analysis using field, the research objects are located within historic and geographic contexts. Descriptions of field include how knowledge of the object has been previously produced and whose interests have been served in the generation of this (Bourdieu, Wacquant & Farage 1994; Thomson 2008). For instance, in Bourdieu's research and descriptions of French schooling he demonstrated that rather than being a meritocracy,

it benefited those who already possessed social and economic advantages (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). In this study school choice is located in the NSW field of school education and the historic constitution of school choice in NSW forms part of the description of field to be investigated.

Fields intersect with other fields, institutions and individuals (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.97), with some fields exerting a particularly powerful influence, especially the economic and political fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.109). Relations among fields themselves are not fixed, rather they are constantly negotiated (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp.109,110). Bourdieu used the analogy of 'refraction' to express how fields experience the forces or forms of power that influence it from other fields (Bourdieu 1993; Bourdieu & Ferguson 1988). That is, rather than a transference of power unmediated and in the same form, fields 'refract' or accommodate power into their field, still preserving their autonomy, for instance social class can be described as refracted into a family structure, influencing class practice (Bourdieu & Ferguson 1988, p.540). Such a depiction is useful in this study for while school choice centres on relations between families and the field of school education, influences from other fields including the Australian government and changes in the economy can be included without bluntly assuming, for instance, that policy effects are unmediated. This also enables a depiction of how within a field actors experience, interpret and may act in relation to these outside forces differently, depending on their own positions in the field.

To describe the internal relations within a field Bourdieu frequently used the analogy of a game, representing fields as sites of conflict and competition where participants competed to control the *capital* – what is at stake – effective within it (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1998). Capital is the object of the struggle for legitimation in a field (Swartz 1997, p.123) and its currency allowing its possessors to wield power or influence (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.98). Capital is realised in the resources individuals have access to which may be accumulated, invested and exchanged (Bourdieu 2006). Bourdieu (1984, 1986) broadly characterised three types of capital: economic, cultural and social. Economic capital is principally recognised as income and monetary assets. In this study it is particularly relevant for describing parents' purchasing power in the school field, manifest in both a capacity to pay school fees and purchasing power for children's extracurricular activities. Cultural capital denotes the

ideas, tastes and preferences that can be deployed as strategic resources in a field (Bourdieu 1972). It is described in three forms – institutionalised, embodied and objectified (Bourdieu 1986, 2006). Institutionalised capital is expressed as educational qualifications and knowledge; embodied capital in the form of dispositions; and objectified capital in the form of cultural objects (Bourdieu 1986, p.241). A form between embodied and objectified – habitus operating as a capital - has also been described (Bourdieu 2006; Moore 2014). Social capital is broadly recognised as social networks, particularly the benefit gained from one's position in them (Bourdieu 1998). In this study these notions of capital enable descriptions to be made of parental assets that can operate in the school field, and the objects and outcomes parents desire their children to gain from schooling and including the forms each of these take.

To describe the underlying principles governing the way an individual thinks, feels and acts Bourdieu conceptualised the notion of *habitus*. Built on past experience, the habitus inscribes the correctness of particular practices and tastes (Bourdieu 1990a, p.113), providing individuals with an unconscious and internalised 'roadmap' for behaviour. It includes the encoded beliefs, social class and strategies which become an individual's modus operandi (Bourdieu 1984, p.170). While durable and transposable across time and space (Bourdieu 1993) a habitus is also continually acquired, defined and regulated (Bourdieu 1990a, p.75). The habitus is thus both a *structured structure* and a *structuring structure* (Bourdieu 1990b, p.170), structured by one's past and present circumstances thus shaping dispositions, and 'structuring' in that it provides a means of empirically analysing the social world (Maton 2008, p.1,3). Based on their past experience in different fields, individuals with varying degrees of success are able predict both current events and what is to come – what Bourdieu termed *protention* (Atkinson 2018; Bourdieu 1990a). As a result, *habitus can function as a capital* when the capacity to act in a field is based on one's previously developed knowledge of the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu 2006). In this study habitus provides an important concept to describe the enduring influence parents' past experience in schooling and the labour market exerts, shaping their aims from schooling and their school selections for their children, and helping to account for parents' accommodations, actions and reactions to the current conditions in the school field.

3.3.2 Using Bourdieu's relational framework: field, capital and habitus

Key to Bourdieu's conceptualisations of field, capital and habitus was these could only be defined within the theoretical system they constituted together, not in isolation (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 96). Bourdieu emphasised 'to think in terms of field is to *think relationally'* (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.96, italics in original) and '*a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field'* (italics in original) (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.101). Therefore it is the institutions within a field that influences how capitals are able to be activated. These three elements thus provide the 'thinking tools' of the relational framework central to Bourdieu's concerns (Grenfell 2008, p.153) with Bourdieu summarising the relations between them in the equation [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu 1986, p.101). That is, observed practice is the result of relations between an individual's habitus and their struggle for influence within a particular social area (Maton 2008, p.4).

Bourdieu's method is frequently cited in school choice literature. However, as outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), most authors emphasise only a single element of his schemata – commonly 'habitus' or 'capital', an approach that largely renders the concepts merely descriptive (Atkinson 2012, p.169). Other studies have simply relabelled empirical characteristics like social class background as 'habitus', or desirable attributes as 'capital'. This kind of application has led leading Bourdieusian commentators to critique such approaches as superficial, incomplete or reductive (Atkinson 2011; Grenfell 2010; Maton 2018; Reay 2004a). This is due to the scant attention paid to the mutually constituting relationship between field, capital and habitus that is central to Bourdieu's schemata (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). In this study it is the relations between field, capital and habitus that provide the overarching framework to describe how parents' practices in school selection.

3.3.3 Using Bourdieu's field theory to addresses the research questions

Bourdieu's schemata provides a framework through which the phenomenon of parental school choice can be described. This is by constructing a framework that encompasses a specific phenomenon – in this case, school choice in the school field – in terms of the relationships that organise it, which can then be described and understood. Specifically:

1. Through the concept of *field* the internal relations that create high school education and parental school choice as a specific social arena are able to be situated and described. This includes the internal constituting elements within

the school field and also a language for describing how the influence of external fields play out within this. For instance, how government policy is realised within the educational field. This provides a framework within which the first research question can be addressed, 'How is parental school choice constituted in the Australian school field, including how is it described and regulated?'. It also provides the arena in which the final research question is situated, 'What do parents' high school choices reveal about the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?'

2. Through the concept of *capital* the internal relations between actors and each other and between actors and institutions can be described with reference to the outcome – or capital – they seek to gain from the field and control in the field. Capital thus enables both a depiction of the different assets parents want their children to achieve from schooling and also the different assets parents themselves bring to the school field, such as purchasing power or knowledge of how to achieve academically in schooling. This provides a framework for addressing the second research question, 'What do parents seek from high schooling for their children?';
3. Through the concept of *habitus* parents' ways of acting based on their past experiences can be described, including how this enables parents to see what is at stake and, in the struggle for capital, how to act upon this. This provides a concept and language of description for both the influence of parents' past experiences of school and the workforce on their school choices and how these and parents' present experiences in the workforce and schooling also shape their responses to this. This provides a framework for describing parents school choice practices for the third research question, 'What do parents' high school choices reveal about the mechanism of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?'

However, while Bourdieu provided an overarching framework through which to describe the different relational elements, he did not provide a means in which to describe and compare these sets of relations. Thus it is not clear why any one of these may provide a particular form of advantage or disadvantage, nor what is the basis of the struggle – or what is at stake – in the field itself. Maton (2018) describes how the tools of field, capital and habitus 'cannot fully implement a relational gaze as they are

"intentional" rather than "operative"' (p.252). Thus, while different forms of capital can be described, why any of these provide a particular advantage or disadvantage in a specific field cannot. Likewise, while habitus provides a mechanism for describing the influence of past experience on present actions, it doesn't provide a means of describing which particular actions will have more utility than any others in a particular field. Nor does it provide a means of analysing the underlying bases in a field that enable particular practices to become dominant.

To be able to operationalise these elements of field, capital and habitus a different set of tools is needed, one that enables the principles that underlie actor's practices in the field to be described, compared and analysed. The aim of this is threefold. First to reveal the underlying basis of these different elements, second to compare them, and third to demonstrate how these may be varied 'in order to generate different empirical instances', that is, imagine new possibilities for actors in the field (Maton 2018, p.253). To generate such a conceptualisation of the organising principles underlying parents' school choices in the field of school education, Legitimation Code Theory is used.

3.3.4 Using Specialization from Legitimation Code Theory

Legitimation Code Theory or 'LCT' is a sociological framework that extends Bourdieu's field theory, and also incorporating elements of Basil Bernstein's code theory (1977, 1990, 1999) (Maton 2005a, 2014, 2018). Like field theory, LCT is a 'practical theory' to explore and think through issues, practises and contexts both on its own and in dialogue with complementary frameworks (Maton 2016a). It has particular relevance in education studies and has been used to describe and illuminate classroom practices and curricular structures in primary school (Zhao 2012), high school (Jackson 2016) vocational education (Shay & Steyn 2016), higher education (Wolff & Luckett 2013), learners and different ways of learning (Chen & Maton 2016a,b), and distinguishing between differing meanings and approaches in disciplinary fields (Carvalho, Dong & Maton 2009).

Following Bourdieu, LCT also understands society as comprising a series of relatively autonomous social fields of practice, each of which is distinguished with its own resources, forms of status and contestations that define what can be understood as legitimate success within the field (Maton 2014). Actors' practices are understood to

embody and convey messages as to what should be the dominant measures of achievement within a field which are described as *languages of legitimation* (Maton 2014, pp.23–42; Maton & Chen 2016a, p.2). These may be analysed in terms of their *legitimation codes* which describe the underlying organising principles, providing descriptive tools for outlining why certain practices are privileged in a field (Maton 2014). Because LCT is concerned with describing the bases of practices in the field (Maton 2018, p.254) it provides a means to describe, analyse and visualise the organising principles that underpin field, capital and habitus as they are specifically enacted in this study of parental school choice in NSW. Specifically, through the use of the specialization codes, a description of the 'rules of the game' is enabled, including description of which code is dominant in this school field and where the struggles over this code lie (Maton 2014, p.77).

In this thesis I primarily employ Specialization, one of the dimensions, or sets of concepts used in LCT (Maton 2014). Specialization is based on the premise that every practice is about or oriented towards something, and by someone (Maton 2014). This enables analytic description to focus on both *what* is valued and *who* is valued or idealized in a field (ibid). This is formalized as two distinct relations:

- *epistemic relations* (ER), where possession of specialised knowledge, practice or skill is emphasised as the basis of achievement;
- *social relations* (SR), where the dispositions of actors as knowers are emphasised as the basis of achievement.

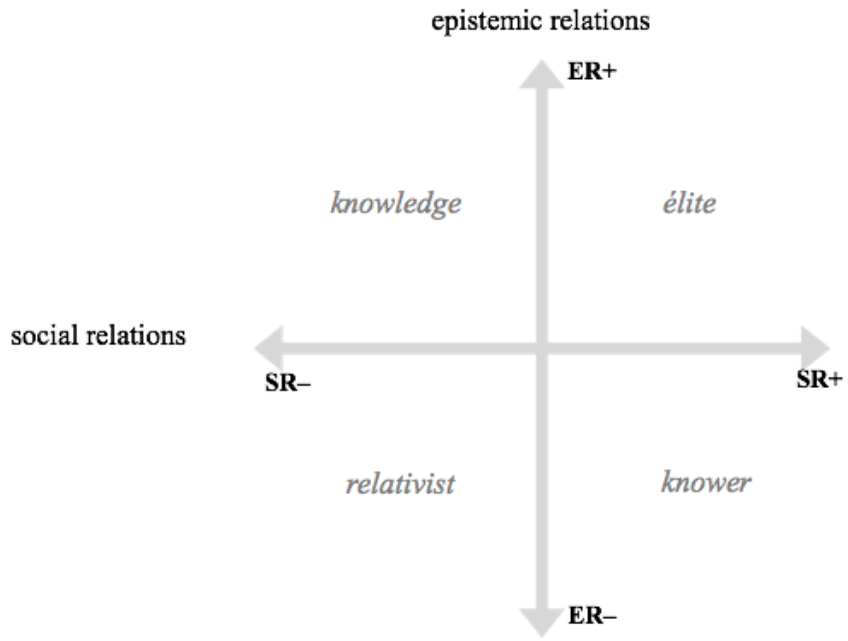
Each of these relations may be more strongly (+) or weakly (–) emphasised as the basis of practices and are expressed in coding as ER+, ER– and SR+, SR–. Maton (2014) stresses that there are always knowledge and knowers – the key question is which of these relations is emphasised?

As illustrated in Figure 3.1 these two relations are brought together to generate *specialization codes* which are visualised on a specialization plane, producing a topographical space with four principle modalities:

- *knowledge codes* (ER+, SR–) where possession of specialised knowledge, principles or skills is emphasised as the basis of achievement, and the attributes of actors are downplayed;

- *knower code*s (ER–, SR+) where specialist knowledges are downplayed and the attributes of actors are emphasised as measures of achievement
- *élite codes* (ER+, SR+) where achievement is based on possessing both specialised knowledge and being the right kind of knower; and
- *relativist codes* (ER–, SR–) where legitimacy is determined neither by specialised knowledge, nor knower attributes – 'anything goes'
  (Maton 2016b, p.16).

***Figure 3.1* specialization codes (Maton 2014, p.30)**



Specialization codes thus provide different measures of achievement to reveal the underlying 'rules of the game' that structure a field. Specifically, whether what matters is: 'what you know' (knowledge codes), 'who you are' (knower codes), both (élite codes), or neither (relativist codes) (Maton 2014).

Revealing specialization codes is useful for this study as different actors, institutions or fields of practice may legitimise different codes as their basis of achievement, and these bases may not always be 'transparent, universal or uncontested' (Maton 2016a, p.13). In a field, a particular code may dominate or there may be more than one code present and there are likely to be struggles among actors over which code should be dominant (Maton 2014). This enables, for instance, description and analysis of the principles

underlying different capitals operational in a field and a comparative description and analysis of the dispositions of different actors in the field as they are revealed in their struggle for the key capitals.

To establish the *basis* of the field, the additional tool of *constellation analysis* from Legitimation Code Theory is also employed. The notion of *constellations* provides a conceptual language of description for groupings of socio-cultural practices that have a particular coherence. Maton (2014, p.152) explains constellations are used to describe what Bourdieu (1991) termed 'the space of possibles'. That is, the range and variety of stances viewed by actors as legitimately able to be combined in a field. These may also contain *clusters* of smaller groupings (Maton 2016b, p.237). The underlying basis of constellations can be described using specialization codes.

The basis of the struggles and agreements in a field are revealed when different actors' practices are compared by bringing together their specialization codes, to reveal if there is a *code clash* or a *code match* between actors or entities in a field (Maton 2014). A *code match* is described when the legitimation codes that underpin one knowledge practice (for instance, parliamentary description of how parents should choose a school) are the same as those that underpin another (for instance, parent description of school choice). A *code clash* described instances where these differ (Maton 2014). Epistemic relations and social relations are also used to describe the *focus* and analyse the *basis* of differing practices. *Focus* refers to what practices concern, while the *basis* relates to the underlying basis of legitimacy, as revealed in the description of their legitimation codes, in their study, the specialization codes (Maton 2014, p.31; Maton 2016b, p.239).

3.3.5 How Specialization will be used to address the research questions

In this study specialization codes are useful because they enable the *relative differences* between different parents' priorities from schooling to be compared by bringing these together on a specialization plane (see Figure 3.1 above). These can also be brought together and compared with other practices valorised in the school field, for instance, the basis of school selection as idealised by school policy makers. If these two specialization codes demonstrate a *code match* this reveals the underlying principles align, an advantage in the school field. Conversely, if a *code clash* is demonstrated, this reveals there are competing bases for validity of the underlying principles, likely to lead

to relative disadvantage in the field. This particularly addresses the fourth research question, 'What do parents' high school choices reveal about the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?'

Specialization analysis thus provides both a language of description and analytic framework that enables the multiple factors influencing parents' and schools' actions in the field to be brought together to produce a topography of school choice, including a detailed analysis of parents practices in the school field. This enables a nuanced description to be drawn of relative advantage or disadvantage in the field as is enacted through school choice and also the capacity to imagine different and future positions in the field for reform.

3.3.6 Conclusion conceptual framework

In summary, the work of Bourdieu and Legitimation Code Theory together provide a toolkit valuable to this study as they provide a powerful and progressively more nuanced structure for describing the 'rules of the game'. Bourdieu's descriptors of field, habitus and capital provide an overarching structure for the forces in play, guiding descriptions of the field of school choice and providing a language of description for the differing dispositions and capacities parents bring to this. These particularly shape the analysis of the first two research questions, with field informing the description of how parental school choice is constituted in the NSW school arena (question 1), the conceptualisation of capital providing a language of description for what parents want from schooling for their children (question 2), with the dispositions parents bring to this and how they seek to recognise this in schools (question 3) shaped by descriptions of habitus.

To operationalise these relations in the field to enable their underlying principles to be analysed and compared these practices are coded using LCT specialisation codes.
This enables a description to be built up for the cumulative circumstances that lead to parents' relative advantage and disadvantage in school choice in the school field to be described (question 4). These are placed on the Specialization plane illustrating underlying advantages or disadvantages parents bring to the field and the differing logics of the outcomes they are pursuing for their children.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.4.1 Qualitative Research

To answer these research questions, which seek a detailed and explanatory understanding of the complex relationships in a competitive school marketplace enacted in school choice a qualitative paradigm is the most appropriate choice for investigation (Bryman 2004; Holliday 2007). The advantage of qualitative methods is the data generated is rich in detail, and, in drawing upon participants' perspectives, is able to provide multiple contexts for understanding the phenomena being examined (Denzin & Lincoln 1994).

The conceptual framework outlined above provides a guide as to a broad frame for the research design, which was conducted in two parts. In the first part, school choice in the school field was constituted with two methods: a historical enquiry of key institutions, elements and ideas; and a discourse analysis of contemporary parliamentary speeches on school choice. This enabled question 1 to be addressed. In the second part, a specific case study enabled a description and analysis of choice in the field as enacted by parents, with parents' priorities and positions derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with parents in a single geographic school field in the Greater Sydney region.

3.4.2 Phase One: Methods for introducing the school field

Following the resarch questions, the first phase of research was to establish how the school field was constituted and regulated. This was to address a limitation outlined in the Literature Review that found parents' school choices were not meaningful without more specific descriptions of the context within which these choices were made. Thus the key task of the first phase of the research was to describe how school choice evolved in the NSW school field, including key institutions, the populations associated with these and how these were funded, regulated and maintained both historically and contemporarily. This was to provide a context through which to then describe, analyse and compare the contemporary practises of actors and institutions in the field in practice.

This description of the field was first developed through a historical inquiry of the evolution of key ideas, elements and institutions that remain today. Second, the

contemporary field was developed through an analysis of how school choice is idealised in policy-political discourses as exemplified in parliamentary speeches that addressed parental school choice. This was to provide the data for description and analysis to answer the first research question.

3.4.2.1 Constituting the school field in NSW through historical inquiry

Historical inquiry was used to provide a description of the historic evolution of the key institutions and persistent social discourses of the school field (Robinson 2000, pp.51–2; Tosh 1991, p.15). This method was chosen to guard against a simplistic or linear interpretation 'that the past has merely existed to lead to the present' (Aldrich 2006, p.4) and to understand the complexities of continuity and change in the school field. This informed the description of the present conditions in the contemporary school field, and enabled a critical description of long-standing practices and presumed knowledges still found in the present (Freathy & Parker 2010, p.234).

As the purpose of using historical inquiry was to provide a context for the contemporary school field rather than original discovery, secondary historical materials were used to develop this, with reading across a wide range of sources (Rury 2006). This followed a thematic form, with emphasis placed on signficant events, critical social contestations and discourses (Rury 2006, p.330). Particular emphasis was placed on describing what was most at stake or most desirable in the school field at particular historic junctures, who has access to this and what elements of causation were ascribed (Bailyn 1982; Henry 2006). This enables a context to be provided for the key institutional forms, educational discourses and influential fields that continues to have resonance in the contemporary school field.

3.4.2.2 The contemporary school field: discourse analysis of parliamentary speeches

To build a description and understanding of how parental school choice is idealised, regulated and maintained in contemporary government policy, parliamentary speeches on school choice were selected, described and analysed. These provided a policy-political context for describing how contemporary policy makers understand parental school choice as working. Parliamentary speeches were chosen as a data source as government legislators are the dominant institutional force in the school field (Goertz 2006). Parliamentary discourse is recognised as both prescriptive in that it enacts formal

legislation and also inscriptive of a social reality (Kronick & Rousseau 2015, p.545), it thus provides an ideal source from which to describe and analyse official constructions of the contemporary school market and its idealised forms. That is, parliamentary speech was selected in order to construct an 'ideal type' for comparative analysis (Gerhardt 1994; Schütz 1976) in order to describe and analyse the basis under which the field was presumed to operate, rather than as a focus of specific investigation, including of the subject of the parliamentary bills in and of themselves. The material selected from the parliamentary debates for analysis was illustrative of a range of views relating to parental school choice. As described in 3.3.4, *constellation analysis* from LCT (Maton 2014, 2016b) was employed as the primary tool of discourse analysis and was used to describe the languages of legitimation in policy-political discourse about school choice in Australia.

Parental school choice is not specifically established in any Acts in NSW or Australian federal parliament. Therefore parliamentary debates in which school choice was a key theme were identified. This was undertaken using keyword searches of both NSW and federal official Hansard records, as are published on the NSW parliament and federal parliament websites. With school funding and school policy settings established at both the state and national level, legislative records from both state and federal parliament were selected and two parliamentary debates referenced. To establish a contemporaneous context with the primary research parent interviews, the parliamentary debates selected were those closest to the time of interview data collection with parents. The speeches were derived from debates relating to four bills of parliament, the bills in each house having been bundled together for debate as is parliamentary convention. These bills were:

Federal:	Schools Assistance Bill 2008
	Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008
NSW:	Education Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009
	Education Further Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009

A total of 53 speeches were given for the federal bills, by a total of 52 speakers (full list Appendix A)

A total of 72 speeches were given for the NSW bills, by a total of 45 speakers (full list Appendix B).

Speeches were downloaded from the parliamentary website. These were then logged, with school choice-related commentary highlighted via keyword search, which was then described, thematically coded and analysed. As is outlined in 3.7.2, this analysis revealed that while the *focus* of the speeches in the Bills was different in each parliament, the underlying idealised *basis* for parental school choice put forward by speakers was similar. Thus a singular *constellation* was described which reflected the combined *basis* uncovered in the parliamentary speeches. Further, while this was an inductive process, as is described in 4.3, the themes that emerged from the political discourses largely conformed to political party affiliation. As parliamentary speeches often have key 'talking points' produced within political parties, many speeches repeated the same or similar points, including the same phrases. In the analyis, other highly similar speeches are noted together. Notable exemptions are outlined in 4.3.2 *'legitimate choice' and problematising parental school choice*.

3.4.3 Phase Two: Establishing school choice in practice using the case study approach

To establish parental school choice as enacted by parents in a specific school field, this study employed a case study approach. Case studies are an empirical form of enquiry that enable a picture to be built of complex phenomena by exploring these within their own context (Creswell 2007; Yin 2009). The focus is thus on a bounded and integrated system and identifying the way people and things interact in this context (Merriam 1998; Stake 2005). This method is particularly pertinent to research that addresses descriptive and analytic questions and is delineated by its emphasis on the wholeness of the 'case' (Yin 2006, p.112). To enables research questions 2 and 3 to be addressed, the case study for this research was defined as a single geographic area.

Case study research takes different forms (Yin 2006) including 'intrinsic' case studies, where the purpose is to undertand the key case itself, and 'instrumental' case studies, which seek to develop insights into wider issues and populations beyond the case (Stake 2005). Using this distinction, this study adopted an instrumental case study approach as while it examined a single arena, this was then compared to an idealised field (as

described from parliamentary speeches), each of which were described and analysed using field theory and LCT to provide a model in which the key principles could be generalised. This addresses a key criticism of case study research that it offers little basis for generalisation or application elsewhere (Flyvbjerg 2006; Yin 2006). Further, using the conceptual framework of field theory and LCT for both method, research design and data analysis enables underlying principles of the field to be surfaced, and thus imagined in similar contexts.

The primary source of information in the school choice case study was semi-structured interviews with parents recounting their school choice processes. Interviews were selected as a primary technique for both practical and methodological reasons. Methodologically, semi-structured interviews are complementary to a case-study method as they enable rich contextual data to be elicited from a single field (Byrne 2004). A reconstructed choice approach was taken in the interviews, where parents were invited to recount their choice processes, including reconstructing their own timelines and unfolding logics of choice.

3.5 PRIMARY RESEARCH SETTING: CASE STUDY AREA

The primary research for the case study was conducted in "Doongara", a geographic area within the greater Sydney region close to the geographic and demographic centre of the city. In this location, identifiable as a single local government area, there were eight public high schools and twelve private high schools including six Catholic systemic schools. The public high schools included comprehensive high schools and schools with specialist arts and academic selective streams with both single-sex and co-educational high school options. The private schools included high-fee and low-fee schools, with both single-sex and co-educational options. Good public transport by bus and rail meant most schools in the area were broadly accessible. Doongara thus presented an 'ideal market' for studying school choice as families notionally had a full range of school options. (A list of high schools in Doongara by school type is provided in Appendix C).

Doongara is socially and economically diverse, with professional, paraprofessional and trades workers and pockets of welfare-dependent families all represented. Key indicators including highest educational qualification, occupation and employment

established it had a population profile largely analogous to the population of the City of Sydney, though with somewhat fewer high-income households and somewhat more low income households. Broadly suburban, it includes both long-established suburbs with freestanding houses and medium and high-density new housing settlements (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, 2011).

Since the early 1990s Doongara's population has been expanding due to urban consolidation and migration. This has been accompanied by a shift in the socio-economic and ethnic characteristics of the population. Notably, while previously predominantly Australian-born with an Anglo-Celtic heritage, by the time of the research period around one third of residents were born overseas, most commonly originating from (in descending order) China, India and Lebanon with around a quarter having arrived in the previous five years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 1996, 2006). Accompanying this was a shift in the religious profile with a decrease in the percentage broadly identifying with Christian religions and an increase as those identifying with 'non-Christian' ones. A more complete demographic profile is included in Appendix D.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

This section outlines the primary data collection phase for the case study. It explains the rationale for participant recruitment and selection for interviews and the interview form. It includes a description of how the research design evolved throughout the study period. Primary data collection took place throughout 2012-2013.

3.6.1 Rethinking early study design

This study was initially conceived as two-way study of high school choice, examining how parents chose a high school and also how high schools' chose students. This was prompted by research by Aitchison (2006) who described families not always gaining admission to their first choice of high school. In the original research design, families were to be recruited via approach to selected high schools in Doongara which would also be research subjects in the study.

However, the initial four high schools in Doongara approached in 2012 either declined to participate or would not respond to researcher approaches. As some of these schools

were pivotal for the school type they represented this necessitated a re-think of both participant recruitment and the overall study design. A decision was made to change the research design to focus only on family decision-making. To this end, recruitment was focused towards parents with children in year 6 in primary school. Ethics approval was established so that primary schools were also able to be approached by the researcher for recruitment. Once a substantial number of interviews with parents had been undertaken, two key informant interviews with primary school principals were conducted to elaborate patterns of family behaviour.

3.6.2 Recruitment case study participants

Families were selected for interview through purposeful sampling (Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Miles & Huberman 1994). In this study the predefined sample groups were families with children attending year 6 primary school or year 7 high school in the Doongara local government area in 2013 or 2014. Families were selected to be indicative of the socio-economic status and cultural background of local families with their children's high school destinations an illustrative selection of the school destinations available locally. Parents were recruited via two methods: through a recruitment survey distributed to local schools and snowballing.

The recruitment survey (Appendix F) collected information on the child's destination high school and family demographic information. Socio-economic indicators included highest level of parental educational qualification, occupation and employment status, and cultural indicators included cultural background and language spoken at home. This was sent out in the second half of the 2013 school year once offers for high school had been accepted. Included in the pack was a cover note, information sheet (Appendix G), the survey and a large addressed sealable envelope in which the survey could be returned to the school. This was distributed to six Doongara primary schools selected to reflect the geographic and demographic diversity across the Doongara area as determined through referencing the MySchool website. Four public primary schools and two Catholic primary schools for survey distribution and all six principals agreed to participate. The largest independent non-catholic primary school in the area was approached also for recruitment, but did not respond to three approaches by email and phone. Participating schools were supplied with individual survey packs to distribute to students in year 6 to take home and boxes into which returned surveys could be

placed. These were retrieved from schools two weeks after distribution. While this method of selection does have limitations due to self-selection it avoids the biases other selection methods could bring (for instance, nomination of families by the principal or parents and citizens committee).

As outlined in Table 3.1 a total of 394 surveys were distributed with 96 returned. Indicative families were selected for parent interview as per the purposeful sampling outlined above.

Table 3.1 **Recruitment survey returns**

Primary school	No. delivered	No. returned	Rate of return from school	% of total returns
Dursley	64	14	22%	15%
Doongara East	40	3	8%	3%
Bennett Park	120	14	12%	15%
Fernbank	75	18	24%	19%
St Josephs	25	6	24%	6%
St Columba's[1]	62	41	66%	43%
SUB TOTAL	386	96	25%	10
Other (snowballing)	8	8	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	394	104	n/a	n/a

Concurrent with enlistment via the recruitment survey, participants were also recruited via snowballing (Miles & Huberman 1994, p28). Snowballing took place throughout the research period, but particularly in the latter stages where families were recruited to address emerging 'demographic gaps'. This included recruiting more low-income parents selecting relatively low-performing public high schools, relatively high-income parents selecting high-fee private schools and parents of children at Catholic primary schools selecting Catholic systemic high schools. This was undertaken to ensure an indicative selection of families interviewed. Destination high schools in Doongara were ranked according to the relative advantage of families attending as per the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) published on the Myschool website in 2013 (Appendix A).

A total of 28 interviews were conducted with parents. As well as 'Australian' identifying parents, interviews were conducted with parents who identified as from Arabic, South-East Asian, Pasifika and Indian cultural backgrounds. No successful

[1] While the rate of return for this school is high, only 2 families indicated a willingness to do follow up interviews and provided contact details. This was low compared to other schools.

interviews were conducted with parents from a Chinese cultural background despite a considerable presence in the geographic area. This was due to a low rate of return from this cohort from the recruitment survey, interview refusal and poorer-than-anticipated English proficiency in the sole conducted interview. This represents a limitation in relation to constituting the parent groups as described in chapter 5 and 6. This limitation was brought into focus by the responses of parents from one parent grouping, credentialists (described from chapter 5 on), who were predominantly Indian-background parents. These parents characterised Chinese-background parents as having similar practices towards schooling, including in their school choice, as they did.

3.6.3 Phase Two: pilot interviews

To strengthen the soundness of the data collected in the semi-structured interviews, interviews were piloted with two families who had been recruited via snowballing prior to speaking with families recruited via the school recruitment surveys. These were: interview A, with a married couple and their daughter; and interview G, a mother who was interviewed alone (though she was part of a married couple). The interviews piloted several elements of the interview design including: the interview guide (Appendix H); interviewing parents as a couple; interviewing only one parent from a couple; collecting timeline information from parents about school choice process; interviewing a young person; and using a 'lifegrid' to construct a schedule recording extracurricular activities (Parry, Thompson & Fowkes 1999). These interviews were then transcribed and an early thematic analysis undertaken. Following this the interview process was modified. While the pilots established the value of having an interview guide, rather than a formal list of questions (Brenner 2006, p.362), having parents formally co-construct a written timeline of choice with the interviewer was not a successful method, interferring with parents' narratives on choice. Instead, in subsequent interviews parents were invited to recount their choice processes broadly with the interviewer and timelines were then reconstructed from the interview data. Although parents were recruited on the basis that they would have a child starting high school in 2013 or 2014, if there were other children in the family, parents invariably brought them into high school selection discussions. Thus the data reflects the high school selection processes for all children in a family, though as far as possible the main children referenced are those initially recruited for.

Although interviewing young people was piloted and the unsuccessful 'lifegrid' co-construction was dropped from subsequent interviews, these interviews provided few insights beyond what was reported by their parents. This was potentially because the interviewer had little chance to establish rapport with the young people and the interviews took place in the presence of their parents, rather than with peers. A total of seven young people were interviewed, however these were not included in the final data analysis.

3.6.4 Phase Two: semi-structured interviews data collection

Families were invited to nominate where and when they would prefer the interview to take place. Predominantly interviews took place in the family home in the evenings or on weekends, though other interview settings included cafés (5), and workplace (1), with two also conducted over the phone. Parents were invited to nominate which family members would be present during the interview, with the interviewer only expressing a preference that those most involved or most able to speak to the school choice process. Interviews thus included families, couples or individual parents. Children were invited to be present if the parents suggested this as detailed above. A summary of all families is provided in Appendix E

Care was taken to establish with participants from the outset that there was no presumed 'right way' to choose or 'right school' to choose, but rather this research sought to explore families' school choice decisions. To establish rapport and elicit elaboration the interviewer adopted a stance of 'empathic neutrality' (Drew, Hardman & Hosp, 2008 p.187) representing herself as a researcher, an educator and also a parent who faced similar decisions regarding selection of high schools for her children, albeit in a different geographic area. Thus at times the interviewer would reflect on similar possible choices facing her family.

To facilitate rapport-building and to establish a non-directive course for conversation, interviews commenced with a 'grand tour' question followed by 'mini-tour' questions (Brenner 2006, p.358). Interviewees were first invited to broadly recount how their child came to be at the high school they were at (or were to attend) with their accounts interrupted as little as possible. As the interview progressed, interviewees were

prompted to elaborate key moments in their school choice processes with care taken to use open-ended questions. While the interview guide (Appendix F) was referenced, no specific order of questions was followed after the initial opening, rather the order of topics was guided by the unfolding conversation. As well as information on school selection processes, information as also sought on parent's values on schooling, including their beliefs about what children needed to gain from high school.

Interviews were recorded using a 'Livescribe' digital recorder pen with notes also written on digitized paper. Use of this pen also proved to be a good 'ice breaker' with some interviewees when talking about the technology available. For the interviews conducted by phone, a purchased phone recording 'App' – TapeACall (pro) – was used. Some interviews were sent out for transcription to a transcription service with transcripts checked and corrected when returned.

Interviews were transcribed and reviewed throughout the data collection period which lasted 18 months. Using purposeful reading (Richards 2009) emergent themes noted and followed up in subsequent interviews with different parents. As interviewing progressed, while all interviews still commenced with the same opening 'grand tour' question outlined above, perspectives from other parents interviews were also introduced. This enabled emerging themes and perspectives to be expanded and also functioned as a validity check to confirm common practices (Whyte 1943). This ongoing process of data scanning meant interviews could be continued until a 'saturation point' (Glaser & Strauss 1967) or 'point of sufficiency' (Johnson & Rowlands 2012) was reached. In this study this was recognised as when little new information emerged from the most recent interviews.

3.6.5 Phase Three - Key Informant Interviews

Two key informant interviews with primary school principals were undertaken near the end of data collection from the parent interviews. These informant interviews were conducted to elaborate the behaviour of two parent groups – some recently migrated parents from India (who in this study are identified as credentialists) and some parents from lower socio-economic status backgrounds (described in this study as parents with a social disposition). These informants were two primary school principals from

schools which had earlier distributed recruitment surveys which had in turn led to the recruitment of some parents who belonged to these now-identified parent groupings.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

To analyse the three data sets – secondary historic descriptions of the school field, parliamentary discourses of school choice and primary interview data from parents and key informants – data was described and coded. This coding referenced both the generative categories of field, capital and habitus from Bourdieu's field theory and, for the latter two, LCT. Using these two theoretical frameworks throughout enabled the data sets to be brought together, with LCT coding enabling both an analysis of the specific case study, and then for this to be placed in the context of the wider school field.

3.7.1 Describing historic relations in the school field

Historic descriptions derived from secondary historic sources were thematically described and analysed in relation to the external fields, dominant discourses and social and economic forces and social associations that have influenced the key institutional relations and institutional setting within the the school field. This included highlighting key elements in the field that have now become doxic or taken for granted in the field (Bourdieu 1977) and what is an *illusio*, or beliefs about what is important in the field's stakes (Bourdieu 1996b).

3.7.2 Describing and analysing parliamentary discourse using constellation analysis

To uncover the underlying principles that govern the school field, particularly how school choice should operate according to parliamentary speakers, the LCT method of *constellation analysis* was used. Constellation analysis is a descriptive and analytic methodology that builds a description of how groupings of socio-cultural practices or stances within a social context have coherence (Maton 2016b, p.237). This provided a systematic way of describing how groups of practices and stances relate to each other, may contain multiple associations and come to acquire positive and negative associations. Constellations are made up of *clusters* of smaller groupings which can be *condensed* so their meanings become encoded in the wider cluster. These meanings may also be *charged* with positive or negative judgement (Maton 2014, 2016b).

In this study constellations were identified through an inductive process examining selected school choice discourses in parliamentary speeches. Initially, all speeches were broadly described and coded. While the parliamentary speeches from the two parliaments were initially coded separately, the revealed underlying basis for parental choice was consistent between the speeches for these differing bills. Therefore the discourses and coding were combined, with common themes described and clustered together. This enabled a description of the common underlying assumptions about parental school choice that operated in the field. This enabled a description of an 'ideal choice' process, including the ideal basis for choice. More specific descriptions of parental school choice were then clustered together, which revealed two different orientations as to what parents should choose for in a school. This clustering reveals sets of associations with other educational and social practices and included how speakers positively and negatively evaluated these practices and values. The overarching constellation and the two orientations to parental school choice were then coded as to the strength of their epistemic relations and social relations to generate their specialization codes. This coding and analysis, when combined with the thematic analysis of the historic relations of school choice in the school field, enabled question one to be addressed – 'how is parental school choice constituted in the Asutralian school field, including how is it described and regulated?'. This analytic description of the ideal school choice process and the key sets of relations in the school field sets up a basis for comparison for parents choices as realised in the case study.

3.7.3 Coding interviews, a three-step process

To create meaningful descriptions of parent practices from the primary interviews and reach the organising principles or *legitimation codes,* a staged coding process was undertaken. A three-step process was used that moved from descriptive, to thematic, then analytic coding using LCT (Glenn 2016; Richards & Morse 2007; Maton 2014). This method ensured both 'empirical fidelity and explanatory power' was maintained and deduced (Maton & Chen, 2016a).

Stage 1 descriptive coding involved a period of immersion in the data (Richards 2009; Saldana 2011). Emphasis was placed on generating 'thick descriptions' from the interviews including interviewee reactions and emotional responses to questions and

interviewer observations about the interview (Richards 2009). Interviews were broadly coded with key elements drawn out (Richards 2009). Coding at this stage resembled 'in vivo' codes, using the language of participants (Strauss 1987).

Stage 2 thematic coding, involved coding analysis and moving between inductive and deductive processes. The 'in vivo' codes were clustered into categories and themes (inductive) and the analysis of these was gradually sharpened (Saldana 2011). As the coding progressed, key outcomes and attributes parents described wanting from schools were explicitly depicted as different forms of capital (deductive). Parents were grouped according to the differing capitals they sought from schools, with four parental groupings emerging. This was brought together with the social, cultural and economic descriptions gathered from the recruitment surveys. A similar inductive and deductive process was followed for themes from the parliamentary discourses which had an underlying consensus constellation described, that contained two different clustered values orientations.

In **Stage 3 analytic coding**, the thematic elements – in the parliamentary discourses the different bases for choice, in interviews the different capital forms – were explicitly analysed according to the strength of their epistemic relations and social relations revealing the specialization codes. Table 3.2 illustrates how epistemic relations and social relations were recognised in this study in both parental practices and policy political discourses. This reveals epistemic relations were realised in the degree of emphasis of academic achievement and academic performance, particularly in HSC, TER and NAPLAN scores; and social relations were realised in an emphasis on values, discipline and school community particularly in policy-political discourse, and in social skills and social attributes and distinctions in parents' interviews.

Table 3.2 **Translation devise: epistemic relations and social relations in school choice**

Concept	**Focus:**	**Emphasis on:**
Epistemic Relations (ER)	Attributes or capital parents describe seeking from schooling	HSC & TER scores
	Policy political discourse of the 'ideal parent' & basis of choice	School academic performance in external testing regimes
Social relations (SR)	Attributes or capital parents describe seeking from schooling	Social skills and social attributes and distinctions

	Policy-political discourse of the 'ideal parent' and basis of choice	Values, discipline, school community

3.7.4 Comparative analysis: code matches and code clashes in the school field

Having described parent groups and political constellations according to their epistemic relation and social relations, further analysis was enabled by comparing the respective specialization codes of different parent groups and parent practices by revealing these on a specialization plane.

This first enabled parent groups to be compared to each other, with a topography of parents' relative positions in the school field to be illustrated. As parents' positions represented different capital valuations in the field, this enabled analytic question 2 to be described – 'what do parents seek from high schooling for their children?'.

Second, parents' relative valuations were able to be compared to that of the coded 'ideal parent' described from answering question 1. This enabled a 'code match' or 'code clash' to be described for different parent groups compared to the 'ideal parents' as imagined in parliamentary discourse. This provided the first insight for answering question 4 'what do parents' high school choices reveal about the mechanism of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?'.

Parents practices in school choosing were likewise coded to reveal the underlying principles guiding these school choices. These were illustrated on a specialisation plane. This enabled question 3 'how do parents seek to realise [their aspirations from schooling] for their children.' This was also compared to the ideal selection process as illustrated in the consensus constellation revealing a code match or clode clash with the idealised basis of school choice. This enabled part of question 4 to be answered. Finally, specific parent case studies were examined in order to describe a 'best match' or 'greatest clash' between the idealised parent basis of selection and selection process, as coded for the parliamentary 'consensus constellation', and parents reported experiences in the school field. This is used to illustrate question 4, 'what do parents' high school choices reveal about the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?'

3.7.5 Ethics approval

Three formal ethics approval processes were required to conduct this research. First, the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee which was completed via application to the committee and approved on 10 June 2013. Concurrent with this was ethics approval to conduct research in schools from NSW Department of Education and Communities (now Department of Education). Permission for this was confirmed 25 June 2013. Finally, approval was sought from the regional office Catholic Education office which included oversight of the "Doongara" area. This was approved 23 October 2013. As delivery of recruitment surveys included visitation to primary school premises a NSW Working with Children Check was obtained 19 July 2013.

Ethical practice with schools and participants was maintained through all stages of the research. Schools through which parents were to be recruited via the recruitment survey were first approached with email correspondence and then a phone call to the principal. If the principal denied permission for distribution no further approach was made. If a principal approved distribution, survey packages for all year 6 families were brought to the school. These contained the survey form, an information sheet and a sealable envelope for the survey to be returned to the school in (Appendix E and F). The survey forms had a detachable second page that requested contact details if the parent was willing to be followed up. Sealed survey forms were collected from schools two weeks after distribution.

Once all the surveys had been retrieved, interview participants were selected. Only parents who had specifically indicated they were willing to participate further and provided further contact details were approached, via an initial phone call. A meeting was then arranged, with parents asked to nominate both a time and place they were most comfortable with. As a result some interviews were conducted in the families' homes, others were in cafes or workplaces and two were conducted over the phone. Parents were also asked, prior to interview, which family members had been involved in school selection, if both parents wished to be interviewed together and whether their child would contribute to the interview. As a result some interviews were with only one parent, some were with both parents and some with a parent and child or both parents and their child. In all cases except for the phone interviews consent forms were signed at the end of the interview. For the two phone interviews, consent for what had been

discussed was recorded at end of the interview. The interview consent form stipulated all data would be anonymised and stored securely and the interviewee had the right to withdraw their consent at any point in the project.

The most vulnerable group of interviewees were children and the researcher ensured she was never alone with a child in this study. The potential negative to this precaution was when children were interviewed they were aware their parents were listening. Therefore some may have felt uncomfortable voicing differing opinions to their parents. Ultimately, such limitations likely contributed to the relatively poor quality data elicted in this way, and ultimately the seven recorded interviews with children were not included in the final analysis.

Data storage. Data collected from this research exists in both hard and digital form. To maintain anonymity, hard copy files are kept in a locked office, with identifying documents, including parental consent forms, stored separately to transcribed interviews. Interviews are stored and recorded in anonymised digital files, with the identification key stored separately.

3.7.6 Quality of research

A qualitative research method has been selected for this study to enable the collection of a rich and detailed dataset reflective of the perspectives of the research participants in order to describe and analyse the phenomenon of school choice. However, qualitative research, in drawing from a relatively smaller sample size, is vulnerable to compromise in relation to both validity and reliability. As a result, several steps were undertaken in the research process to ensure the soundness of the research project (Creswell 2007; Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Miles & Huberman 1994).

For the analysis of parliamentary discourses engaging with parental school choice, two differing political debates were chosen, one in state parliament, one in federal parliament. This was to ensure the data analysed could reflect an indicative range of views from parliamentarians, and not only reflect the key subject matter of the debates. As is outlined in 3.4.2.2 above, this yielded a large data set of speeches to be analysed: A total of 53 speeches were given for the federal bills (full list Appendix A) and 72 speeches for the NSW bills (full list Appendix B).

A methodological approach was used for data analysis. This was a staged process for the analysis of both the interviews and parliamentary discourse, as outlined in 3.6.3 Coding interviews, in a three-step process. This first involved a period of immersion in the data (Denzin & Lincoln 2000) and an initial thematic analysis, then methodical coding that moved between inductive and deductive coding to identify concepts to be coded using LCT, then finally identification of specialisation codes and comparative analysis.

Analysis of the data was also undertaken continuously throughout the project, with initial reflections from this tested in subsequent interviews. For instance, when a group of parents emerged from the data who described intensive home-study practices, questions investigating home-study practices were added to subsequent interviews to verify the commonality of these as a phenomenom (Given 2008).

Snowballing as a participant recruitment technique was used throughout the data collection period, but was particularly employed at near the end, when the researcher was aware of groups emerging from the data who appeared to be underrepresented in the data sets and illustrative parents were recruited for interview who bore socio-economic demographic similarities to those within the underrepresented groups.

To confirm and further elaborate the home-school practices of two groups of parents who had emerged from the data, two key informant interviews with primary school principals were added at the end of the data collection period. The principals selected each had had parents from these groups recruited from their primary school. However, care was taken to maintain respondent confidentiality at all times, and the principals were unaware as to the identity of parent interviewees.

3.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has detailed the conceptual framework, analytic method and research design of this study. It commenced by outlining the substantive gaps that had been raised from the review of literature in chapter 2. These pointed to the need for a conceptual framework that would enable the researcher to get beyond empirical

description to an analytic model that enabled parents basis of choice to be understood and described.

Field theory and Legitimation Code Theory were adopted for the the conceptual framework as it suited this analytic task, field theory providing the overarching framework, LCT the means to describe and operationalise its organising principles. This study was constructed in two parts. In the first, the constituent elements that historically constructed the school field were described. The underlying codes of the field were analysed with reference to the dominant field of influence and an 'ideal choice process' and 'ideal chooser' described. In part two the organising principles of parents' school choices as enacted were described including their relative differences, and their code clash or code match with the idealised parents as constructed in part one.

A qualitative research paradigm was found to be best suited to the explanatory nature of this research. This consisted of a historical description of the field and an analysis of the contemporary operations of school choice in the school field as idealised in parliamentary discourse on the subject. Then primary field work in a case study area was conducted using semi-structured interviews. The data from these was analysed using two different but complementary processes: first broad descriptions of the operations of field, capital and habitus from the interviews were described. These were analysed using LCT to reveal their specialization codes.

These two data sets where then brought together to describe the operations of parents in the field and to reveal which parents' codes matched the idealised codes of the field and which parents' clashed. This provides a generalisability from this study, revealing an underlying basis as to how some family strategies in school choice and education more broadly are more likely to be successful.

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS PART I
Understanding the contemporary NSW school field

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes and analyses the key elements that constitute how parental school choice is positioned in the school field in New South Wales (NSW). This addresses the first research question – 'How is parental school choice constituted in the Australian school field, including how is it described and regulated?'. In the Literature Review (Chapter 2) I argued that as well as seeking insight into school choice elements identified as important from previous studies, parental school choice must be studied within a local context to enable specific elements of influence within the local school field being described.

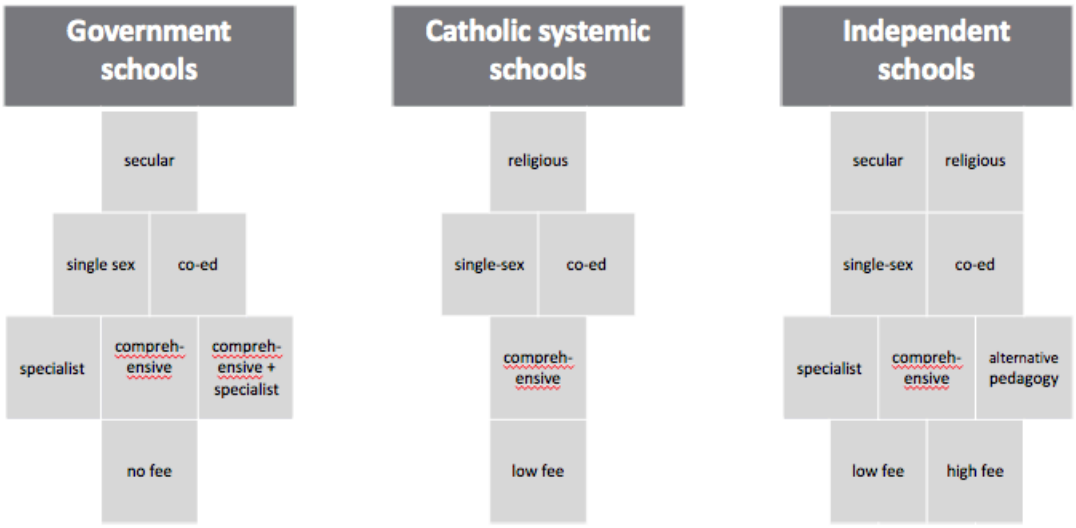
To establish this for the school field of NSW, this chapter is divided into two parts. In section 4.2, the historical relations that continue to exert influence on school choice are described (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). These include external fields that exercise particular influence, and internal institutional structures and discourses. External relations refracted into the field include government policy, the economy, immigration and population. Internal relations include those between actors, and between actors and institutions, most particularly, between parents and the different schools available to them. In section 4.3, the operations in the contemporary field as depicted in parliamentary discourse are described and analysed using constellation analysis and Specialization analysis from Legitimation Code Theory. This enables a description of how the school choice process is idealised as working in current political-policy discourse, including an 'ideal choice process' and 'ideal chooser'. This provides a comparative template against which to compare parents as choosers (chapter 5) and parent choice processes in actuality (chapter 6), which are brought together in chapter 7.

4.2 CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL CHOICE AND THE HISTORIC RELATIONS OF THE NSW SCHOOL FIELD

The contemporary school field in NSW is characterised by the array of choices it offers to parents, resulting in a field that is highly segmented, socially stratified, competitive and with a non-government school sector that is large by international standards (Windle 2014). As Figure

4.1 illustrates, there are three school sectors[1] – government, Catholic and independent – within which there are multiple school forms, including: single-sex or co-educational; specialty (academic, performance, arts, technology or sports) or comprehensive; and no-fee, low-fee and high-fee options. This in turn is also highly socially stratified and can be distinguished by divisions in social class (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2011) and ethnicity (Ho 2016). Students from advantaged families are more likely to attend schools with others like themselves, with the same true for students from disadvantaged families (Perry 2017). In Sydney the highest achieving schools – fully academically-selective schools – have an average of 83% of students from a language background other than English (LBOTE). Sydney also has 125 schools where more than 90% of the students are from a LBOTE, are below average in academic performance, and are concentrated in more socio-economically disadvantaged areas in the city (Ho 2019a).

Figure 4.1 **School sectors in the NSW contemporary school field**



[1] There is considerable critical contention as to the naming and delineation of the NSW school sectors, with Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009 pp.9–10) providing a useful outline of the debates. In this thesis I have chosen to characterise the sectors as 'government, Catholic and independent' to capture the overarching key differences in fee and governance structures for each sector. Catholic schools here are differentiated between 'low fee' Catholic systemic schools oversighted by Catholic Schools NSW, and independent or congregational Catholic schools, which are administered independently by individual religious institutes or 'public juridic persons' and may be 'low fee' or 'high fee' (Catholic Schools NSW 2020). In this figure the latter are included as independent schools. Where relevant, Catholic and independent schools are referred to collectively as the 'non-government' sector. Government schools (also interchangeably referred to as public schools) are nominally 'no fee' however voluntary fees are frequently levied for additional curricular and extra-curricular activities. Non-payment of these fees can lead to activities being made unavailable to children from these families.

All parents find themselves placed in this competitive and differentiated school field. Even if families wish to enrol in their nearest government high school, selection procedures compel them to participate in a school choice process that includes lodging an 'expression of interest form' where up to three school options may be nominated and proof of their residence in the catchment area of their nominated school is required (Expression of Interest Form, 'Moving Into Year 7 In A NSW Government School In 2018'). Evidence of parents' embrace of such choice processes is furnished in research that has found in some areas in Australia the majority of students do not attend their local government school (Cook 2017).

Such highly marketised conditions can be recognised as characteristic of how neoliberal policy regimes have been enacted in education worldwide (Windle 2015; Connell 2013; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; Forsey, Davies & Walford 2008). However, although it has been boosted by the neoliberal turn in government, the competitive, segmented and marketised education system seen today across Australia, and New South Wales (NSW) specifically, is not the result of a singular government policy direction (Pusey 1991, 2003; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2011). Rather, it is an evolved outcome of a school field that has been shaped, funded and promoted over time by different institutional government and private players. It has been subject to waves of varied and increasing government regulation informed by differing ideologies of education, while also functioning as a responsive buffer to changing economic, employment and migration imperatives. These forces can be traced from the foundation of schooling in the colony of NSW.

In this section these key features of the contemporary field are analysed in order to understand their historical trajectories (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Bourdieu characterised all fields as having permanent struggles, but with some fields more settled than others (Bourdieu 1984). This account is a description of the elements related to school choice which are particularly contested in the NSW school field, and which elements are more settled. In each section below a contemporary feature of the field is outlined, including its key attributes. The historic footprints still making an impression today are described, particularly the historic turns which continue to cast an influence. Cumulatively these provides a context within which the durability and continuing influence of different institutional elements can be understood, including which family groups have historically been best catered to in the school field.

4.2.1 Three sectors: government, Catholic systemic and independent schools

The New South Wales school field is characterised by the existence of three school sectors: a government sector, Catholic systemic sector and an independent schools sector. In 2018, 65.5% of students in NSW attended government schools, 20.9% attended Catholic systemic schools and 13.6% attended independent schools (ABS 4221.0, Schools Australia, 2018). These sectors are longstanding and their origins can be traced back to the earliest days of the NSW colony. Today all three sectors are maintained by government funding, either through full funding or part-subsidy (Harrington 2011). While there is a diversity of popular opinion about government subsidy to non-government schools, governments or oppositions which have proposed funding reduction to such schools have suffered electorally (Buckingham 2011). This reinforces the persistent notion that state funding for education should be made available to all school sectors, not just the government ones. This is fuelled also by a historic record that demonstrates that for the last half century few church-based private schools have been able to be sustained without state support. Through tracing the trajectories of these sectors it will be demonstrated how ingrained in the public imagination, the institutional knowledge of the sectors and the electorally-sensitive political antennae of government, is the notion that all three sectors should be sustained.

In the earliest period in NSW the colonial government encouraged the establishment of educational instruction, influenced by Enlightenment values on 'human improvement' as well as responding to the imperative for social control (Gascoigne 2002)[2]. Formalised into schooling, this was the business of entrepreneurs, churches and government. Entrepreneurs included widows who established small informal 'dame schools' out of their houses catering to the children of convicts and labourers; clergymen who supplemented their income by opening private day and boarding schools for a nascent middle class[3] (Campbell & Proctor 2014); governesses employed directly by families or who established ladies academies; and other commercial entrepreneurs (Campbell & Sherington 2006). These largely unregulated forms were highly classed and gendered in their focus (ibid). Yet the government, moral and business imperatives that defined these early forms can be seen in the continuing influence of government, the churches and business on education today.

[2] Prior to the Federation of Australian States in 1901 which established a national government, governance in the British colony was an almost entirely state-based affair and the development of schooling varied among states. This study is concerned with the development of schooling in NSW, so the majority of historical references are specific to NSW unless generalisable to Australia.

[3] As outlined in the Literature Review, social class descriptors follow the authors designation

Over time government and denominational schools emerged, the latter established by a range of Catholic and Protestant groups (Fogarty 1959 p.38; Maddox 2014). Often founded in competition with each other, such schools were sporadically financially supported by the colonial government (Campbell & Proctor 2014; Maddox 2014). A system of 'national schools' was established in 1848 that ran side-by-side with the denominational systems (Campbell & Sherington 2007; Maddox 2014). So, from even the earliest period of British settlement, competing sectors were endemic within Australian education, with the churches and governments contending for both influence and funds.

A government school system in NSW was established in 1866, with the government taking on the competing interests of educational sectors, divergent theories of instruction, assertions of church bodies, and differing family capacities to participate in schooling, through a series of government regulations. Government Acts in the 1880s instituted a compulsion to attend primary school, regulated educational instruction and – under the banner of a movement that demanded schools be 'free, compulsory and secular'– progressively withdrew public funding from denominational schools (Campbell & Proctor 2014; Campbell & Sherington 2006). While contentious and resisted by many protestant denominational groups that had hitherto enjoyed both state support and considerable autonomy, by the end of the century churches found themselves largely unable to maintain elementary schooling without government support (Gascoigne 2002) and denominational schooling, with the exception of Catholic schooling, was largely subsumed into the government system (Campbell & Proctor 2014).

There was far from universal acceptance of this state regulation and funding controls. From the 1870s a particularly forceful opposition campaign was led by the Catholic bishops, who strenuously argued for the continued need for Catholic schooling for Catholic children both on religious and anti-discriminatory grounds (Campbell & Sherington 2007; Maddox 2014). Attendance at Catholic schooling by Catholic families was framed as a moral obligation and church authorities railed against Catholic tax-payers having to support 'godless' government schools. Catholic schooling, with its focus on low-fee urban working class and rural education, continued as a sector, enabled by the unsalaried work of its teaching orders (Campbell & Proctor 2014; Gascoigne 2002). This was eventually formalised and systematised in 1939 with the establishment of a Catholic education office (Lutrell 1996). Since this time Catholic, systemic education, as a formal and separate school system, has been institutionalised in the school field (Hastie 2018).

For more than eighty years following the establishment of a government school system, Catholic schooling was solely supported by church funding and its unsalaried workforce (Campbell & Proctor 2014). This was ultimately challenged by the combined effects of the baby boom and the post-war migration program that followed the end of World War Two. Both government and Catholic schools struggled to cope with a rapidly expanded population, with Catholic schools' intake fuelled by a large influx of Catholic migrants (Maddox 2014). As a result, its teaching workforce of nuns and brothers had to cope with up to 100 in a class (Campbell & Sherington 2008). This was brought to a head in 1962 when Catholic schools in the regional NSW city of Goulburn shut down in a dispute over the provision of suitable toilet facilities for children, which a state government inspector had required, but the government had not funded. On the morning Monday, 16 July 1962, nearly 2000 Catholic students arrived at their local government schools seeking enrolment. Only a third were able to be accommodated in the government school system. After one week, the point having been made, striking families returned to their Catholic schools (Campbell & Proctor 2014). In 1964 the federal government responded, providing for the first time, part-funding to non-government schools – starting with grants for science laboratories – benefitting the Catholic education system in particular (Maddox 2014; Campbell 2005). While this was also seen a political manoeuvre to attract traditionally-Labor Catholic votes on the part of a conservative government, since the 1970s particularly federal governments have, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, directed government aid to the non-government school sector (Forsey 2010). This has been particularly in the form of direct federal government grants to non-government schools (Harrington 2016), which is significant as constitutionally, responsibility for schooling resides with State governments (Harrington 2011).

Since this time too, depending on the policy objectives of the government of the day, there have been further periods of expansion in government funds towards both government and non-government schooling. For instance, in the 1990s federal grants were extended, aimed at expanding low-cost denominational private schooling (Cranston et al. 2010). This was supported by then-Prime Minister John Howard, leader of the centre-right Liberal Party, who declared parents were moving their children from the state system as it was 'too politically correct and too values-neutral' (Crabb & Guerrera 2004). This increased public subsidy of non-government schooling saw students flow to low-cost non-government schools, with a 12% growth in Catholic systemic schools from 2001 to 2011 compared to only 1% for other

independent schools in the same period (ABS, Schools, Australia 2011, (cat. No. 4221.0)). The result is by the first decades of the twenty first century the non-government school sector in Australia, including the large Catholic systemic system, is among the largest in the OECD (Windle 2015).

4.2.2 Stratification by design: elite schools and the professions

Australian schooling is particularly socially stratified. Compared to the OECD average, Australia has both high performance and low equity levels (Palmer 2013; Australia. Review of Funding for Schooling 2011) and only a small proportion of students attend schools with a balanced socioeconomic mix (Windle 2015). This has led to an association emerging between particular school forms and different social groups. The first and arguably most crucial of these is the relationship between middle class professionals and elite schooling. This is particularly associated with the rise and continued maintenance of two types of elite school: elite independent schools and academically selective government schooling.

The oldest extant independent elite school in NSW is The King's School, founded in 1831. But the establishment of elite schooling in a form most recognisable today can be particularly traced back to the opening of the University of Sydney in 1852. This encouraged the development of academically-oriented curriculums in elite post-secondary schools, which could direct students towards the University. This was encapsulated in the foundation by an Act of Parliament in 1855 of Sydney Grammar, which remains today a high-fee, academically selective and secular high school. Other elite independent schools evolved from earlier private ventures (Campbell & Sherington 2007) which were sold to the organised churches whose schooling model better enabled them to prepare students for university or public sector entrance exams that had become an important ticket to credentialled professional employment (Campbell & Proctor 2014). The governance of these schools was distinctly different from schools encompassed by denominational systems. While still religiously aligned with various protestant denominations and Catholic orders, these were governed through a model that sat outside such central denominational control. Instead the governance of these followed a board structure that mirrored English "public school" models (Campbell & Proctor 2014).

Such schools were particularly shaped by the 'Arnoldian' traditions first established by Thomas Arnold at Rugby School, United Kingdom. Elite in purpose, they were designed to prepare students for industry and social leadership through an emphasis on team sports, Christianity

(Proctor 2011) and a prefect system, as much as academic instruction (Campbell & Proctor 2014). Such schools appealed to aspiration, marrying academic achievement with the development of the manners and confidence of social leadership that extended beyond 'mere wealth' (Gascoigne 2002). This ongoing relationship between a professional elite and Independent schools is exemplified today in the disproportionate representation of elite independent school graduates in politics (Malone 2013) and elite law firms (Douglas 2013).

A second type of elite school, also directed towards academic study and supported by the idea of 'ability', maintains a strong presence in the NSW school field. These are academically elite 'selective' government schools. Unlike in other Australian states, in NSW elite academic schooling has had a strong association with government selective high schools (Campbell & Proctor 2014; McCalman 1993). In NSW currently there are 48 partially or fully-selective high schools (NSW Government 2019), more than in all other states combined (Campbell 2019). Such schools remain in the forefront of media discourses on school success, as exemplified by articles headlined, 'Inside the genius factory: the secrets to James Ruse high schools' success', (Baker 2018) and 'School shopping': The trend leaving Sydney's high schools half-empty' (Baker & Gladstone 2018).

The logics supporting this form of schooling are long-standing and also trace their origins to the establishment of the University of Sydney. Selective academic high schools were established early, including Fort Street (1849) and Sydney Girls and Sydney Boys High Schools (1883), the number increasing particularly from the 1880s (Campbell & Sherington 2006, p.21). Built on a concept of 'meritocracy' with admission via competitive academic exams, these were elite by design, charged fees and were not intended to be universally accessible (Campbell 2019). That is, built into the original conceptualisations of selective schools was the notion that this was only ever to serve a small elite.

This exclusivity is important to the more recent trajectory of selective schooling, which is tied up with the establishment, and more recent defence, of comprehensive schooling in NSW. The comprehensive school, established from the 1960s, was ostensibly a model to serve all students in government education (see 4.2.4 *The Comprehensive School* below). Selective schooling survived two attempts to close it down in 1960s and 1977, the relevant Minister retreating each time in the face of popular revolt by parent communities and alumni against the plan (Campbell 2019; Campbell & Sherington 2006, p.203). The number of selective schools began to grow

again from 1988 when a reformist state Minister for Education argued middle-class and professional families in the outer suburbs also deserved access to such schooling (Campbell 2019). In 2009, the number of selective school places was increased, largely through the expansion of selective school classes in comprehensive schools, a move coinciding with the raising of the school leaving age, thereby increasing high school enrolments overall (Campbell 2013, p.176).

The notion of government selective schooling has also expanded to other specialities beyond academic selection. In NSW this now includes nine creative and seven sport-selective high schools (NSW Department of Education 2019). These have varying degrees of competitive entry requirements that range from full-audition or trial to presentation of a portfolio. An additional range of 'technology' specialist schools has also been created, which are comprehensive schools that include a technology speciality across the curriculum.

This association between a professional elite and academically selective high schools has continued. For instance, in 2019, eleven of the twenty most advantaged schools in NSW – as measured by school ICSEA (a measure of family socioeducational status) – are government selective schools (Ho 2019b). At the other end of the scale recent NSW government review has established that students whose parents had lower educational levels were both less likely to apply for selective schooling and less likely to be offered a place when they did apply (NSW government 2018). A commercial listing of HSC results in a 'league table' based on the number of students in the top 'band 6' of rankings for 2018 demonstrates that the top 20 ranked schools are either fully government selective schools, partially government selective schools or independent schools (Matrix.edu.au 2019). The other key demographic feature of academically selective high schools in NSW is their enrolments are heavily dominated by Asian-Australian students. In the majority of selective schools in Sydney, students from Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LBOTE) comprise at least 80% of overall enrolments. Such children, often the product of a migration system favouring professional qualification, continue a long-standing association between such elite schooling and the professions (Ho 2019b, p.516).

4.2.3 Discourses of ability, talent, merit and the necessity for academic sorting

The rise of selective schooling has been supported by persistent discourses on the need to provide for academically 'gifted and talented' children, who were cast at one point in 1977 by a NSW government committee as 'the most disadvantaged group in our schools' for not having

received the stimulation to achieve their full potential' (Campbell & Sherington 2006 p.101). This joined notions of 'ability' and discourses on merit which rose in prominence from the early twentieth century as a key justification for the growth and continued existence of such schools (Campbell & Proctor 2014; Proctor & Sriprakash 2017).

With the educational discourse driven by notions of 'ability' a key endeavour of primary schooling was thus the discernment of this, and then determining the right pathway into the right secondary school for each child. Ability was detected through regular sorting via testing in primary school and was associated with notions of natural intelligence and mental capacity, which were reinforced through intelligence testing and the production of IQ scores (Krisjansen & Lapins 2001, p.50). Early backers considered high intelligence to be possessed by only a small elite (Braggett 1985, p.28). This led Proctor & Sriprakash (2017) to observe such schools represent a relic from a time when secondary schooling was the destination for only a small minority of young people, almost invariably from the middle and upper classes.

Ability sorting required ability testing. Another key innovation during the early- to mid-twentieth century was a rise in the notion of specialised testing both to measure 'aptitude' – encompassing notions of intelligence, psychological fitness and disposition for learning on entry into high school pathways – and for testing academic performance, particularly on school completion (Campbell & Proctor 2014, pp.155–156). The centrality of testing reinforced within schooling the validity of systems of measurement, with entry and exit-level testing at key school milestones providing pathways to different schooling forms, and exit credentials and pathways to post-school study and careers. Cemented particularly was the centrality of secondary school examinations and credentialing as a principal object of schooling. In these measurements can be recognised the contemporary key capital of the school field, particularly the measurement of academic performance or achievement.

Academically-selective schools still represent a form of elite schooling for some parents and schools alike. Their popularity has grown since the 1980s, which Campbell and Sherington (2006, p.10) have associated with the rise in published 'league tables' detailing the students who attained the highest scores in the HSC. Currently around one in five students in government schools apply to selective high schools and of these, around four in ten are successful in gaining a place (NSW government 2018). Indeed there is evidence of a rivalry between academically-selective government schools and elite independent schools for

recruitment of the most academically-gifted students, with non-government schools offering to enrol such children, including with the inducement of scholarships, prior to the government selective exams (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009, p.106).

4.2.4 The comprehensive school

The dominant contemporary high school form in NSW is the comprehensive high school. In 2012 57% of NSW students were enrolled in these (Campbell 2013). Comprehensive schools arose from the 1960s fulfilling the need for a new approach to schooling as schools strained to bursting point, the result of the post-World War Two baby boom, immigration, and changes in the economy that both created a need for greater credentialing and busts in the youth jobs market (Irving, Maunders & Sherington 1995).

The notion of 'equity' was particularly a concern of Labor governments, which argued equity in education mattered as both individuals and the nation would be stronger if education were available to all with talent, not just the wealthy or well-connected who could afford private schooling (Campbell & Proctor 2014). Informed also by social concerns about equity (Campbell & Sherington 2013), the comprehensive or 'Wyndham' model was developed to accommodate all local students in a local geographical area regardless of academic merit or perceived aptitude for learning, to encourage retention in extended secondary education (Campbell & Proctor 2014; Campbell & Sherington 2013; Irving et al. 1995). Such a model 'was thought to suit middle-class families who could not afford the fees of the corporate schools or Catholic colleges and whose children could not win a place in the diminishing selective high school sector' (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009, p.48). Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) argue that for much of the twentieth century this became the the local comprehensive school was the standard high schooling model for most families, with the notion of 'school choice' inconceivable for most parents (p.2).

Comprehensive high schools replaced earlier technical schools, which were criticised as trapping children in class-based educational streams (Campbell 2019; Campbell & Sherington 2006). The comprehensive school was tasked with assimilating all social classes, ethnicities and the Indigenous population, thus serving both social aspiration and democracy (ibid). Only a few boys and girls high schools and selective high schools that had earlier predominated remained, though these were rigorously defended as outlined above (Campbell 2019; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; Campbell & Sherington 2013). Ability grouping within

schools also continued (Campbell & Sherington 2006, p.55). Technical or vocational programs instead became optional within the curriculum through Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools programs. Such study programs have never had the same level of popularity as academically-selective places however, and currently the numbers participating in such programs are declining (NCVER 2019). Indeed, even as an optional addition to the curriculum the association with working-class education persists. For instance, in a case study outlined by Campbell (2013, p.174), a school principal declined to offer vocational programs in his comprehensive school as he was already competing with nearby schools offering academic streaming and did not wish to further attract more working-class young people. This illustrates that however strong the discourses on equity or, in the case of VET programs 'educational alternatives', a strong hierarchy of study options exists within schools, with academic performance continuing to set the benchmark for desirability.

4.2.5 Maintaining distinction and the movement of the middle class

Much as increased school retention fuelled the development of comprehensive schools, it is the movements of parents broadly characterised as middle class that are most influencing school composition and school enrolment today. A major study on middle-class parent choice in Sydney described how comprehensive high schools have come to be understood by many middle-class parents as undisciplined and disorderly places, where principals have little control over teacher selection or student recruitment. As a result, these schools have come to be seen as no longer 'good enough', and it is arguably comprehensive schools that are the most 'chosen against' in the current school marketplace (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009).

Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009) characterised middle-class parents as having two sets of anxieties over their children's futures. One relates to the labour market and an economy that demands ever higher credentials, but provides fewer guarantees of secure and long-term employment. Thus, the question is 'will one's children be up to what is required?' (p.182). The second relates to the quality of schools, and the type of education they children will get, which they linked particularly to a diminution in trust in government comprehensive schooling (p.183). Referencing the work of Ball (2003) in the UK, they describe a shift in the middle classes from the need for 'merit' from schooling, to the need 'distinction' (Campbell, Proctor and Sherington 2009, p.28). Such a logic particularly supports the continued presence of identifiably elite schooling.

Historically for the first hundred years of colonisation, attendance at post-elementary schooling alone was elite. Early government high schools, far from being open to all, charged tuition and were selective on entry via competitive exam (Campbell & Sherington 2006, p.21) thus high school completion could be considered an elite distinction in itself (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; McCalman 1993). However, for the past 40 years the number of students completing high schooling has expanded rapidly, so that by 2018, 84.5 per cent of students were retained until the end of year 12 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018, Schools, Australia, 4221.0). This change, from exclusive to mass high school completion, has been accompanied by shifts in attendance patterns, particularly by children from middle-class families, between school sectors.

Attendance in government schools peaked in 1975, with 75.9 per cent of students attending one. But as Table 4.1 illustrates, from this point on students flowed to the private sector, so that by 2018 this number was down to 65.7 per cent in government schooling, though there is some evidence this drift has stabilised (4221.0 - Schools, Australia, 2017).

Table 4.1 **Percentage of students attending government schooling in Australia**[4]

Year	1978	1988	1998	2008	2018
% students in govt school	78.7	72.7	70	65.9	65.7
% students in non-gov't schools	21.3	27.3	30	34.1	34.3

This exodus from government schooling was led by middle-class parents (Campbell 2005), exemplified in research illustrating it was the children of government-school teacher mothers (Proctor 2008) and government bureaucrats (Maslen 1982) who were at the forefront of the move from government-to-private schooling. The most prominent explanation for this enrolment shift to private schooling relates to the reaction of middle-class parents to the dramatic increase in high school retention during this period. This increased retention was prompted by a dramatic drop in youth employment opportunities, particularly affecting working-class young people who now stayed in school (Irving, Maunders & Sherington 1995). But with curricular structures remaining academically-oriented, a culture clash ensued between students presumed to be progressing towards higher education and the newly retained students

[4] Data taken from ABS series 4221.0 – Schools, Australia in relevant years

who remained in schooling largely to avoid the unemployment queue (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009; Connell 1982). The result, as Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009, p.53) write was:

> Middle-class parents, who now sought more credentials for their children in an increasingly competitive world, were disturbed to see disruptive children, sometimes working class, but also ill-disciplined middle-class youth, with little interest in academic studies, sitting alongside 'their own' in the same classroom and at the same school.

In response, these parents shifted their children to private schooling. This middle-class drift to private schooling, after a generation that favoured comprehensive government schooling, echoes the earlier discourses that accompanied the foundation of private schools, which were established sites of distinction for the development of future leaders. This is significant as it establishes the persistence of notions on the importance of academic credentials and social distinction from schooling have been to middle-class families.

4.2.6 A market-based response

Federal and state governments responded to the shift in school populations with inquiries and position papers. These included a joint paper from 1980 that promoted a market dynamic within government schooling by creating a greater range of choices among government schools (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1985), and in NSW, the 'McGowan Report' (1981). The NSW state government gradually de-zoned government schools, opening up catchment zones to allow the attendance of outside-area students in government schools (at the principal's discretion) (Campbell & Sherington 2006, pp.108-110) and by increasing the number of selective high schools. These were both market-driven responses. This illustrates the pivotal role parents – particularly those from the middle-classes – play as social agents in the school field, with their actions shaping the composition of sectors within the field as they collectively manoeuvre and shift their loyalties between school systems (Campbell 2015).

In contemporary high school enrolment materials available to parents online from the NSW Department of Education, the information provided outlines that while students have a guaranteed enrolment at their local catchment school, to uptake this they must submit a high school enrolment application which is to include residential documentation verifying their home address. In this form also they are invited to nominate up to three non-local high schools (NSW government schools – Going to a Public School, NSW Education and Communities

2014). This formalises within enrolment procedures for government high schools the notion of choice of school.

Similar shifts have been described in relation to cultural diversity in schooling. This is illustrated in analysis by Ho (2015) who outlines the widening ethnic divide between school sectors: while in government schools 52 per cent of children have parents coming from a language background other than English (LBOTE), this share was 37 per cent in Catholic schools and only 18 per cent in independent schools. When the enrolments at the three highest-achieving government selective high schools were examined, they revealed 97 per cent, 91 per cent and 88 per cent of students had parents with a LBOTE. Conversely, the lowest performing schools also have student enrolments greater than 80 per cent from LBOTE (Windle 2015). That is, both the highest and lowest performing government schools have a very high percentage of children from a language background other than English, while independent schools have the lowest level of language-background diversity. The result is that in contemporary Australia, school education is distinctly segmented, includes a non-government sector that is large by international standards and has schooling that is highly socially, economically and culturally segmented.

4.2.7 Summary: External and internal relations in the field

This historical account demonstrates many key elements that define the contemporary Australian school field are the result of longstanding and taken-for-granted assumptions. This includes: that there are three school sectors – government, Catholic systemic and independent – and all should be supported or part-supported with government funds; that elite schooling that led to the professions was necessary for children with academic ability and the testing and sorting of students to deduce talent was a necessary part of schooling; that equity should be built into the government school system; and that government schools must retain middle-class parents. Finally, a notably, the most significant changes in the school field historically have been associated with the movements of middle-class parents and schools' need to cater to these families in order to continue to attract middle-class student attendance. That is, even before the policies of neoliberalism, were explicitly enacted in the school field to create a competitive marketplace, one already existed in parts. This illustrates Bourdieu's conceptualisation of what is a doxa in a field.

Three key fields outside school education have been demonstrated to exert particular influence on schooling in NSW: the field of government power, the economic field and the conglomerated of sub-fields of the denominational churches and the Catholic church. The most dominant of these – the field of government power – has, over time influenced the organisation of the school sector forms within the school field and the actions of individuals within it, including parents who are brought into its orbit through regulations such as compulsory school attendance. The government has also used schools to buffer the fluctuations and needs of the economy and has changed schooling models in response to the effects of population growth. It has exerted influence over the denomination sub-fields through regulation, including curriculum, and funding, which denominational schools have come to depend upon for their continuation. The trajectory of the sub-fields of denominational schooling has been of fortunes waxing and waning in response to government policy, such schools ultimately proving dependent on funding from the field of government for their survival. Their continued success in exerting influence on government has largely relied on the established nature of their systems and their influence over voting populations.

The influence of the economic field can be seen in the rise of independent or 'corporate schooling' and the continuing dominance of graduates from elite schools in the elite professions. This also indicates the key historic relationship of the economic field with the school field as being primarily a relationship between the business and professional elite and elite school forms, rather than between the broad populace and schooling. As Connell et al. (1982, p.15) wrote in *Making the Difference,* 'Social inequality was hardly a problem: it was built into the system from the start.' This then raises the questions, how does the field of government power currently regulate parent school choice; and how is parental school choice idealised in current policy-political discourses?

4.3 SCHOOL CHOICE IN CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC POLICY DISCOURSE

The preceding section described how parental school choice has evolved from the establishment of the colony of NSW as a key feature of the school field. This also illustrated how the field of school is most influenced by the field of political power in relation to the school options that are made available and funded in the field. No single legislative or policy moment has thus led to the enactment of parental school choice, though in the contemporary school field all parents find themselves in a competitive marketplace that is sustained by government policy. Even families intending to send their child to the nearest government high

school are required to 'choose' this school in an enrolment process that invites nomination of different schools in order of preference and requires proof of residence (NSW Department of Education 2019). To understand how contemporary school choice is idealised in the field of political power (Bourdieu 1977), in the following section a discourse analysis of parliamentary speeches engaging with parental school choice is undertaken.

In this section how parental school choice is currently constructed in the field of political power is established in an examination of parliamentary discourse on school choice. Here the key logics, principles and ideals that sustain parental school choice in government policy are described and analysed, against which the actions and motivations of parents in practice can be compared. This enables description to be made of how the school market is presented as working by policy makers in the field of political power, including how this is idealised.

As outlined in chapter 3, this analysis focuses on two parliamentary debates, one state and one federal, that enacted five bills of parliament. As school choice is not enacted specifically in any act of parliament, including any education acts, political discourses have been discerned and analysed from other parliamentary debates in which parental school choice featured as a key theme. These were specifically from debates in federal parliament relating to the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Educational Legislation Amendment Bill 2008; and in the NSW Parliament of the Education Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009 and the Education Further Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009. 53 speeches were made in the former and 72 in the latter[5]. The primary subject of these debates was school funding appropriation and enabling legislation that laid the groundwork for national literacy testing (that was to become the NAPLAN tests) and the public reporting of such. These speeches, as recorded in Hansard, represent contemporary political discourse on school choice during the period families interviewed for this study were selecting schools. Key themes on parental school choice from these debates are outlined below with illustrative quotations and notes about other speakers referencing very similar key points. The majority of speakers were from Labor (centre-left) or the Coalition[6] (centre-right) which comprise the dominant parties

[5] The political affiliation, date and house of parliament in which speeches were delivered is identified for quoted speakers. The latter is abbreviated as follows: Federal House of Representative (Fed HOR); Federal The Senate (Fed Sen); New South Wales Legislative Assembly (NSW LA); New South Wales Legislative Council (NSW LC).

[6] The Coalition comprises two parties in alliance, the Liberal Party of Australia ('the Liberals') and The National Party of Australia ('the Nationals'). In the text speakers from both are identified as from 'the Coalition' unless a specific party-political stance is adopted by the speaker, in which case the speaker's party is identified.

of the Australian parliament. Also included are commentary from smaller parties including the Greens and independents. As outlined in Chapter 3, 3.4.2.2, as the purpose of analysis of parliamentary speech is the construction of an 'ideal chooser' as presented in the policy-political arena, federal and state political speeches are considered together. The utility of this approach became clear when the federal and state speeches were first examined, which revealed only relatively minor school choice discourse variation between federal and state speakers belonging to the same political parties.

These discourses are described using constellation analysis and Specialization from Legitimation Code Theory (Maton 2014). These provide a basis from which to describe, cluster and cumulatively analyse how the school market is constructed, particularly the role of parental choice within this, including how an 'ideal parent' acts in choosing a high school.

As was outlined in section 4.3, there are three key school sectors in the Australian school field: a government sector, Catholic systemic sector and Independent school sector. These are supported with full or part-government subsidy. Parents are required to choose a school in government enrolment processes, and entry into any school beyond the local government school in which a family is in the catchment area for is by application which ultimately the school decides on (Aitchison 2006) or, if selective schooling via entry exam, the Department of Education.

To understand how policy makers – in this case, politicians in both state and federal parliament – understand this to work, described below is 'what is agreed' in the political field. This is expressed as an *'ideal chooser' constellation* (section 4.4.1). This constellation enables a description and analysis to be made of what is settled, or doxic (Bourdieu 1977), in the political field about school choice. Then, in order to describe the illusio – beliefs about what is important in the field (Bourdieu 1996b) – two sets of stances, one from each dominant political party are outlined: 4.4.4 *Labor academic orientation* and 4.4.5 *Coalition values orientation*. This constellation and the orientations within it are then analysed using specialization codes from LCT (Maton 2014). This enables a depiction of the principles that underlie how school choice is constructed and idealised in NSW in the field of political power.

4.3.1 Consensus on what is 'legitimate parental school choice' in the political field

While oppositional rhetoric (Steiner et al. 2004) was evident in speaker's discourses, underlying this, were some common positions on parental school choice. These represent the doxa of the field (Bourdieu 1977), or what currently settled in the field of political power in relation to parental school choice. Consensus was recognised both in aspects of parental school choice that were promoted as positive by speakers, and also what was uncontested about choice. This was revealed both through directly examining speakers' statements and also in an inductive process as outlined in the research design (chapter 3), where what was *not* contested in the speeches was attended to. Included here was the notion that parental school choice was the right of all parents, that school choice should be made in a rational and considered manner and on the basis of a child's best interests, and that the maintenance of a school field that included diverse school sectors was necessary to ensure parental choice.

4.3.1.1 The validity of parental school choice

Parental school choice itself was supported by the majority of speakers, including speakers from major parties, minor parties and independents. Across all speeches, no speaker suggested parental choice should be discontinued. Even speakers who problematised school choice in various ways (see 4.4.4 below), did not challenge the essential legitimacy of parents choosing their child's school. These consensus positions were realised through speakers accommodating support for parental school choice through associating it with other values within their own political frameworks. That is, although this analysis was conducted as an inductive process, this revealed the dominance of party-political discourses. For example, a typical Labor discourse involved the linking of school choice with principles of school equity, such as equity in the information available to parents to enable their school choices:

> We can provide better information to parents and to students about their education and their educational provider…This framework will give parents, the public and the government information about every school. We are creating a sound policy of equality in education standards (Darren Cheeseman, Labor, 20/10/08, Fed HOR[7]).

Equity was also associated with parental school choice by Labor speakers through discourses on equality of access to quality education, the importance of considering all schools on a 'level playing field – particularly through transparency of results reporting (Baldwin 16/10/08; Butler 20/10/08; Champion 20/10/08) – and associating it with forms of human rights including

[7] Key abbreviations in this section: Fed HOR (Federal House of Representatives), Fed Sen (Federal Senate), LA (Legislative Assembly, NSW lower house), LC (Legislative Council, NSW upper house).

children's rights and 'parental rights' (Carr 2/12/08; Hale 20/10/08). Thus, by clustering these values together, parents' right to school choice was supported by association with broader Labor values of equality and support for human rights.

For Coalition speakers, support for parental school choice was frequently associated with a broader stance supporting 'values and standards'. For example, Baldwin (16/10/08, Fed HOR) emphasised an association between education quality and school choice:

> Parents and students must be assured that our education system is defined by choice, values and high standards. The alternative government demands that every child have access to high-quality education from a high-quality teacher in a high-quality school environment.

That is, for Coalition speakers, parental school choice was associated with notions of high performance, principles of behaviour and standards of academic excellence. This was also clustered with notions of the right of parents to choose schools based on moral or religious values (Irons 20/10/08; Johnson 16/10/08; Mariano 16/10/08), parents' aspirations for their children (Scott 16/10/08) including aspiration to attend private schooling (Briggs 20/10/08; Robert 20/10/08) and notions of 'reward for effort' (Briggs 20/10/08). Thus parental school choice was aligned by Coalition speakers with a core positioning of the Coalition parties as traditional defenders of religious values and educational and behavioural standards.

In this way speakers from both major parties constructed discourses supportive of school choice that linked to broader sets of stances associated with their parties. This was expressed by both sides as parents' *right to choose,* though this rights discourse in itself had slightly different associations for each party. Labor speakers most commonly associated parents' right to choose with a right to know information on school academic performance (Carr 2/12/08; Firth 18/6/09, 24/6/09; Paluzzano 24/6/09). Coalition speakers were more likely to emphasise a right to choose as absolute 'parental right' (Stuart 20/10/08), though parents right to know performance information to inform their choice was also emphasised (Parker 24/6/09).

Even the most frequently problematised aspect of parental school choice reinforced its validity. This was the difficulty of maintaining the conditions of a school market for parents who lived in regional or outer-urban areas who, due to reasons of geography and transport, did not have the option of school choice for their children (Fardell 8/09/09; Hodgkinson 9/06/09; Humphries

24/06/09; Parker 24/06/09; Piccoli 24/06/09; Stokes 24/06/09). That is, *lack* of school choice was highlighted as a key issue for some families.

This cross-party agreement on parents' right to school choice is highly significant. It signals the notion of parental school choice, as it is understood by the field of political power, continues to be an established and almost entirely uncontested feature of the field of school education in Australia. It also demonstrates how parental school choice as a concept is supported within the two dominant political frameworks in Australia.

4.3.1.2 Parental school choice should be rational and considered

A second area of common political consensus was the expectation that parents that would choose schools on a considered basis and in a rational manner. That is, while speakers advanced different bases on which parents should choose schools, outlined below in 4.4.4 *Labor academic orientation* and 4.4.5 *Coalition values and standards orientation*, there was underlying agreement the choice process itself would or should be deliberative and informed. As with the first set of discourses, speakers clustered this notion with others aligning to their political values.

Labor speakers clustered the notion of a parents undertaking a deliberative school choice process with broader, government policy objectives. At the federal government level these were packaged at this time as an 'education revolution' – which was to eventually become a major policy document entitled 'Building the Education Revolution' (2010). This included a raft of reforms including national numeracy and literacy testing, the reporting of the results of this testing on a school-by-school basis, and a national curriculum. For instance:

> … the program that the government is advancing as part of its education revolution is very much about the rights of parents – the right of parents to know what is going on so they can make informed choices about the future of their children's education (Kim Carr, Labor, 2/12/08, Fed Sen).

In this way, purposeful parental school selection facilitated the alignment of parents' values with those of the government. Deliberative parental choice processes were also clustered with notions of parents as consumers (Neal 16/10/08) and parents' 'right to know' school performance information as part of their choice calculations (Bishop 2/12/08; Gillard 24/9/08).

For Coalition speakers, deliberative choice was clustered with notions of parents' commitment to education and the Coalition's commitment to education:

> Our commitment to choice in education is second to none. The Liberals and The Nationals introduced the dezoning of schools—another policy that was of course bitterly opposed by the Labor Party, which now tries to argue that it wants to support competition and choice (Catherine Cusack, Coalition, 09/09/09, Fed Sen)

That is, for Coalition speakers parental choice was linked with principles of competition which would therefore produce competitive excellence in educational standards schooling (Hawke 20/10/08). This was also particularly supported through the choice of private schooling (Andrews 21/10/08; Fifield 2/12/08; Hasse 20/10/08).

Thus, across the political spectrum the process of school choice was idealised as considered, rational and systematic. For Labor this aligned parents' values with government values. For Coalition speakers it reinforced the maintenance of diversity within schooling.

4.3.1.3 A child's best interests and the need for school performance information

A third area of agreement was that parents' key basis for school selection should be their child's best interests or, more broadly, the family's interests and values (which by inference, were in the child's best interests). This was most frequently clustered with notions about parents being able to choose 'the best' school possible, broadly understood as the school most able to maximise their child's academic performance. While the emphasis on academic performance was almost certainly an artefact of it being a key subject of the debate in these bills, its consistent clustering with parental school choice by speakers from across the political spectrum indicates its importance.

For Labor party speakers parental school choice was clustered with notions of being able to choose the 'best school'. This was directly associated with a schools' academic merit and performance (Bishop 2/12/08; Carr 2/12/08). This emphasis on performance measures was presented as enabling parents and governments to move beyond old divisions – and distinctions – between school sectors, to a more objective and equitable field:

> The debate has moved on from public versus private. It's moved on from how much funding should come from where. It's moved on from naming and shaming schools. It's moved on from blaming educators. Today it's where it should be and that is—about student performance. Today it's about standards and outcomes. Today it's about

> transparency and assessment of educational institutions (Mark Bishop, Labor, 2/12/08, Fed Sen).

The emphasis on academic performance by Labor speakers was particularly significant, for while the tendency for geographic areas to become socially stratified through such choice actions in this pursuit was noted by some, the underlying assumption was that parents would or should pursue the individual academic interests of their child.

In addition to supporting the measurement of academic performance – or at the least not challenging this as a measure (with the specific exception of Nationals speakers below in 4.4.2) – Coalition speakers also linked 'the best interests of the child' to values of individual freedom over collective control:

> This is all about parents making choices for their children, choices that the parents see as being in the child's best interests. That is a good thing and the Coalition has always supported this (Luke Simpkins, Coalition, 16/10/08, Fed HOR).

Coalition speakers clustered this with notions of individualised education and support for schools with alternate pedagogies (Pyne 16/10/08) or religious schools (Forrest 10/10/08; Mirabella 20/10/08; Simpkins 16/10/08). In these ways, parental school choice was associated with notions of academic performance and thus academic excellence by Labor speakers, and with the ongoing maintenance of diversity of school forms and school sectors by Coalition speakers.

4.3.1.4 Parental school choice requires the maintenance of government aid for private education

Finally, speakers agreed that the maintenance of a diverse school field with both government and private schools was crucial to providing parents with school choice. Included in this was bipartisan support for government funding of government schools and the public subsidy of private schools. For Labor speakers, funding private education was linked to the advancement of educational opportunities to all families:

> … delivering on our election promise to maintain levels of funding for non-government schools, will provide the ongoing reassurance to many parents, particularly in my local community, that this is a government that is committed to continuing to govern for all Australians and to providing educational opportunities to all Australians (David Bradbury, Labor, 10/10/08, Fed HOR).

Labor speakers associated multiple sector school funding with choice and equity (Irwin, 21/10/08; Neal 16/10/08; Perrett 20/10/08) and quality (Arbib 2/12/08; Sherry 10/11/08) in education. These are elaborated further in 4.4.4.

For Coalition speakers, the maintenance of a field with as wide a range of school choices as possible fundamentally included supporting parents' capacity to choose a private school:

> The aspiration to start a new non-government school ought to be recognised by the government and assisted. We ought to have choice in education within Australia (Alex Hawke, Coalition, 20/10/08, Fed HOR).

Private schools were associated by Coalition speakers with supporting the values of aspiration (Scott 16/10/08), religion (Simpkins 16/10/08), 'difference' in schooling (Billson 20/10/08), savings for taxpayers (Andrews 21/10/08) and parental 'sacrifice' (Hawke 20/10/08). This was often clustered with the charge that Labor was anti-private school and therefore 'anti-choice' (Briggs 20/10/08; Hawke 20/10/08; Johnson 16/10/08; Robert 20/10/08). These are elaborated further in 4.4.5. Thus, for speakers on both sides of parliament, the ongoing maintenance of diversity of school sectors through the provision of public funding and public subsidy was crucial to ensuring parental school choice.

4.3.2 'legitimate choice' and problematising parental school choice

While support for the notion of parental school choice was near universal, some speakers did problematise aspects of this, though such dissent was only raised by a minority of speakers across the debates. This in itself underlines the degree to which there is a doxa (Bourdieu 1977) even in dissent, reinforcing the overarching political consensus as to the validity of parental school choice.

Dissensions were raised on three grounds. The first was that school marketisation, and the policies that supported it, only worked where there was a school market. As alluded to earlier, this was not the case in many regional areas which had only one or two local high schools. This meant families in these areas did not have choice (Ripoll 21/10/08). This point was raised particularly by speakers from the NSW National party (the junior party in the Coalition) as well as both Liberal and Labor speakers with regional seats or outer-urban seats. Speakers' concerns centred on the notion that policies which emphasised the reporting of academic ranking of schools would have negative consequences, as rankings create a hierarchy. This would lead to the demonising of local high schools with low academic performances (George

9/9/09). If this were the case for the sole school in an area, the effect would be to undermine the future employment prospects of its graduates and also reduce the appeal of the town, particularly to professionals (Fardell 8/9/09; George 9/9/09; Piccoli 24/06/09). In towns with two high schools, an inevitable hierarchy would be created, with negative consequences for graduates from the lower-ranked school (Goward 25/5/09; Povest 24/6/09), potentially including a reduction of choice through eventual school closure (Humphries 9/9/09). A similar effect was cautioned for schools with a high number of students for whom English was a second language (Roberts 24/6/09) or who were poorer academic performers (Piper 24/06/08). These critiques can be understood as problematising what a lack of school choice means in a marketised system. That is, the critique was not simply against parental school choice, but the against the imposition of a market mechanisms – specifically here, a publicly reported school performance record – where there was not a competitive market.

The second point of dissent was in relation to how school quality should be evaluated by parents and policy makers. This critique was also dominated by speakers representing regional and remote areas. These speakers emphasised the importance of valuing non-academic elements in schools, including sports, the arts and public speaking (Provest 24/06/09) and emotional support from teachers (Baird 24/6/09). Speakers emphasised affective forms of school evaluation and downplayed the valuation of academic performance, critiquing its narrowness, or describing how this could be misused by schools to game the system and select in the most desirable students (Moyes 24/6/09). This position was thus that the overt evaluation of academic performance was problematic if parents did not have a choice of schools, rather than an argument against parental school choice itself.

The final point of dissent was that parental school choice should not be the key mechanism guaranteeing a child getting a good education. Rather this was the role of government (Ripoll 21/10/09) and that education was a collective rather than individual right (Milne 2/12/08). That is, that marketisation undesirably narrowed the focus of the field of education to the point where its raison d'etre was solely on maximising the achievement of (fortunate) individuals, rather than a broader view of what education could be.

4.3.3 summary: 'legitimate choice'

Brought together, this examination of 'legitimate choice' on parental school choice from the federal and state parliamentary debates demonstrates that despite the frequently oppositional

rhetoric, speakers held common positions on parental school choice in the school field. These were that:

- parents had a right to choose a school for their children;
- this choice should be rational and considered;
- the choice should be based on the best interests of the individual child or the child's family; and
- governments had a central role facilitating school choice by funding government and private secondary schools.

These can all be regarded as reflecting the doxa of the field as to both the validity of parental school choice and the ideal process of parental school choice. Further, the argument that parents had a 'right to choose' was a common discourse used by speakers from both major parties. This borrowing of the terminology of the legal and human rights field, imbued the claims for parental school choice with a positive *axiological charging* (Maton 2014, p.162), increasing the weight of the claim. This had the effect of establishing parental school choice as an inviolable feature of the Australian school field. Further, by associating the continued funding of government and private schools with parental school choice, this solidifies the maintenance of three institutional school sectors – government, Catholic and independent – within the Australian school field.

In highlighting the importance of rationality and focussing on the best educational interests of the individual child, speakers emphasised the significance of a measured approach towards schooling. That is, they reinforced within these debates the centrality of academic achievement as a key measure of value in schooling. While this association was undoubtably given prominence in that the subject of the bills was the introduction of a national testing regime, the language of rationality and measurement were also directly associated with parental choice processes. That is, there was a correct way in which parents were to choose schools, and this was to be centred on academic performance.

That speakers supported parental school choice by clustering this with other values associated with the political stance of their side of politics is illustrative both of the influence other fields and key discourses that exerted influence in the school field. Labor speakers associated school choice with equity and quality in education, emphasising the importance of aligning the educational interests of parents, schools and government. Coalition speakers clustered parental

school choice with notions of educational performance and standards of behaviour, and the development of religious and moral values, social, and sporting distinction. These differences are indicative that within the overall 'legitimate choice' position on parental school choice there existed differing orientations as to the legitimate basis of school choice and how it should be ideally enacted by parents. These are described and analysed below to establish what possibilities and bases of legitimacy are inscribed within the 'legitimate choice' position. These provide two versions of the 'ideal parent' as recognised and understood in the field of political power. This affords a benchmark for comparison of parents' actions in actuality as will be described in chapters 5 and 6, including which parents and parental actions are recognised and supported in the field of political power. Each orientation is elaborated below with attention paid to the key outcomes speakers emphasised children should get from schooling and the key attributes parents should look for in schooling.

4.3.4 The Labor 'academic orientation'

The Labor values of educational equality, equity, childrens' and parents' rights, and the value of government schooling that supported school choice were brought together through a singular focus on measuring and reporting academic achievement. With this emphasis, speakers sought to align the interests of parents, schools and government:

> The requirements in this bill focus strongly on five features that are central to good reporting to parents, the community and government: national testing, national reports on the outcomes of schooling, provision of individual school information, reports to parents and publication of information by schools (Gillard, Labor, 21/10/08, Fed HOR)

In this way, a national testing and reporting regime – the key subject of the federal and state bills which Labor sponsored – enabled the projects of school and the state to be brought together with parental school choice, through the common goal of supporting student achievement (Firth 18/6/08). In this framing, the key role of government was to ensure parents were provided with accurate and independent academic performance data (Carr 2/12/08; Champion 20/10/08; Jackson 16/10/08; Hale 20/10/08) to enable them to be 'informed consumers of educational services' (Bidgood 16/10/08). This was advanced despite significant disquiet from both sides of politics about the negative possibilities should league tables of schools be generated from this data (Bresseling 08/09/09; Hancock 08/09/09; Hopwood 26/06/09; Kaye 24/06/08; Paluzzano 24/06/09; Parker 26/06/09; Piccoli 25/06/09, 2/09/09; Rhiannon 24/06/09) – and promises from government that protections put in place meant this would not occur (Firth 18/06/09, 25/06/09; Sharpe 26/06/09).

For this to be effective however, speakers emphasised it was essential parents chose schools on an informed basis. Speakers outlined how the right information would support parents '…in making the right choices about their schooling' (Jackson 16/10/2008) with the implication parents would consider all available schools – government, Catholic or independent – and would assesses these according to academic performance. This was also presented as a value of schooling, as well as a right:

> It is very important that the right values are being assessed and that the performance of the schools is measured not just the natural talents of the children who are attending those schools (Neal, Labor, 16/10/08, NSW LA)

That is, published school performance information was necessary to ensure parents choose a school on this basis, rather than any other quality, such as a schools' demographics. This point was underlined by speakers who provided examples of parents who made school selections for the 'wrong reasons', with the 'wrong information', such as:

> …rumour or innuendo from what they heard from Mrs Jones down the street, when she said so-and-so school was not good but another was. It is not based on real information or analysis of what that school is achieving for the children in the classroom every day (Firth, Labor, 24/6/09, NSW LA).

That is, the wrong basis on which to make school choice decisions is social information. Significantly this meant a key aspect of the project that became NAPLAN testing and the MySchool website was driven by a desire to shape the decision-making of parents, to align this with the key value in the school field itself, academic performance. This was linked to a greater project of ensuring government schools were understood in the public imagination as being as of high quality as private schools (Bishop 2/12/08). This was underlined with some speakers charging that the Coalition only recognised private schools as being quality schools (Burke 20/10/08; Firth 25/6/08; Sullivan 21/10/08).

With a consistent emphasis on valuing, measurement and publication of academic results, Labor speakers can thus be described as having an 'academic orientation'. This orientation references historic discourses of the field, particularly in relation to sorting children according to academic ability. The measure of academic performance also clusters the Labor values of equity and quality with academic achievement by placing all three major school sectors on a level plane as being equally comparable, rather than recognising any historic social positioning that may privilege independent schools. An ideal parent in this scenario thus focusses their

school selections on which school is most likely to facilitate their child's academic performance rather than being influenced by school reputation or social demographics.

4.3.5 Coalition 'values and standards orientation'

Coalition speakers, especially those from the federal Liberal Party, emphasised 'values', 'standards' and religious beliefs as key factors parents used in school selection. For these speakers, school choice centred around parents choosing a school compatible with the needs and talents of their child that also accorded with their own religious and moral values. For instance, one speaker outlined how these elements represented choice for parents:

> because they represent an option for alternative education systems such as the Montessori school or education in a Christian context. There is nothing bad about this; there is nothing elite about this. This is all about parents making choices for their children, choices that the parents see as being in the child's best interests (Simpkins, Coalition, 16/10/2008, Fed HOR).

This illustrates several key features of this stance including a focus on wider values than educational performance. Religious and moral values were a key focus, and school choice largely meant private school choice, which was often presented as superior option. This set of stances can thus be described as a 'values and standards orientation'.

In addition to values, speakers with a values orientation highlighted schools that provided a wider range of educational opportunities for children beyond academic achievement as desirable. This included schools with alternate pedagogies, and school sports, arts and social-development programs (Irons 20/10/08; Provest 24/06/08; Pyne 16/10/08). Unlike Labor speakers, Coalition speakers only infrequently referenced notions of school or student academic achievement or academic performance. Rather, support for school choice was more directly associated with support for educational innovation and individualised learning (Billson 20/10/08), a stance also captured by notions of 'educational standards' (Baldwin 16/10/08; Briggs 20/10/09; Humphries 2/12/08).

The most frequently idealised parents for speakers with a values orientation were those described as choosing schools based on religious and moral values. For these speakers, school choice was almost invariably private school choice (Briggs 20/10/08; Hawke 20/10/08; Marino 16/10/08). Speakers pressed the importance of continued funding to the private school sector as a long-standing position of the centre-right parties (Baldwin 16/10/08; Marino 16/10/08).

While some speakers sought to defend this stance against charges of elitism (Simpkins 16/10/2008) others explicitly embraced this, contrasting private schools with those in the 'overcrowded, underfunded state system' (Stuart 20/10/08). Private-school choosing parents were often presented as particularly virtuous, sacrificing their earnings in order to pay private school fees to ensure a superior education for their children (Billson 20/10/08; Fifield 2/12/08; Hasse 20/10/08; Hawke 20/10/08; Johnson 16/10/08). Allied with this was a presumption that parents willing to financially self-sacrifice were also more committed to their children's education, evidenced in an apparently-greater involvement in their children's schooling overall (Billson 20/10/08; Hasse 20/10/08). That is, a position of supporting private schools – which not all families could afford to pay for – was transformed from an elitist position to a virtuous one through parents' self-sacrifice.

For speakers with a 'values and standards orientation' the idealised parental school selection process involved a longer list of consideration than for those advocating from the position of an 'academic orientation'. One speaker, a retired school principal, offered an exhaustive catalogue including speaking with principal and staff, seeking information on school extracurricular activities and sports events, classroom mood, focus, student engagement, academic rigour and academic ranking, school facilities, school behavioural standards, uniform and student demeanor and published school philosophy (Humphries 8/09/2009). That is, speakers with this orientation subsume the focus on academic achievement and extend it, emphasizing also the importance of students' dispositional and 'all round' development and schools' relationships with parents.

In contrast to 'academic orientation' speakers who sought to bring together parents, government and schools with a common focus situated in the school field, Coalition 'values and standards orientation' speakers focused both within the school field and on fields beyond this. The focus in the school field was narrowed primarily towards the private school sub-field, supported by the assumption that parents willing to pay for schooling were more committed to it. The focus to external fields was demonstrated by the emphasis of some speakers on selecting schools that could develop attributes – capitals – which carried a value particularly to the field of work, with some also referencing values related to the field of religion. These foci continue the historic trajectory outlined in 4.3.3 of the association between private schools with the development of social elite who would then go into the professions and business leadership.

4.3.6 Analysis school choice in contemporary political discourse

These parliamentary discourses on parental school choice have enabled the description and analysis of the key external relations the field of political power exerts on the field of school education. Specifically, it details how the doxa of the field (Bourdieu 1977) – captured in the construction of the consensus constellation – seeks to maintain the current status quo of the field. That is, parental school choice is presented as a 'parental right', legitimate and unquestionable. It is maintained through the funding of both government and non-government schools. Parents are brought into and bound to school field through a presumed rational pursuit of academic performance, the key value at stake in the field and what can be recognised as the dominant capital of the field. Parental school choice is presented as ahistorical, that is, no consideration beyond a rational assessment of the immediate interests of the child or family is presented. The dissension had the effect of reinforcing the underlying value of having a functioning market in the field.

Within this 'space of possibles' (Bourdieu 1991) two differing illios, or belief sets about what is important in parent choices (Bourdieu 1996b) are identified and described: a Labor 'academic orientation', and a Coalition 'values and standards orientation'. The stances taken by speakers from each political orientation described and sought to direct relations within the field principally between families and schools. Speakers with an academic orientation sought to bring parents, government and schools together with a common objective of the pursuit of academic performance through the object of measuring performance testing. Socially-acquired information was explicitly dismissed as having any legitimacy in informing parental school choice and speakers also sought to diminish the impact of parents assessment of other children attending the school, instead directing the focus toward measured performance. Speakers with a values orientation subsumed the value of academic performance in their championing of 'values and standards', and instead emphasised the importance of supporting private education, education that also included the development of social attributes valued in the field of work. The role for parents in the field was largely oriented toward private school parents, who were reified for demonstrating a commitment to education through paying for it.

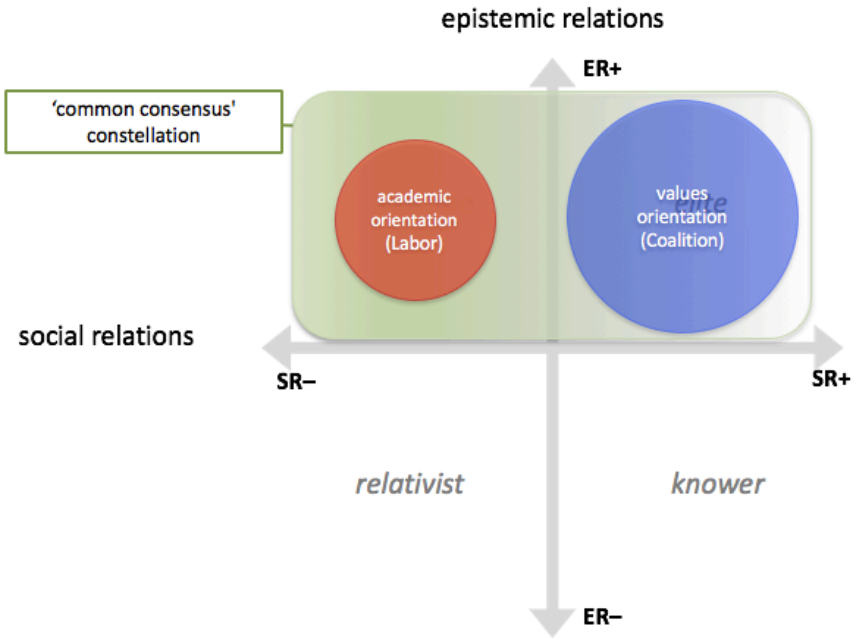
In order to understand how these stances construct an 'ideal chooser' and principles that underlie this, specialisation codes from Legitimation Code Theory are used. As outlined in Ch 3, Research Design, Specialization (Maton 2014) enables the operative principles underlying the social field of school education to be described and analysed. This is specifically according

to two key relations: *epistemic relations* (ER), which are about or orientated towards something; and *social relations* (SR), which are about or oriented towards someone. In this study epistemic relations are recognised as relating to academic achievement; social relations are recognised as social or personal development.

As illustrated in Figure 4.3, the 'legitimate choice' position in the parliamentary discourses placed an emphasis on rationality and academic performance. This represents stronger epistemic relations (ER+). Thus the 'ideal chooser' constellation, representing the legitimate positions for parental school choice, may include both codes that demonstrate stronger epistemic relations (ER+): the *knowledge codes* (ER+, SR–) and the *élite codes* (ER+, SR+). These codes emphasise the importance of what is known. The stances of speakers, as clustered into two orientations, occupy differing positions which can also be described. Speakers demonstrating a Labor 'academic orientation' consistently emphasised academic performance as the sole basis for parental school choice and explicitly downplayed social knowledges or peer selection. This can be recognised as demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+). Conversely, their downplaying of social knowledges – 'schoolyard gossip' – demonstrates weaker social relations (SR–). This demonstrate a *knowledge code* (ER+, SR–). Labor thus positioned 'ideal parents' as pursuing the same capital as that measured by schools and government, including in their school choice processes, with the aim of strengthening academic performance in the school field overall. In Figure 4.3 the region highlighted for this group of speakers is relatively small as their emphasised target is specific and they did not offer a range of differing instances or suggested strengths for this.

Speakers with a Coalition 'values and standards orientation' were supportive of educational standards, which also subsumes academic performance. Thus speakers taking this stance are also recognised as demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+). In addition, with their emphasis on the development of values, extracurricular activities, student demeanour and cultural dispositions, and their championing of parents 'commitment to education' speakers with this orientation can also be recognised as demonstrating stronger social relations (SR+). Thus the 'ideal families' who are described demonstrate an *élite code* ER+, SR–). That is, they place an emphasis on academic performance and the development of social knowledges and dispositions. The region highlighted for this group of speakers is wider as across the discourses they emphasised a greater range of social knowledges and kinds of standards.

Figure 4.2 **Legitimate choice in parliamentary school choice discourses**



4.4 CONCLUSION

In bringing together the analysis of elements that have positioned parental school choice in the school field historically, with parental school choice as it is idealised in current political discourse, this chapter has attempted to outline the key institutions, discourses and social and economic forces that have shaped what is most at stake in the contemporary school field. The insights gained from the historical inquiry reveal the key constituting elements of the field including which can be described as doxic. This includes: how intrinsic and long standing school choice itself is, having been a feature of the field since British settlement; that choice has long involved three sectors – government, Catholic system and independent; that government financial support is necessary to support all three sectors and how this is largely accepted by government, in public discourse and the institutional memory of each sector; that discourses of academic ability, aptitude, merit and equality have both historic and continuing influence particularly on parents, as the ongoing support for the notion of selective schooling demonstrates; how testing regimes to sort students have also been long-standing; and finally how it has been the movement of middle-class parents particularly that has prompted changes in schooling forms.

When attention is turned to the parental school choice logics in the contemporary school field through the analysis of parliamentary speeches, the revealed consensus on what constitutes 'legitimate choice' reinforces much of the status quo positions developed in the historical field

of government, the denominational churches and business and professional world. This included a bipartisan acceptance of the maintenance of three schooling sectors, including through government subsidy to denominational and independent schooling. The emphasis on academic performance as the key basis for choice reinforces its status as the key capital of the school field. The emphasis on parents as rational choosers, both echoes principles of marketisation outlined in both the Literature Review and the historic construction of the field outlined in the first part of this chapter. That is, the ideal parent can be described as one who largely conforms to the conceptualisations described in rational choice theory (Gintis 2016; de Jonge 2012), choosing according to the provisions of the market in front of them, absent any reference to their own past schooling or work experience, local knowledge, local area networks. That is, parental choice is presented as a-historical, with parents described as if they are tabula rasa confronting a field of infinite choice in which the only constraints are immediate ones – money, access, religious affiliation or educational preference.

Analysis using the specialisation codes has enabled a description that answers the first research question that asked how parental school choice was constituted in the school field, including how it was described and regulated. Through the construction and analysis of an 'ideal chooser' constellation, analysed using the specialisation codes as being positioned in the knowledge codes and the élite codes, parental school choice as idealised in political discourse can be understood as focussed on the acquisition of academic achievement, which is also the key stake (or capital) in the school field. Within this constellation the two orientations represent two differing 'illusios' of the field: a Labor 'academic orientation' and a Coalition 'values and standards orientation'. In the 'academic orientation' only academic achievement is emphasised and social knowledges downplayed, which demonstrates a knowledge code (ER+, SR–). In the 'values and standards orientation' there is a dual emphasis on both academic standards and social values including the development of dispositions towards social leadership, which demonstrates an élite code (ER+, SR+). These differences suggest different value-sets in the school field as to why an emphasis on academic achievement in school selection is important. Finally, having outlined the idealised choice process the question then arises as to how do parents' understand and portray their own practices in the field? This is addressed in the following three chapters, beginning with a description of what parents describe wanting for their children from schooling in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS: PART II
What parents want

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes and analyses what parents in 'Doongara', the case study area, described in interviews as wanting their children to gain from high school. This is used to constitute four different parent groups. This relates to the second research question and addresses the conceptual gaps revealed in the Literature Review from previous school choice studies, particularly in relation to the use of pre-existing social categories which had led to either reductionist explanations or lengthy empirical descriptions in an attempt to address parents' past experience, current circumstances and local field conditions. This is addressed in this chapter by creating four parent groupings based on the key *capitals* parents are pursuing from high schooling for their children, with descriptions for each of their relative stance towards academic capital or the development of social dispositional capitals. These are grouped as four parental dispositions: a 'credentialist disposition'; a 'social disposition'; an 'all-rounder disposition' and a 'consolidator disposition'. Parental dispositions are then conceptualised as specialization codes by identifying the relative strength or weakness of their epistemic relations and social relations. These provide the organizing principles that underlie parents' dispositions. This analysis enables a comparative analysis of each parent grouping with each other.

5.2 RECOGNISING AND DESCRIBING PARENTAL DISPOSITIONS

All parents interviewed for this study had a story as to how and why they chose the high school they did for their child. That is, all parents presented their choice as a considered and deliberate process. Further, from these stories, common themes and discourses emerged. All parents also expressed their 'commitment to education' and an engagement with notions of academic achievement. Other common elements included the importance of social development, having the opportunity to develop special skills and talents, their individual child's needs, their child's happiness and how well their child would 'fit' in a school environment. This list has much in common with the previous school choice literature outlined in Chapter 2.

However, two key issues emerged. First, while parents emphasised the importance of education and their own commitment to this, their descriptions and recounted actions suggested they had different understandings as to what this meant in practice and very differing capacities to act to achieve it. Second, while parents espoused positive or negative opinions about factors such as academic achievement, their actions didn't always correspond with their claims. For instance, some parents emphasised academic achievement and overtly pursued actions to secure it, others disavowed its importance but undertook similar actions in its pursuit, still others described it as important but did not describe undertaking actions to advance its acquisition. Thus, while parent's stated factors for choice may superficially have seemed to have much in common, the meanings of these, the basis on which factors were prioritised and the actions taken by parents to achieve these varied considerably.

To make sense of this, parents' practices are described and grouped according to what they said they wanted their children to achieve from schooling. This is recognised as the key capital or capitals they wanted their children to achieve. These capitals, including as contextualised by the parents, are then described and analysed using Specialization from Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). This enables the principles underlying these capitals to be described and coded according their relative strength or orientation towards *epistemic relations* (ER+), in this study, academic achievement; and *social relations* (SR+), in this study dispositional development. Parent groups are thus described according to their *specialization codes.* This enables parents' relative positions in the school field to be described and illustrated.

5.3 PARENTS WITH CREDENTIALIST DISPOSITIONS

This first group of parents had a singular clear aim from high school for their children – academic achievement. This was informed by parents' long term aspirations for their children to go on to university in order to enter a professional career. Parents in this grouping took a position that their children needed to achieve the highest marks possible from school to enable this. This trajectory was based on parents own experience of success in school, study in higher education, entry into the professional workplace, including their transnational mobility. Parents in this grouping are thus described as having a 'credentialist disposition'. Five families, all married couples, constituted this grouping. Interviews were conducted with three families as couples and two with mothers only (full details in Appendix J). These parents are described below, with an emphasis on their relative stance towards the importance of academic achievement and/or social and cultural development from schooling

5:3:1 Parents with credentialist dispositions on academic achievement

For parents in this grouping what mattered in and from a school education was completely clear. It was academic achievement and this could be understood directly as their child's performance in school:

> Children's education is ultimate priority and also we parents talk about each child's performance, how is your daughter doing, how is your son doing, how much he scored in the test? – those sort of things. (Meera)[1]

That is, for parents with this disposition, academic achievement was the chief – and mostly exclusive – capital to be pursued from schooling. This is notable because, as is described in Chapter 4, academic achievement is the dominant capital of the school field. What distinguished this group of parents is they were alone among parent groupings in exclusively pursuing this from schooling. Indeed, high school selection was often expressed by these parents as directly related to achieving as high a higher school certificate (HSC) score as possible.

Academic achievement was important for parents in this grouping as their chief aim from high schooling was for their children to gain sufficient marks to study in higher education, which was then to lead into a professional career:

> The aim is always university and then they must have a good profession. That is why India is not coming in Olympics. So they are not participating in sports or…cultural activities. (Aashi)

That is, further study in higher education was the unambiguous target, with high school only one part of a longer continuum of education that was to lead to the attainment of higher education credentials and a professional career. Hence the description of parents in this grouping as having a 'credentialist disposition'.

As the previous quote illustrates, these parents frequently situated themselves both in terms of class and culture. Specifically, most self-identified as middle class, and with the majority originating from India, specifically as from the Indian middle-classes:

> The thing, in Indian culture, the children when they're going to school, we are thinking of they having to be the top in the class. Always, we are pushing, pushing them. As

[1] All parent's names, children's names, principal names and names of schools have been anonymised

> much as we have to pay, it doesn't matter. We want them to study in higher education. That is our culture…Medium families. Even if they are not studying well, we will send for tuition. It is the one thing, the Indian culture. (Sadar)

That is, this drive for academic achievement was situated in parents own experience of success based on this. All parents in this grouping were educated to a tertiary level, the majority in university (Appendix J). As one simply put it, 'for a middle-class family, it [schooling] is the only asset that we have'. However, while parents described their aims and educational practices (which are more fully explored in Chapter 6) as Indian practices, some also described recognising similar practices in other cultural groups, particularly Chinese parents. It is therefore important to note that while in this study having a 'credentialist disposition' was observed in families originating from the Indian middle classes, such a disposition was by no means exclusive to them.

This prioritising of academic achievement and educational credentials was directly grounded in credentialist parents' experience of the role higher qualifications had played in their own success and mobility. All parents were first generation migrants and most had worked in other countries prior to settling in Australia. All were tertiary education qualified and worked in industries including information technology, accounting and finance, medicine and allied health. Their work and mobility, including migration to Australia, had been enabled by the credentials they had gained and the field they worked in – 'because of that education, today we are here and we are able to move anywhere in the world', noted one. Specifically, the migratory visas parents had secured for Australia had been gained under a basic points system that favoured tertiary credentials and professional experience in particular key industries. They intended their children to follow this same educational pathway, placing the importance of qualifications into this global context. For instance, Prabal, who worked in finance outlined:

> Definitely they'll get a degree. With my background, I see the world market is ever changing, we don't know what discipline or market will grow – she says now finance, or they can go to engineering, or medicine, but whatever it takes to build a strong or comfortable person, let them choose. It's good that they're strong in mathematics or science so they have options. (Prabal)

As this quote exemplifies, for credentialists it wasn't just academic achievement that was important for further study, but the disciplinary area also, particularly as it applied to desirable future career paths. The disciplines parents emphasised offered trans-national transportability, independent of local context, and were perceived to offer a degree of security. Maths

performance was a particular focus – 'When you develop maths, you develop your main thinking…everything is on maths. The world is running on maths,' described one parent. Parents also framed subject mastery as related to professional success. For instance, Sadar emphasised it was both the discipline and mastery of a discipline that mattered:

> Number one is IT. Because it's more and more of a networked world. And it's going to be more so. So, they have to be fluent in Information Technology, or whatever is there at that point of time. It continuously upgrades...and domain expert. That is what I always tell them, that being a generalist does not help…whatever you are doing you be the good at it, be best at that field.

Thus, as well as developing specialised knowledge in information technology, Sadar pushed his children to also strive for mastery – particularly in relation to one's peers – in their chosen field. That is, credentialists measured academic achievement both in relation to subject knowledge and as relative performance in relation to peers. For the majority the latter took precedence.

Credentialists had a detailed knowledge of the relative merits of studying in Australia, including how Australia's schools and universities ranked internationally with some presenting this as an additional motivation for their own migration. That is, migration was not only about parents' work prospects, but about their children's future study opportunities:

> Sadar: One thing I tell you that by OECD country's standard, Australia's standard [for schools] is around 23. But when I compare to Indian studies…I came through that system I know that. And students, from the, Australian students are lagging, very much lagging of India…
>
> Aashi: But the thing, the university is the best one...
>
> Sadar: Is the best one in Australia.

With study in Australian universities being the ultimate goal, credentialist parents saw value in their children pursuing their school studies here. This was despite most presenting Australian school itself as not being as rigorous as in India. This differential in academic performance standards was a source of both frustration and relief, which is explored further in chapter 6. Here is it worth noting some regarded this difference as providing their children with a competitive edge:

> I think that in India there is competition, also. Children, they want to study, study. They want [to be] in the top class. But here, I don't think they have any ambition to, you know. (Sadar)

That is, relative to the competition they would face in India, Sadar's children didn't have to work quite as hard to achieve academic success in competition with their peers, an additional bonus.

Credentialist parents presented academic success as the key aim of schooling. They measured school success according to academic performance, and frequently referenced school test results as well as HSC performance goals in their interviews. The validity of these as measured of academic achievement were largely unquestioned and reflected parents' own prior school experiences and successful educational and professional trajectories.

5.3.2 Parents with credentialist dispositions on social and cultural achievement

Compared to all other parent groups credentialists were relatively less likely to raise notions of dispositional development, such as social skills, or the development of cultural attributes such as arts or sports performance as elements important to gain from schooling. However, this did not mean these were unimportant to them per se. Most credentialists had their child enrolled in at least one additional out-of-school activity, which varied from philosophical or moral instruction, traditional dance, sports including soccer and cricket and music studies, though their degree of participation in these activities overall was less than some other groupings. Rather, they differed in relation to the emphasis they placed on these activities from school and in the level of proficiency they expected. That is, credentialists overall did not emphasise acculturating activities as something to be gained in or from school. Nor, broadly, did they place an emphasis on developing proficiency or excellence in their pursuit. Rather, it was enough that children participated. This was in direct contrast to their emphasis on academic performance, which was to be to the highest level possible. Most also made clear that participation in these additional activities was contingent on continuing good performance in school work.

Some expressed an understanding that their having an exclusive focus on academic achievement was different to many other parents and this did carry costs, as well as opportunities. For instance, Prabal actively canvassed his work colleagues' perspectives on school education, describing:

> What I found here is, in preference to education, they give more emphasis on practicality of the person being groomed. Whereas in Indian and Asian education, its more of an analytical one—numerical abilities, analytic, those directions.

That is, for Prabal a singular focus on academic achievement meant his children would perform relatively better in schooling, but that this likely came at a social or 'practical' cost.

Some parents also described appreciating the broader social and sporting study program in Australia schools:

> I don't want somebody or my daughters or my kids to be excellent in only education. It's basically an all-round development. Education is important I know, but sports and others, and facilities if they are available in the same premises that matters. (Sachit)

That is, while parents with a credentialist disposition may not have actively sought schools that encouraged the 'well-rounded' education pursued by some other parent groups, they were positive that such conditions were instituted within the school system overall. Others presented the singular focus on academic achievement as a more fraught calculation. There was an awareness that academic achievement did not always translate directly into the desired professional career paths, that there was a risk of burnout, or narrowed options later. However, as the story of Aashi and Sadar that is related in the next chapter 6.2.6, the greater risk was that the family migration program itself would fail.

5.3.2 Summary, capitals sought by parents with credentialist dispositions

The key outcome credentialists sought from high school for their children was academic performance, which can be recognised as institutional cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 2006). In pursuing academic achievement, particularly as it can be measured in competitive testing, they can also be described as exclusively pursuing the dominant capital of the school field. The primary reason parents in this grouping favoured the acquisition of academic capital to the exclusion of other forms of capital flowed from their own educational experiences prior to migration and the opportunities that resulted from this. Credentialists dispositions had been shaped from the educational systems in their country of origin (India for four families, Sri Lanka for one) where academic achievement was the singular strategic asset available to families like themselves. This academic capital—achieved in specific disciplinary areas—had proved an enduring and transportable asset that had enabled both migration out and career progression within a variety of countries. With few exceptions, they intended their children to follow this same path. While they appreciated social and cultural knowledges, these offered less certain pathways to the goal of entry into higher education. Thus, a singular focus on academic performance was the most durable capital they could focus on for their children.

5.4 PARENTS WITH SOCIAL DISPOSITIONS

Parents in this grouping also had a singular focus about what they wanted in and from high schooling for their children: to be happy. Within this deceptively simple notion was an associated range of meanings that included an existential wish for 'happiness' and the development of a range of social attributes including confidence in oneself, a sense of vocational direction and the social skills necessary for the workplace. This is exemplified by Lorraine:

> I want them to be confident with themselves and to be able to get to where they want to be in life sort of thing. So you know, looking at different ways of getting there…You know you just want happy, healthy kids and doing what they wanna do.

For parents with this disposition, success in education meant finishing school with the necessary confidence, sense of direction and what they often termed "social skills" or "life skills" to successfully embark on a career. Thus, this grouping of parents is described as having a 'social disposition'. These elements are elaborated below in 5.4.2. First however, their attitude towards academic achievement, the key capital of the school field, is described and illustrated. This establishes a depiction of their relative position in the school field. This grouping comprises children from seven families. All the interviews in this grouping were conducted with mothers only, six of whom were living as sole-parent families (full details in Appendix J).

5.4.1 Parents with social dispositions on academic achievement

While parents with a social disposition foregrounded their responses with descriptions of the social attributes they wanted their children to develop in and from schooling, underlying these were concerns about academic achievement and the attainment of academic credentials. This is illustrated by Clara, who is discussing son Ahmed:

> He's always joking saying 'I'll leave school in year 10' and his dad he left school in year 11. He didn't finish his studies. I said to him 'I don't care – you finish school, go to uni, do everything'. I don't want him to leave school. I want him to do something like he's good at…and he's only in year 7, he doesn't know what he wants to do.

That is, for Clara in common with other parents with a social disposition, an unambiguous aim from schooling was both the successful completion of high school to year 12 and a willingness to undertake further study after that – academic aims.

However, while this desired academic outcome was clear, compared to parents in other groupings, parents with a social disposition often seemed puzzled as to the actual mechanics of this. For instance, despite describing eldest daughter Harriet's diligence in high school and her academic ambitions to study at university, Faith described herself as unsure if this would be sufficient to enable her daughter to achieve these ambitions:

> … we have some family friends, their daughters did not make the score. We've been talking about it, we said maybe when it gets closer to year 11 and year 12, if you're not getting top marks in your results, maybe we need to work getting tutors…Because two of our family friend's daughters they didn't get to uni, they didn't make that score what they wanted to do. And one was in Lachlan Macquarie [High] and one was in Lemington [High] and they were dedicated students. I don't understand.

These hesitations as to how academic success was achieved was common from socially-disposed parents. This was despite their recounting involvement with home study tasks such as reminding their children to do their homework or study for tests. In their narratives, these tasks were presented as necessary 'educational work' to be done, but not then connected to stories of academic success. That is, while the mechanics of study could be described, how this would convert into academic achievement – particularly in relation to targeted outcomes from the HSC – was unclear.

Indeed, rather than a narrative of academic success to draw upon, such as credentialists were able to, socially-disposed parents narratives revolved around the avoidance of failure. As was exemplified in the earlier quote from Clara, a majority of fathers from this grouping did not finish high school (see Appendix J). This factor set them apart from all other groupings in this study. Mothers in this grouping commonly attributed this failure to finish to a lack of confidence on the father's part. For instance, Lorraine conveyed a deep frustration that her children's father had been unable to realise his potential:

> … he is so, so clever. He was too clever and mucked up and only did one month in year '11. It frustrates me to the max because he doesn't have any self-confidence. It wasn't just schooling. There was a lot of home issues as well. But I think he doesn't have the self-confidence to—...he could do anything he wanted to.

As this illustrates however, a failure to complete high school was not presented as a failure of the school or schooling, but rather as a personal failure of confidence. Academic non-achievement was thus attributed to non-academic factors which specifically related to the sense of self.

In another instance, Assi, a mother of five, was alert to specific and differing danger points for early leaving for her sons and daughter. For her sons it was the temptation to leave early without something to go to – 'My son, he was gonna drop out. He was gonna go to TAFE, do plumbing. He didn't get into his course. So I said, "Look, I'm not having you at home being a bludger. You don't have a job, so what shall we do?" He goes, "I'll go back to school."' For her daughters, it was the temptation to marry early, as Assi herself had done at 18:

> You know? I wish I followed what I wanted to do. I go, "Don't have regrets in life." I go, "Because marriage, believe me, it will come. But if you let go of that dream and then you think to yourself years down the track, 'What have I done with my life? I've done nothing…so that's why I'm going back to TAFE. And encouraging my kids, "Okay, look how old I am. I'm pushing forward. Don't wait 'til you get to my age to push forward. Push now, this is the time.

That is, their own family histories had taught socially-disposed parents that academic achievement could not be separated from a person's sense of who they were. Most worried that their children needed to develop a 'sense of direction' in order to finish school and enter a career path. For their children to achieve academically they must first develop a sufficient sense of self, a confidence in themselves and a sense of vocation that would provide them with sufficient motivation, confidence and direction to then academically achieve.

Likewise, measures of academic achievement, particularly those that focussed on test scores, were at times presented as counterproductive to a successful school outcomes. For instance Rhonda, a parent from a Filipino background, rejected a focus on academic achievement despite describing this as common practice in her community:

> I know so many parents that if they can't get in a high mark there is punishment. Almost all of my friends before here. My daughter's friend before, my eldest daughter, it's like that…And you can see that even some of my friends it's like that. It's like it's so heavy inside of the kids.

That is, for Rhonda, the emotional price children had to pay as they pursued high academic achievement was not worth the potential compromise to their sense of confidence and sense of themselves. This was born out by her personal experience of schooling in the Philippines:

> It's very, very different here because here, they don't announce your grades, your score in exam. You will not be embarrassed. There, they announce who is the highest, who is the lowest. You will be embarrassed.

This academic shaming culture was something Rhonda was determind her children would avoid. This was reflective of socially-disposed parents overall, who commonly downplayed measures of academic achievement, particularly test scores. Some downplayed this even if their children were performing well. In more than one interview a child's achievements as recognised by the school – for instance, school captaincy, or selection for gifted and talented programs – were not mentioned until near the end of the interview, and were then offered almost inadvertently, as if this had not formed any part of their key narrative.

Socially-disposed parents did not lack academic ambition for their children. Indeed, compared to their own educational attainments they were more ambitious. Of the seven mothers, five had achieved qualification post schooling, two at bachelor degree level, though only one had achieved this qualification immediately post schooling. Rather their own educational trajectories had been interrupted by factors including early marriage, migration, child-bearing, illness or the economic necessity of immediate entry into the workforce. Three of the mothers had recently completed vocational study and each recounted how important it had been to them that their children had seen the positive example of them studying. They were keen that their children not experience these educational delays. However, relative to other parent groups, they were most likely to question the value of pursing university compared to vocational studies:

> There is a lot more pressure now to go to uni, and it's just the kind of the norm now. It doesn't guarantee you a job though, even if you get an honours degree. It still doesn't guarantee you that someone's going to ring you up and say, "Look, we really need you next week, and here's $200,000 to go with it." (Sophie)

That is, socially-disposed parents downplayed university entry as a key measure of success, even as they described some of their children as aiming for this. But rather than this being a downplaying of academic achievement completely, this aim was downplayed relative to the more immediate aim of successful school completion. Furthermore, as will be described below, this itself was preceded by the need to develop social skilled and attributes in high school as a *precondition* for academic achievement.

5.4.2 Parents with social dispositions on social and cultural achievement

For parents with a social disposition, the key aim from schooling was that their children be happy in school.

> …what did I get out of my high school? I think to feel confident that you're in the right school. Happy where you are as a student...if he's growing as a person and learning a lot of things that fascinates him...with the high school I want them to at least have some kind of direction where they want to go. (Faith)

That is, this happiness was not only related to a sense of existential happiness, but was also connected to notions of a sense of belonging in school and a sense of self, including of vocation and future direction.

Developing this sense of self was described by parents in this grouping as being fundamental to their children's success in school and in the workforce after, including providing the motivation for further study. The importance of this was underlined by negative, cautionary narratives on children who did leave school without having developed such qualities:

> you got lots of 18-year-olds leaving…they don't know where they're going. Like they've left school, but they're at home. A lot of them don't wanna do uni. They're waiting for a job to come through. It doesn't come through, it's like a block, a gap. And that's where I feel like trouble starts to build in when there's that gap, and boredom. (Assi)

For these parents, to avoid this 'failure to launch' and the associated adolescent troubles that followed it was thus crucial their children develop an understanding of what they wanted to do with their lives by the time they left school.

Related to this was a set of qualities parents often termed 'social skills' or 'life skills'. These were connected with skills in the social mores of the workplace. For instance, Lorraine emphasised how crucial it was her children developed the right way to dress and the right way to act:

> It's okay to be independent but in society, we do have society rules and yes, you do have to turn up to work at a particular time of day. You can't just wander in when you want...The issue of uniform. Everybody does conform to that. Even though at work you may not have a uniform or such, you still have to make sure that like, you're not hangin' out all over, that you're appropriately dressed...there's all those life skills that happen at school that's, what I expect school to contribute to.

That is, the correct way to dress, rules like showing up on time and rules for how to behave towards co-workers and supervisors, were learned in school through conformity to the rules there.

The ability to 'fit in' was also seen as a necessary proficiencies working with diverse groups, and the ability to confidently negotiate multicultural social networks was presented as an important skill in itself. For instance Sophie, championing her children's schools multicultural playground noted:

> …no matter where you end up in life, you're going to come across people who come into your life or across your path who are from all around the world, and to be able interact, and to have a healthy level of social skills.

As is explored further in Chapter 6, parents with a social disposition saw a virtue in selecting schools that enabled their children to develop the ability to work with diverse social groups with skills in cultural negotiation presented as necessary in contemporary workplaces.

Ultimately, for socially-disposed parents the greatest measure of success in and from school came down to their children developing a robust sense of themselves, a sense of the social world around them and thus the confidence to act within it:

> I think, really at the end of the day, there is a certain amount in the curriculum that you have to do, but at the same time, you've got to be reasonably happy with it too. So, I think just finding that balance between happy home life and trying to infuse that into school and just general everyday functioning is important for life skills. (Sophie)

That is, proficiency in social relations was far more reliable an indicator of future success, and had a far more certain payoff in terms of future happiness, than simple measures of academic achievement.

5.4.3 Summary, capitals sought by parents with social dispositions

Parents with a social disposition consistently favoured the development of the self, social confidence, a sense of direction and social skills over the overt pursuit of academic achievement in schooling. In this way parents with a social disposition can be described as seeking a form of embodied cultural capital – one that related to knowledge of oneself and of others – for their children. This was grounded in parents own experiences of schooling and the workforce, and particularly their own experiences of disrupted education and the failure to complete an education in many of their children's fathers. In addition, the mother's own dispositions, shaped by their own experience in the workforce had reinforced to them the importance of social skills in behaviour and negotiation for future success. These parents downplayed academic performance, particularly academic performance in tests. However, this was not a lack of ambition for their children. Rather, a focus on their child's emotional

wellbeing in school was presented as a precondition for academic achievement and sense of vocation later. Additionally, parents with a social disposition described a 'lack of knowing' as to the mechanisms of academic achievement.

5.5 PARENTS WITH ALL-ROUNDER DISPOSITIONS

The key characteristic of parents in this grouping was the importance they placed on their children achieving multiple attributes and achievements from schooling. Central to this was the importance of their child becoming 'well-rounded' as a person, which included the development of a collection of social attributes and achievements from schooling as well as sufficient academic success to ensure a progression to professional life:

> My husband, he's in financial services…he says he gets brilliant children, kids coming through for interviews who have no idea of problem solving in the real world because they, they rote learn, they're all tutored. They know perfectly how to answer a textbook question, but if you put it to them in a real-life example, they have no idea what to do. So my hope for my children is through their school education, I don't care if they don't get As – those type of things come later – I want them to excel to the best of their ability, but to also learn other stuff, to be a good person in society, to be kind, to be generous, and you know, how to look after yourself, how to respect yourself. (Katrina)

That is, for parents in this grouping future success is the result of social attributes and academic achievement. In this regard, parents in this grouping are described as having an 'all-rounder' disposition. While these parents downplayed academic performance – 'I don't care if they don't get As' – they assumed their children would attain this, which is elaborated below.

In addition, some parents in this grouping in their school choices also pursued opportunities for their child to develop excellence or some form of distinction in a cultural, sporting or academic pursuit. In this sense parents in this grouping could be described as pursuing 'excellence' and 'all-roundedness'. Four families constitute this grouping in this study. While each of these represented a traditional nuclear family, three of the interviews were conducted with the mother, and one with both of the couple (full details in Appendix J).

5.5.1 Parents with all-rounder dispositions on academic achievement

When all-rounder parents discussed academic achievement, it was almost always in the context of their child's future professional workplace. Thus, its value rested in how this could be exchanged beyond the school field to enable entry to a professional pathway. This accorded

with parents' accounts of their own life-course trajectories which were largely related as a series of successful study and work endeavors that led ever onward to professional opportunities. For instance, Katrina narrated her career as a progressive series of employment and education events:

> I went through school, started working, did all my uni studies part-time. so straight after high school I joined [major bank] and joined their financial services division and did a commerce degree part-time and I majored in technology and then I went on and did a Masters in technology. I did alright. I was there about 6 years and then I moved to another [multinational] financial company. I went offshore with them and lived overseas with them and lived in Tokyo, did a lot of travelling. Also, when I was overseas I started another degree and did a Grad Dip in Education…

All parents in this grouping – four married couples – had tertiary qualifications and most were or had been positioned in professional leadership roles in their chosen careers. Thus, parents were acutely aware of how academic achievement had enabled their own life trajectories. They presumed the same for their children. For instance, when Carolyn outlined likely post-school trajectories for son Anthony, she noted 'I'll be disappointed if our son doesn't go to university, because since he was 10 he had a life plan; he wanted to be a scientist. So he's got his little thing mapped out'.

However when directly asked about academic success, all-rounder parents frequently downplayed the importance of it. For instance, Katrina dismissed a focus on the HSC as a mark of student success:

> Kids get their HSC and life moves on and whether you've got 50 or 100 in your HSC, in 10 years time, it doesn't really matter. What matters is who you've become.

This can't be taken at face value however. While all-rounder parents discounted directly measuring academic success with HSC marks this was largely as they assumed their children would be able to go to university. For example, Carolyn too apparently dismissed a focus on academic achievement when selecting a school for daughter Clarinda:

> I'm less concerned about the academic thing...I want her to be a responsible citizen. I want her to have good values. I want her to be part of the community...I imagine she'll go to university that she's not a silly child. She's perfectly capable.

That is, Carolyn discounted a direct focus on academic performance because she simply expected her daughter would progress on to university. Academic achievement in and of itself was dismissed, not because it was unimportant, but because it was inevitable. Only reluctantly

would some parents allow that university may not necessarily to be the outcome of their child's schooling. Even here parents canvassed a range of alternate pathway strategies that could enable their children to achieve this.

However, from their professional positions all-rounder parents were aware of the limitations of qualifications alone. For instance, Carolyn, a business analyst in a large commercial company, noted that in her workplace, it was not the credential that made the greatest difference:

> I've got some people on my team who in no way you would say would be qualified for the roles that they're doing but they've got the right attitude and so you can get the outcomes that you need done because of the attitude, not because of their tip top skills…

That is, while qualifications were necessary to a point, what mattered more in the professional world were the social attributes that enabled you to craft your achievements into a broader narrative of success. This focus on capital that converts in the workplace – and thus the limits of academic achievement relative to other social attributes – provides a perspective on why parents with an 'all-rounder disposition' were apparently so dismissive of academic credential as an end in itself. Academic capital, while useful and necessary, was to be valued for the capital it could convert to in other fields, not only the field of school education. Nor was it the only capital they expected the school field to be able to develop in their children.

5.5.2 Parents with all-rounder dispositions on social and cultural achievement

Of greatest concern for parents with an all-rounder disposition was their children acquire from schooling a series of social dispositions and attributes related to developing their sense of self. For instance, Martin and Donna, a publisher and lawyer respectively, when describing their aspirations for their daughter's returned repeatedly to the notion that their children needed to be equipped with a well-developed knowledge of themselves to enable them to make their own choices about their futures:

> Martin: Our aspirations for the girls is that they will be able to make their own way in the world…
>
> Donna: To be flexible, a good thinker, a critical thinker. Find out what you're good at and do it…I want them to feel they can do whatever it is they want to do. I don't want them to feel limited…I think the biggest determiner is actually going to be them, we will give them as much support as we can and the school and everything, but ultimately it had to be them that drives it.

This development of a self-deterministic and independent self was a consistent discourse from all-rounder parents.

Just as parents in this grouping pivoted to the professional world to appraise the relative value of academic achievement, they also evaluated social attributes in relation of their usefulness in a future professional workplace. For instance, Katrina described the value of social networking:

> I think you'll find later in your career that its more about how you get along with people, networking rather than you're absolutely wonderful executer of anything you do. Really that's not it at the end of the day. It's some of those leadership and social skills [that] are already quite important…it's developing that confidence to be able to communicate.

That is, all-rounder parents favoured the development of social skills that could later be enacted in the workplace. However, unlike the socially-conformist skills emphasised by socially-disposed parents, the focus for all-rounders was on professional leadership.

Much as parents in this grouping championed notions of 'well-rounded' development, parents focused on schooling opportunities that would enable their child to develop and display unique distinctions. This was often complementary to extra-curricular activities that were also focused, at least in part, on the same outcomes. For example, Rosalie had been fostering daughter Cassandra's musical skills from before she started school, and she emphasised the importance of her maintaining this into her high school years:

> music gives her something to say 'well I can't do whatever, I can do this' and music will always be that…I think every child needs something that they're really, really good at, so they can say 'I can do this, it doesn't matter I can't do that' so they still have their self-esteem.

That is, an important outcome from school education for all-rounder parents was not only participation across a range of activities, but also the possibility of developing something that enabled them to stand out from the crowd.

All-rounder parents were well aware the pressure to perform that came with competitive achievement. Thus, they also emphasised the importance of their child developing of a resilient disposition. For instance, for Carolyn, happiness from schooling was not a key pursuit:

> I don't want them to be happy. Because I think that's just a completely false construct…I just think that's a pointless kind of wish for your children. But I want my children to be able to cope in whatever situation. I want them to cope when they're happy and enjoy

when they're happy. I want them to actually to be able to deal with it when things go wrong.

That is, parents in this grouping planned for their children to be able to choose from a wide range of potential futures in a professional environment. They perceived the future fields of high school, higher education and the professional workplace to be highly competitive. All would require resilience to successfully negotiate, so the earlier this could be developed in the school field, the better.

5.5.3 Summary, capitals sought by parents with all-rounder dispositions

Parents with an all-rounder disposition overtly pursued the development of a range of attributes and opportunities for achievement in the high school environment for their children. These particularly related to the development of social dispositions, networks and opportunities for distinction. The pursuit of these was grounded in parents' own experience of the value of them in the professional workplace. While all-rounder parents downplayed the importance of a focus on academic performance in their interviews, their future planning for their children's professional careers indicated rather than this being dismissed, it was assumed. Parents with an all-rounder disposition can thus be recognised as pursuing a range of institutional and embodied capitals from the school field (Bourdieu 1984, 2006).

5.6 PARENTS WITH CONSOLIDATOR DISPOSITIONS

This final grouping of parents shares common characteristics with each of the other parent groupings, especially all-rounders. Like all-rounder parents, parents in this grouping pursed academic achievement and social qualities for their children in school, and, like all-rounders they particularly highlighted the development of social dispositions, while apparently downplaying the importance and work of academic achievement. For instance, when Alex and Christine described what they wanted their children to achieve from high schooling, they emphasised the social skills they wanted them to develop:

> Alex:…to me personally to be successful in life you have to know how to talk to people, you have to know how to hold an audience, you have to know how to enjoy holding an audience, you have to know how to engage people, to do that, you'll find to do that you can't be a dummy anyway…
>
> Christine: you have to have a certain level of education…
>
> Alex: And intelligence, if you can do that, you're on the right path, straight away

> Christine: You can get dux of your school but if you can't hold a conversation with someone, it means nothing.

That is, parents in this grouping were aiming for their children to achieve sufficiently well academically to go on to further study, preferably at university, but they also emphasised the development of a range of social skills that would transfer to the professional workplace, similarly to all-rounder parents. They also emphasised a sense of vocational direction, in a similar manner to socially-disposition parents; and self-discipline in a similar manner to credentialists.

However, parents in this grouping took a more deliberate approach to the development of each of these forms of capitals as, based on their personal experience, these were particularly hard earned, with many being the first in their family to attend a post-secondary qualification. The effort this had entailed, and subsequent professional opportunities this had afforded them, were central to their narratives:

> I was the first in my family to get a degree and he (husband) was the first person in his family to get a degree and that was on the back of just hard work, you know, off our own back…neither of us had that opportunity for our families to put us through university, we had to do it all ourselves and we did. So we didn't have our parents as role models because they weren't professionals… (Katherine)

Parents expressed an overt desire that their children be able to consolidate – build upon – their hard-won knowledges of educational and social achievement. They placed this acquisition in the context of their own parents struggle and sacrifice which was often part of a story of post-war migration. This narrative of inter-generational opportunity and advancement was one they strongly promoted to their own children. This was woven into their focus on what was to be achieved in and from school and they placed particular importance on ensuring the values of home and school aligned. This meant their school choices were concentrated almost exclusively on Catholic systemic schools. This is further elaborated in chapter 6. Eleven families are included in this grouping. The majority were in traditional nuclear family arrangements, though one had divorced and re-partnered and one was living as a sole parent. Three were interviewed as couples, seven the mother only and one the father only (full details in Appendix J).

5.6.1 Parents with consolidator dispositions on academic achievement

Parents with a consolidator disposition were in little doubt as to the importance academic achievement had been for their own careers. The majority of parents in this grouping had undertaken tertiary study: consolidator mothers were more likely than mothers overall to have undertaken post-secondary education and consolidator fathers all had post-secondary qualifications, with four completing or had completed masters-level studies in accounts or management. They were keen to pass this on their children, most emphasising that further study after high school was an expectation. For instance, Natasha described how, despite her elder daughter's uncertainty about what she wanted to do post high school, family conversations centered on her future study options:

> I want her academically to achieve all the levels she has to. Like I talk to her now and she wants to go to university. She doesn't really know what she wants to do, but we talk about it…I want her to get a good enough result to do what she wants to do.

However, much as consolidators were aware of the role further study had played in their own career progression they also worried their children would not reap the same benefits they had. Katherine for instance, worried that her daughters didn't realise the value of getting a degree as 'everyone goes to university now'. That is, compared to their generation, a greater proportion of students finished high school and went on to further study, diminishing this as a form of distinction.

Consolidators also considered their children faced greater academic competition than they had, particularly from children whose families emphasised academic performance alone from schooling. Many were particularly critical of NAPLAN testing and the intense coaching practice of some other families preparing for this and the selective schools test. These were critiqued as creating unnecessary stress, testing the wrong things, and being an invalid measure of a child's actual abilities. For instance, Christine was particularly dismissive the intense preparation some families undertook:

> Parents round here coach the kids for NAPLAN so it's not, you know, we know friends who are saying 'why is my kid getting a C on their report when they've got an excellent mark on their science test or their NAPLAN?' And you say 'it's because you coached them for their science tests. It's not their everyday classwork.'

That is, consolidators distinguished between knowledge learned in the classroom and academic test scores, considering the latter to represent test preparation rather than ability. Consolidators thus distinguished between 'naturally' academically talented children and children who were

'coached'. This is also explored further in the next chapter (6.4.4) in their attitudes towards selective schooling.

Consolidators responded to this in range of ways. Some downplayed higher education at university, pointing to the trades as offering a good career pathway. This was particularly true if one parent had a trade background. For instance, Marlene pointed to her husbands' successful roofing business:

> I think they don't have to go to the university. Because Duncan [works in the] trades... they're lucky in that sort of area at the moment, in employment. They need more of them. Look, as long as they're happy and you could train them in a good wage, and they work hard, that's all you can hope for.

Others emphasised there were multiple pathways to further study, several noting educational progression post-school could involve vocational study that was then converted to academic study:

> If they go to university that's fantastic. But if they don't, that's okay too. You don't have to go to university to achieve what you want to achieve. There's always 100 different way to achieve what you want to achieve. (Christine)

However, despite their professed ambivalence, parents with a consolidator disposition gave nuanced descriptions of their child's academic strengths, weaknesses and overall academic performance. They monitored their children's homework and if they perceived their child falling behind their peers they sought additional assistance. Thus, consolidators can be described as valuing academic achievement, so long as it was linked to future success particularly in the workplace. Further, despite apparently downplaying performance of tests such as NAPLAN, they worked to ensure their children would be able to follow the same pathways to further study that they had.

5.6.2 Parents with consolidator dispositions on social and cultural achievement

Consolidators placed their greatest emphasis on the social skills and attributes their children could develop from schooling. These included skills in relation to 'knowing themselves' and developing a sense of direction, knowing how to act – particularly in the adult world, having an internalised set of values, having confidence and having a sense of yourself as belonging in both the world of school and the professional world. All of these were presented as crucial to their children's post-school futures. Some of these were the same concerns parents with a social

disposition described, particularly the need to develop a career direction to progress through school and then on to a coherent career path:

> You hear stories of younger 20-year-olds or that, flitting from job to job and things like that, which is fine. But you've got to have some sort of commitment and well, not discipline. Well, I suppose at least to an employer, and dressing the part for an interview and anything like that. That's all part of the job. (Marlene)

That is, they worried children who didn't have a good sense of themselves and their interests would 'fail to launch' successfully into the adult world and workplace.

Where consolidators differed from socially-disposed parents was the level of future social performance they aimed for, with consolidators anticipating their children acting in a wide range of roles in the workforce including leadership positions. For instance, Mario, a senior manager within a large multi-national company, described how in his daughters' professional futures the skills they needed to develop related to learning to lead:

> I'm a graduate of Macquarie University - Bachelor of Economics, accounting major. I'm a Chartered Accountant. Did my years and all these sort of thing. I'm technically competent and all these sort of things. But you know what? I might give it back just 5% of what I learnt. It's all about people. People management…—'how to win and influence people'. I did that course. Cost a lot of money back then. But couldn't have done anything better in my life. And that's my biggest success in my career. So I want my girls to have those social skills, to have those leadership skills.

That is, for consolidators, social skills included knowing how to act and how to project confidence in leadership situations, which were positioned as more important than formal qualifications.

Some of these social expectations were also gendered, with some but not all consolidators expressing specific social skills and social considerations for their daughters. Consolidators didn't so much downplay ambitions for their daughters but expected them to learn specific dispositions – 'how to be a proper lady,' said one father. Others described attempting to influence their daughter's career ambitions towards professions that could accommodate family responsibilities. For instance, Jackie described trying to steer daughter away from plans to join the police force 'think of your children…if you really go into the police force, your children want you to be home to make sure my mum is safe.' That is, while consolidators could be described as being equally professionally ambitious their daughters as for their sons, in

addition some expected school to prepare their daughters only for the workforce, but also for more social and caring roles related to the family.

Consolidators considered a positive experience in high school was important for the development of all these skills. For instance, while Patrick and wife Deanna spent a considerable part of the interview discussing the importance of school values alignment, educational cultures and educational supports, they placed the greatest emphasis on the emotional experience they wanted their children to experience in high school:

> If they have fun learning then, and they're happy, and they look back on their six years of higher education as 'it was fun, it was great. Then, I think they'll make the right decision in terms of where they want to go on later on in life, choosing a career and stuff like that. (Patrick)

Indeed, over and again consolidators emphasised the importance of their child 'loving the high school experience'. In this regard consolidators drew a similar equation to parents with a social disposition: that happiness in school was necessary to post-school success. However, rather than this being focused towards school completion, as were parents with a social disposition, consolidators associated this with the development of social dispositions. In addition, consolidators placed a considerable emphasis on the development of social friendships from schooling. This connection – which can also be recognised as a form of social capital – is discussed in detail in chapter 6.

Consolidators also placed particular emphasis on their children developing 'character strengths' in schooling as well as the home. These included a strong work ethic, self-discipline and resilience. This was presented as necessary for their child's success beyond school in both post-secondary study and the workplace. For some this also related to the religious atmosphere of the school. While most parents in the group described themselves as Catholic, their emphasis was more related to a 'values oriented' that often had cultural elements, rather than direct religious knowledge and instruction. For instance, Jackie noted that when she was considering high schools for her three daughters, it was not so much religious instruction she wanted to pass on, but the rituals of belief:

> I like my kids to grow up in the faith sector, to know God, to know Jesus, to pray, to have that time of reflection, and know that there's someone high just watching over your life.

Consolidators looked to schooling to reinforce the same sense of belief and values they observed in the home. For some parents this was overtly religious, for others it was associated with involvement in charitable endeavors or awareness raising. Overall, this selection of dispositional qualities to be developed in school included: social skills of knowing yourself, a positive orientation to educational environments, self-confidence, knowing how to act (including in gendered ways) and the development 'character strengths'. It was this group of knowledges that had been particularly hard won for consolidators. They wanted their children to acquire these with greater ease than they had.

5.6.3 Summary, capitals sought by parents with consolidator dispositions

Parents with a consolidator disposition sought both academic achievement and the development of social skills and attributes. They had a nuanced and pragmatic approach to the purpose of these skills. Academic skills were crucial to parents' own career development and family intergenerational trajectory for the many who were the first in their families to achieve higher qualifications. However, parents also worried that the advancements these skills had brought them was now threatened both by the ubiquity of progress to further study and increased competition from performance-oriented families. Socially, they emphasised the importance of their child developing a strong sense of direction, of social confidence and leadership, self-discipline and values. As such they can be recognised as seeking institutionalised and embodied capitals from schooling for their children (Bourdieu 1984, 2006).

5.7 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: MAKING SENSE OF PARENTS GROUPS

The description and analysis in this chapter directly relates to research question 2 'what do parents seek from high schooling for their children?' In response to this question parents offered a wide array of notions including 'good marks' or more specifically a 'high HSC score', different social skills, leadership skills, confidence, distinction, values or simply happiness. To make sense of these, responses were first organised into two categories: responses relating to outcomes or assets associated with academic achievement; and responses relating to outcomes or assets related to personal attributes. These were each recognized as different forms of cultural capital. Academic achievement relates to institutional cultural capital. The social skills related to dispositions and cultural distinctions are forms of embodied capital (Bourdieu 1986 p.241). Social connections with others are recognized as social networks (Bourdieu 1998). This distinction provided the means to group parents in relation to what they sought from school,

with four parent groups described: parents with a credentialist disposition, who only pursued institutional cultural capital; parents with a social disposition who only pursued embodied cultural capital; parents with an all-rounder disposition who, despite verbally downplaying it, pursued both institutional cultural capital and embodied cultural capital; and consolidators, who also pursued both institutional cultural capital and embodied cultural capital and also emphasised the importance of social networks. However, this raised the question as to how to understand these groups in relation each other?

As outlined in Chapter 3, methodology, Bourdieu insisted in his schemata of field, capital and habitus that any set of practices by an actor or group of actors is only understandable in relation to the positions of other actors, institutions and outside fields of influence in the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). In this study in order to describe parents' positions in the field it was necessary first to describe the parental groupings in relation to each other. To address this I turned to the specialization codes from legitimation code theory. As outlined in the chapter 3 these encompass Bourdieu's field theory and extend it, including by creating a set of relations to reveal the underlying principles in a field, and, specifically in this instance, the relative values of particular variables to each other (Maton 2018, p.254). This was undertaken as a 3 step process. First the notion of academic achievement for each parent group was described and analysed for its strength or weakness of epistemic relations (ER). This is the degree to which it is the specialized possession of a knowledge of skill that is valued as the basis of achievement. Second, each group was analysed for the strength or weakness of social relations (SR). This is the degree to which the basis of achievement relates to the disposition of actor in the field (Maton 2014). Third, these two relations were brought together to generate specialization codes visualized on a specialization plane. This enables the positions of the groups to be brought together and visualised on a topographical map of the field that illustrates the what basis of achievement from schooling that each group favours.

5.7.1 Epistemic relations and value of institutional cultural capitals parent groups

The importance of academic achievement to parents' high school choices varied considerably between parent groups. Furthermore, in some parent groups there was a difference between their verbalised attitude towards academic achievement, which was at times downplayed, and their future aspirations for their child, which included their child's study at university which was consistent with an expectation of high academic performance. To make sense of this, the notion of 'academic achievement' was analysed for each group by coding it according to the

relative strength of epistemic relations. Consistent with Bourdieu's emphasis on analyzing relational practice (Bourdieu 1986, p.101) greater emphasis was placed on analyzing parents anticipated academic outcomes for the child, more than their stated 'values' in relation to academic performance. These were heuristically illustrated on an epistemic plane (figure 5.1). An enactment scale is described with stronger epistemic relations recognized as study in higher education at university and weaker epistemic relations recognized as early school leaving. Between these relative values (from weaker to stronger) were finishing high school, entering vocational studies, entering university studies, entering university studies at a prestige university and/or in a prestige disciplinary field. The midpoint for this scale is entry to university. The epistemic relations for each group are described as follows:

Credentialists parents aspired to the highest level of academic performance and were very clear about the key outcome they sought from schooling was as high an HSC score as possible. This was in order for their children to be able to enter university studies at a desirable university in a desirable or prestigious discipline area. This is recognised as stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and the strongest relative position of these.

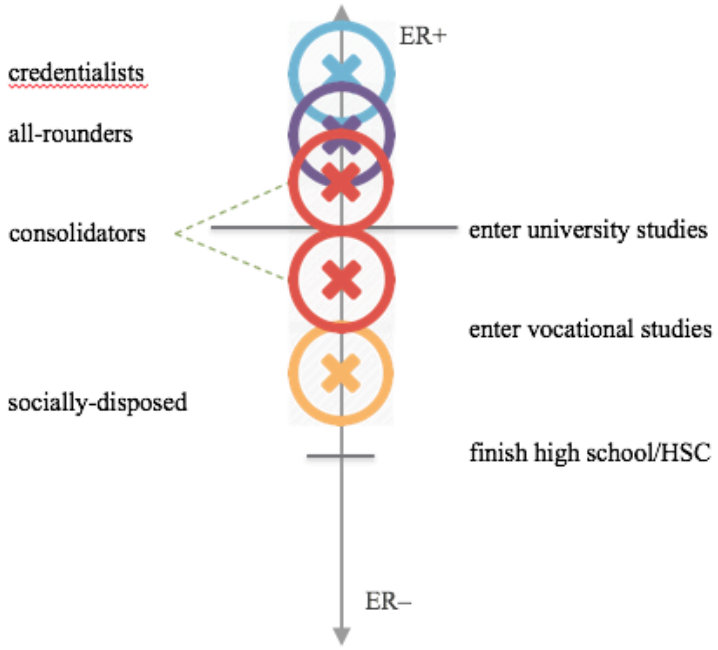
Parents with a social disposition described themselves as very committed to education and aspired for their children to achieve academically more highly they had, with most father in particular early school leavers. However, the target they were most clear about was finishing high school. Beyond this they offered less concrete targets beyond further study, with vocational study cited at least as frequently or more frequently than higher education. Therefore, on the enactment scale described above, this is recognised as weaker epistemic relations (ER–).

All-Rounders often verbally downplayed the importance of academic achievement, particularly as having little value in the professional workforce. However, their assumption was that their children would go on to university study. This is recognized as stronger epistemic relations (ER+).

Consolidators like all-rounders at times downplayed the importance of academic achievement. However, they too most frequently raised university study as their preferred high school outcome for their children, though some within this grouping also canvassed vocational study

in the trades and alternate pathways to higher education. The former of these is recognized as stronger epistemic relations (ER+), the second, weaker epistemic relations (ER–).

Figure 5.1 **Relative strength of epistemic relations**



Illustrated in this way, the relative value in the school field of parents' descriptions of academic achievement thus becomes clear. This addresses one issue that arose from the data, that of understanding the relative value parents placed on academic achievement in relation to each other. That is, the relative value of parents' positions on this in the school field. This creating of a stable enactment scale overcomes the issue of parents having differing understandings of what academic achievement entails, enabling the responses of different parents to be compared in practice.

This also addresses methodological and substantive issues in relation to understanding the relative importance of academic achievement that arose in Chapter 2, Literature Review. That is, factor-based research studies on the importance of academic achievement were not able to be compared as their results were inconsistent (Coldron & Boulton 1991; Elacqua 2005; Kleitz et al. 2000; McCarthy 2016) and that there was a difference between parents self-reported results and observed actions (Bagley, Woods & Glatter 1996; Bell 2009; Scheinder & Buckley 2002). Reported in this way the relative difference in both meanings of academic achievement

and outcomes parents intend communicated are overcome. This is because epistemic relations enable the reporting of this as a principle.

5.7.2 Social relations and the relative value embodied cultural capitals to parent groups

Parents offered an array of differing descriptions of dispositions, cultural attributes and distinctions they wanted their children to develop from school which were grouped as cultural capitals. To make sense of these in the field, a similar process as that outlined above for analysing academic achievement according to epistemic relations, undertaken for analysing cultural capitals using social relations from the specialization codes.

To provide a relational enactment scale, stronger social relations was recognized as the degree to which parents emphasised social leadership and/or forms of cultural distinction, weaker social relations were recognized as no emphasis on personal or dispositional development in school. Between these relative values (from weaker to stronger) were no personal or dispositional development, participation in school social development activities, development of social skills for conforming in the workplace, social awareness and self-confidence, and leadership in the workplace or excellence in a cultural field. The midpoint to this scale understood to be social skills for conforming in the workplace. The social relations for each group were described as follows:

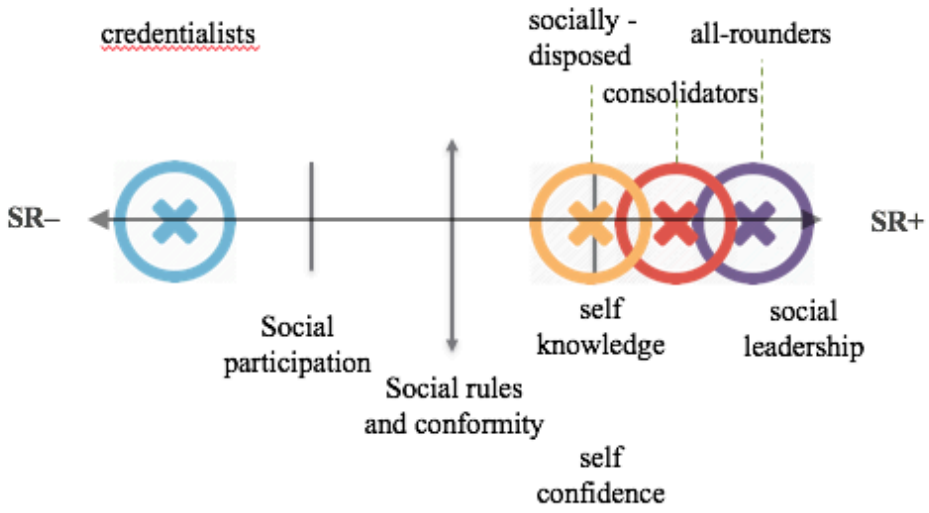
Credentialists largely did not pursue the development of any social skills or dispositions in and from school. However, some did recognize a value in participation in school social development activities. This is described as weaker social relations (SR–).

Parents with a social disposition placed a significant emphasis on their children developing self confidence in schooling, a sense of direction and the social skills necessary to conform in the workplace. This is described as stronger social relations (SR+).

All-rounders placed a significant emphasis on their children developing the skills they needed for leadership in the workplace, confidence to choose their own direction in life and have skills or attributes that demonstrated excellence in a field. They are described as stronger social relations (SR+) and the strongest relative position of these.

Consolidators placed a significant emphasis on their child's social and moral development and emphasised the importance of them developing social confidence and self-confidence from schooling. They are described as stronger social relations (SR+).

Figure 5.2 **Relative strength of social relations**



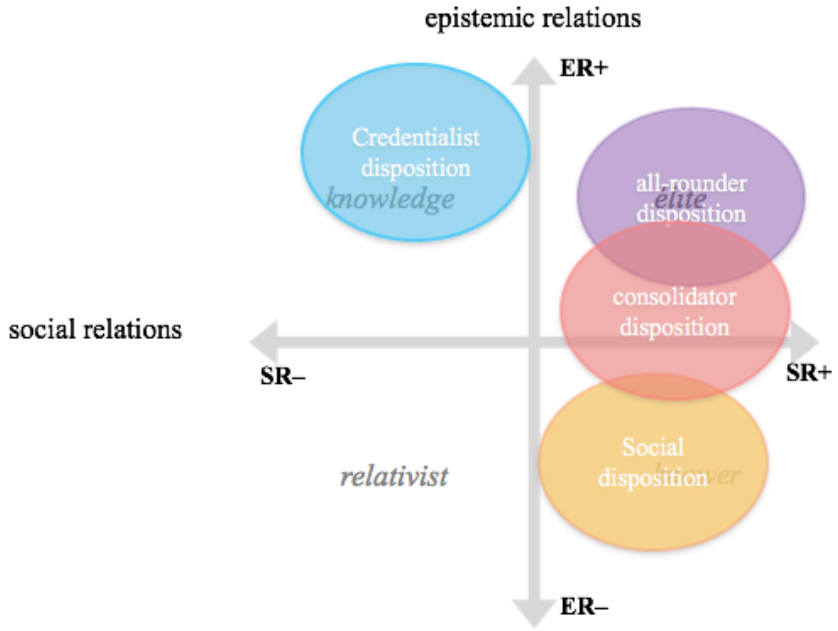
Illustrated in this way, despite their common use of social terminologies like 'social skills', the relative emphasis parents' placed on gaining dispositional qualities, social skills and cultural distinctions from high schooling becomes clear. This particularly enables a differentiation to be made between the relative position of socially-disposed parents, who ostensibly placed the greatest emphasis on their child's happiness, self-confidence and sense of direction, but also emphasised social conformity, with parents from other groups. Thus described they can be differentiated from consolidators, who appeared to also emphasise similar qualities to both socially-disposed parents and all-rounders but placed a relatively greater import on self-confidence in the workplace than socially-disposed parents. This also enables a more nuanced depiction of the differences between consolidators and all-rounders, with consolidators placing less emphasis on demonstrations of excellence and distinction than all-rounders.

5.7.3 specialization codes of parent groups

The epistemic relation and social relations for each parent grouping can be brought together to characterize the groups' legitimation code, providing a language of legitimation for the basis of achievement in the field (Maton 2014, p.29). Through this there can be a relative representation of parent positions in the field. Figure 5.3 provides an illustration of the relative

positions of parent groups in the field, based on the degree to which they prioritise academic achievement or the development of personal dispositional and cultural qualities, as are revealed in their legitimation codes.

***Figure 5.3* Four parent groups in the school field**



Parents with a credentialist disposition pursuit of only one capital, academic achievement, from the school field was a strategic practice focused on enabling their children to study in an Australian university in a desirable course. Parents' aims were based on their own workforce trajectory, where their professional advancement and recent migration had been enabled by their own higher education credentials. This focus for their school choice practices saw them be described as having a credentialist disposition. Using Specialization, their emphasis on academic performance and downplaying of dispositional development demonstrated relatively stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and demonstrated weaker social relations (SR–). They can thus be characterised as a *knowledge code*. In knowledge code practices, emphasis is placed on what you can do, as opposed to who you are (Maton 2014).

Parents with a social disposition also overtly pursued only one capital from the school field – their child's happiness and self-development. This was based on parents own family experience of both the hazards in school – including the negative effects of testing – that could lead to

early-school leaving and unrealised potential, and concerns that their child develop a strong sense of direction that would motivate them to pursue a career path and further education. These practices enabled them to be described as having a social disposition. In this emphasis, in downplaying academic achievement they demonstrated relatively weaker epistemic relations (ER–), while their emphasis on the development of social skills and social dispositions, demonstrated relatively stronger social relations (SR+). They were thus characterised as demonstrating a *knower code*. Practices with strong knower codes are characterised by placing an emphasis on who a person is, rather than what they can do (Maton 2014). Socially-disposed parents can thus be described as emphasising the development of their child's dispositions from schooling, rather than their academic performance.

Parents with an all-rounder disposition pursued multiple capitals from schooling. These included academic performance to a sufficient level to get into further study and particularly social dispositions – social confidence in a range of environments, self-determination, and social and moral values and leadership. They also placed an emphasis on their children being able to develop cultural or sporting skills in which they might demonstrate distinction and develop a sense of leadership. These attributes were based on parents own knowledge of the professional workplace and the skills that lead to advancement there. These practices can be described as demonstrating both stronger epistemic relations (ER+) – with their presumption their children will go on to university study; and stronger social relations (SR+), with their emphasis on social disposition and cultural distinction. As such all-rounder parents were characterised as demonstrating an *élite code*. Practices characterised by élite codes emphasise both what a person does and who a person is (Maton 2014). Thus, all-rounder parents can be understood to emphasise the importance of both how their child performs academically in school and the dispositions they develop there.

Parents with a consolidator disposition also pursued multiple capitals from schooling. These included academic performance that would enable progression to university or vocational education and social skills including social confidence and knowing how to act as well as character strengths and virtues. This was informed by parents own experience of the workplace, including for many the intergenerational experience of being the first-in-family to attend higher education and enter the professions. These capitals that consolidator parents pursued were described as demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+) for higher education study, and weaker epistemic relations (ER–) for vocational education; and stronger epistemic relations

(SR+), though again, they placed less emphasis on developing distinction than all-rounders. As such they are described as demonstrating an *élite code*, though in a more intermediate position on the Specialization plane. In élite codes, the practices that are emphasised relate to both what a person can do and who they are; in knower codes the practices emphasised relate to who a person is.

5.8 CONCLUSION

To answer the research question 'what do parents seek from high schooling for their children' in this chapter parents interview responses, including recounted practices, were coded, with the assets they sought for their children described as different capitals. These were identified as differing forms of cultural capital, either institutional cultural capital – most commonly marks or credentials – or embodied cultural capital – differing forms of dispositional and cultural development. Parents were then grouped according the capital forms they prioritized, with four parent groups described: credentialists, socially-disposed parents, all-rounders and consolidators.

In order to understand the relative value and meaning for these capitals to parents so that parents relative positions could be compared in the school field, they were described and coded using Specialization for the strength or weakness of the epistemic relations and social relations. This enabled parents' priorities for assets relating to 'academic achievement' to be compared, particularly the actual outcomes sought, rather than just the stated preferences, which has been problematized from previous factor-based research and revealed choice research. This revealed how relatively important academic achievement was to credentialist parents, and how, despite socially-disposed parents aspiring for their children to achieve a higher level of education than they had – the only group to aspire to more than position maintenance – compared to other parent groups, they demonstrated the relatively weakest academic position in the field. Likewise, Specialization was used to describe the strength or weakness of the social relations of the dispositional and cultural capitals. This demonstrated despite socially-disposed parents placing the highest priority on this, relative to other parent groups their aspirations were related to conformity rather than social leadership. Bringing together the epistemic relations and social relations for each group enabled their *specialization codes* to be described, revealing their relative positions in the school field. Thus credentialists were revealed as having a *knowledge code*; socially-disposed parents revealed as having a *knower code*, all-rounders as having an *elite code*; and consolidators as having either an *elite code* and/or a *knower code*. This provides

a basis to describe how parents understand the basis of achievement in the school field (Maton 2014, p.29). However, this raises the question as to how these coding orientations influence parents school selection and particularly how they seek to realise their aims in school selection. This is addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6
ANALYSIS: PART III
A good school

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter describes how parents from different groups recognise what constitutes a good high school for their child to attend and how they seek to secure its selection. This addresses the third research question of this study and engages with two research gaps identified in previous Chapters. First, it addresses the issue identified in the Literature Review (Chapter 2) as to why there is such a wide variation between studies on the significance of particular choice factors to different groups of parents, and this reflected issues of definition, gaps between aspiration and realisation or a gap between parent discourse and parent process. This raised the specific questions of what relation did choice factors have to parent objectives from education, and how did these relate to what is possible for parents in a field? Second, this responds to the question raised at the end of the previous Chapter as to how to understand the relationship between what parents sought from schooling and how they sought to realise this through school choice. To address the first, the school choice processes recounted by parents from the four parent groupings constituted in Chapter 5 – credentialists, socially-disposed parents, all-rounders and consolidators – are described and analysed. This is first undertaken with reference to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus to deduce and describe the influence of parents' past experience in school and the workplace, his conceptualisation of capital to describe the different assets different parents have available to them in the school field (Bourdieu 1984, 1986, 1993). To answer the second question, the *focus* and *basis* of parents' key choice practices are coded and analysed using Specialization (Maton 2014). This enables a comparative description and analysis to be made of how parents from different groups seek to realise their educational goals through school choice.

6.2 RECOGNISING A GOOD SCHOOL, CREDENTIALISTS

For parents with a credentialist disposition the clear aim from high schooling was for their children to achieve a high academic performance to enable them to enter into a good university, which was then to lead onto a professional career (see Chapter 5). This

reflected parents' own educational pathways, whereby academic achievement had enabled their progression to higher education, a professional career and subsequent migration. Credentialists emphasised the importance of academic performance and downplayed the importance of the development of social skills, dispositions and cultural development from schooling. They are described as pursuing the dominant capital of the field: academic capital. Employing the specialization codes (Maton 2014), this was recognised as stronger epistemic relations (ER+), with their de-emphasis on social skills, dispositions and cultural distinctions from schooling, weaker social relations (SR–). In the specialization codes credentialists' thus demonstrated a *knowledge code* (ER+, SR–): what their children academically achieved from schooling was more important than who they become.

In this section, the key high school selection practices of credentialists are outlined which include: enrolment in academically high-achieving schools; test preparation and participation in testing regimes; seeking competitive like-peers; pursuing a mutually-obligated home-school relationship; enacting home-based pedagogies including intensive homework support, additional homework and supplementary schooling, seeking to inculcate a study disposition; and seeking a safe environment. The relation of these practices to a parental habitus highly attuned to supporting academic performance, and parents' capitals in the school field are described and analysed using Bourdieu's conceptualisations of habitus (Bourdieu 1990a, 1994) and capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1998, 2006). Then, the *focus* and *basis* of the specific practices parents undertake to realise this through high school selection are coded and analysed using the specialization codes as it outlined in 3.3.4 (Maton 2014, p.31).

6.2.1 Choosing the best school for academic achievement

For parents with a credentialist disposition, the chief strategic practice in school selection was to aim to enrol their child into the 'best school'. This was understood as the school in which their child would be able to maximise their academic achievements. Credentialists worked hard to understand the education system and where academic opportunities lay within it. For instance, they described as important the relative academic ranking of schools – particularly performance in the higher school certificate (HSC) – as was available to them on specialist websites. Credentialists focused their efforts on gaining enrolment into both primary and high schools with a strong academic

track record. Three out of five sets of credentialists had moved their child in primary school because they were unhappy with the academic standards in the first. They pursued, where possible, academically selective education in public schools, or, where this was unavailable to them, schools that exhibited a strong academic track record and culture. In interviews, parents' detailed how they researched entry pathways into sought-after schools and how they positioned themselves to best ensure their child's admission to these. For instance, one family in this study bought a house, sight-unseen by the mother, in the school catchment area of a desirable public high school to ensure enrolment in it (Interview D).

The strategising for enrolment into the best high school commonly began with seeking entry into a desirable primary school. This was illustrated in the example of Bennet Park, a highly sought-after local primary school, particularly with parents originating from India and China. This school was highly regarded due to its reputation for having a high number of students that went on to gain places in academically selective high schools (over 60 per cent in the year previous to data collection). In an interview for this study, the principal recounted regularly fielding phone calls from overseas from parents enquiring, pre-migration, as to the school's precise catchment area. He also recounted seeing flyers that had been distributed in India, advising the desirability of the school, and being aware of discussions of the school on overseas-based websites.

Parents' final high school selections were made on the basis of calculating the best overall circumstances for academic achievement. For instance, one mother, Saachi, recounted applying for the four allowable selective school choices for her daughter in descending order of school HSC performance results. When her daughter was offered a place in Bakersfield High – a considerable commuting distance away – she did not question the value of sending her there and accepted the place. Other families preferred to keep their children closer to home, accepting less prestigious places (for instance, in a school-administered 'gifted and talented' stream rather than state-government guaranteed 'selective stream') if the travel time was less, reasoning this was both safer (another key concern) and also that less travel time would free up more time for doing homework.

Other choice considerations relating to academic achievement included whether the school was single sex (sometimes considered 'less distracting') and had strong regulation. This the latter was particularly emphasised if a child did not attend an academically selective school. For instance, one family preferred Catholic schooling over public schooling as they considered it to have a sounder culture of academic study and 'strong discipline' – including the authority to exclude disruptive students. Ultimately, whatever the focus – academic selectivity, geography, travel time, gender-mix, school religion, culture or discipline – the final basis of selection was the likely impact of the school on their child's academic performance.

6.2.2 Laying the groundwork with test preparation

To prepare for the competitive entry tests into selective schooling held in year 6, most credentialists had their children sit for every state-wide academic test possible throughout the primary years. In addition to the (opt-out) NAPLAN tests in years 3 and 5 of primary school, a significant focus for parents was the (optional) 'opportunity class' (OC) exams held in year 4 of primary school. OC classes, administered by the NSW Department of Education, were available only in some primary schools and were widely perceived as offering the best pathway to selective high schooling. All credentialist children in this study who were eligible for selective schooling sat for these exams.[1] The stakes were such for some families that the principal of Bennet Park described instances of parents seeking to repeat their child in year 6 if a selective place was not achieved, in order to secure a second attempt at selective schooling.

Recounting these actions, credentialists often referenced their own school experiences. For instance, Prabal and Meera described how the difference between success or failure in admission to desirable study programmes in India came down to results from final exams that were only separated by hundredths of a decile point:

> Prabal: Within India, the competition is too high, so…
>
> Meera: In their class, in their school, children they score 99.8 - children scored same level…
>
> Prabal: The third decimal after the decimal, they select the first one…

[1] Two families on business visas were precluded by government regulation from enrolment in selective schooling

Meera: So we parents, all the time after our children, study, study…

That is, credentialist parents' dispositions can be described as highly attuned to the high stakes of academic testing and the nuance of academic performance.

6.2.3 Like peers, a culture of competition and safety

Credentialists particularly sought schools populated by families like themselves – parents serious about academic achievement who would also push their child to achieve highly:

> …we parents talk about a child's performance – how is your daughter doing? How is your son doing? How much he scored in the test, those sort of things. We ask about how our children are rating, who is on the top? (Meera)

That is, credentialists sought out family peers would who would support their child's academic performance by creating a competitive learning community. Parents often characterised these desirable peers as other families from Indian backgrounds, though as outlined in Chapter 5, this meant middle-class Indian families. Chinese-background families, was sometimes described as having similar practices and were thus also depicted as desirable school peers by some.

Conversely, credentialists avoided schools where where the students were observed to be poorly behaved or were reputed to have a poor academic focus. Parents were particularly concerned about distracting classroom behaviours, disrespectful attitudes towards teachers, or peers who were unlikely to do homework or extended study. For instance, Prabal and Meera described their daughter as struggling in the first high school she attended because of the poor in-class behaviour of other students. By the start of the following school year, Prabal and Meera had successfully moved her to another local high school with a better academic track record and a principal who had a reputation for enforcing discipline and behavioural standards.

Credentialists understood their academic focus did not accord with schooling norms of many other families, and feared their child would join an undesirable peer group or become a target of bullying as a result. For instance, Uditi related the experience of a friend whose son had been a high-achieving student in primary school, but who stopped doing homework in high school, which his mother only discovered at the first parent-teacher interview:

> When she came home she enquired of the kid, and you know what the kid said? – he did the homework in the beginning of the term and there was a few kids who was not doing homework. They pulled him over at recess time and said 'why are you doing your homework? If you do it, you are in trouble'.

For credentialists, selecting for schools with similar peers was also protective, aimed at ensuring the creation of a like-minded and like-behaving community of peers whose families practiced similar academic strategies. Likewise, they avoided schools that lacked similar peers to ensure both their child's physical safety and academic performance.

6.2.4 A mutually-obligated home-school relationship

Of all the features that distinguished credentialists, it was their active approach to their child's schooling that was most remarked upon by other parents and teachers. Credentialists approached relations with schools as one of mutual obligation. By their own account and the accounts of other parents and principals, they asserted themselves in schools, placing direct pressure on teachers for additional homework, extension activities and progress reports. But, as with the emphasis on academic testing, credentialists themselves described such behaviour as the norm in their own experience of schooling. For example, Sadar described how in India teachers followed up poor exam results directly with parents, with specific instructions as to where their child was lagging behind – 'But in Australian system, I never had that. So we push the children'. Parents expressed frustration that within Australian schooling they did not have more teacher contact and more regular progress reports from schools, particularly as they sought to familiarise themselves with the workings of the school system. Indeed, some described experiencing a 'push-back' from schools to these expectations. For instance, Meera, herself teacher-trained in India explained 'My son's teacher will say, don't push him too much, he's doing perfectly well, he's doing alright. As a mother and also as a teacher I felt it was not enough.' That is, credentialists approached school education as a mutual responsibility between parent and teacher.

6.2.5 Home pedagogic practices and the creation of a study disposition

Credentialists described undertaking a considerable range of home-based educational practices with their children. These included closely supervising homework, procuring additional homework tasks and purchasing supplementary schooling from coaching

colleges. What distinguished credentialists apart from other parents was the degree to which they pursued these practices. For instance, while parents in all groups recounted overseeing children's homework, credentialists described setting aside dedicated time to be present beside their child when homework was done, providing both direct instruction and assistance. They commonly complemented this with additional homework tasks either sourced from the school or from purchased supplementary textbooks. Credentialist parents were sometimes critical of a lack of explicit instruction and the insufficient volume of practice material supplied by schools. Prabal and Meera for instance, brought in maths textbooks from India to supplement their children's homework:

> In maths, here only 4 or 5 problems to solve. It doesn't give much practice to a child. But in India, in each method they get at least 20 sums to practice…here you just learn the formula, then learn how to apply it, but they're big jumps. (Prabal)

That is, Prabal perceived that the way maths was taught in Australia was not sufficient to provide a strong foundation, visible scaffolding or sufficient repetition for his children to develop mastery. While not all credentialists were as specific in their pedagogic concerns, in their range of home-based educational strategies they can be described as having home pedagogic practices.

The most visible of these was the use of supplementary out-of-school tutoring from commercial coaching colleges. Nearly all parents in this study reported using 'coaching colleges' at some point in their child's school education, most commonly for additional test practice, to inculcate a 'study disposition' or to compensate for parents own lack of subject knowledge. In one example, a parent was interviewed outside an after-school 'Shakespeare's English' class at a coaching college, into which she had enrolled her son as he was due to study Shakespeare in school the following year and she was doubtful as to her ability to assist him with this. This also reflected a practice, noted by the Bennet Park primary school principal, of parents having their children tutored ahead in school curricular materials then asking the school to provide additional extension materials when their children demonstrated advanced knowledge of the subject. This principal also characterised some children spending their entire school holidays '8 hours a day, 5 days a week' in such institutions.

In these actions, credentialists extended educational practice beyond the school yard to the home. In enacting education as a joint enterprise between home and school with children experiencing educational instruction and practice beyond the school day into school nights, weekends and school holidays, parents with a credentialist disposition effectively extended the period of academic instruction, practice and testing their children received.

6.2.6 Downplaying social development in schooling

What credentialists did not consider when choosing a school, particularly compared to parents in other groupings, was the development of their child's social skills, knowledges and dispositions. Credentialists rarely recounted taking into account a schools' facilities or creative or sports programs in their school selections. Nor did they describe seeking information on pastoral care, or opportunities for students to develop their social skills, sense of self, sense of vocation or cultural or sporting attributes.

This did not mean that parents were uninterested in their children's development in these areas. Outside school, children from credentialist families participated in social, cultural, religious or sporting activities, albeit to a lesser extent than children in some other groupings. Rather, parents did not describe seeking out self-development, cultural or sporting opportunities in their school selections. However, some credentialists favourably appraised their inclusion in schooling. For instance, after two years observing the Australian system, Sachit noted:

> I don't want my kids to be excellent in only education. It's basically an all-round development. Education is important I know, but sports and others, and facilities if they are available in the same premises that matters.

That is, while credentialists did not seek these facilities in their school selections, they were broadly approving when they were available. Thus, an absence of parental considerations of this factor could also be attributed to their lack of familiarity with schooling that enabled such development, rather than a rejection of its value.

Finally, while all parents ultimately pursued academic achievement, not all did so with unequivocal enthusiasm. This was particularly exemplified in the reservations of one parent, Uditi who recounted resisting the pressure she felt from her own (self-identified) Indian community to put her child into supplementary coaching after school:

> There are a few friends in my group as well, they put their kids in – 'oh I heard test coaching is good so I'm going to put my son, won't you put him?' I'm going to put my daughter in'. But why can't you have one half, one hour after school with your kid and sit down with your kid and listen to what his problem is?

Despite her reservations, Uditi ultimately did enrol her son in coaching specifically for preparation for the selective high schooling exams. When he failed to gain a place, Uditi expressed frustration at a school system where competition for places was so fierce, anger the level of competition had been unclear to her and remorse for not having enrolled him in coaching sooner. That is, while drawn to more relaxed schooling and family practices, Uditi's underlying benchmarks of educational success remained strongly bound to schooling that rewarded performance in academic test regimes.

Credentialists were in a bind. Having calculated their and their children's best chances for success lay with migration to Australia – including its pathways to desirable higher education – both migration and schooling had to be made a success of. The stakes and consequences of this was illustrated in the experience of one family who had not originally intended their migration to Australia to be a permanent move. Aashi and Sadar had migrated internally within India, then to Ireland and then Australia, returning as planned to India once their eldest child was in high school. However, on this return they found he had slipped irretrievably behind the position of his Indian classmates. Sadar recounted:

> He could not score anything there. He could not get any marks. That's [what] the Australian studies are compared to. And the Indian students who are studying here, getting out of 100, in physics, they're getting around 80% and he's getting 17%. Then I thought 'this is not going to work'.

Despite paying for expensive private schooling, assessing their child's likely poor outcome, the family made the decision to return to Australia three months later. The position for credentialists was thus that migration had to be a long-term success or one's children kept apace of the position of their Indian-based peers. To ensure this they replicated strategies that had served them well in their countries of origin. With an Australian school system also governed by high stakes testing, their own experience provided them with an understanding of the mechanism of academic performance in this environment.

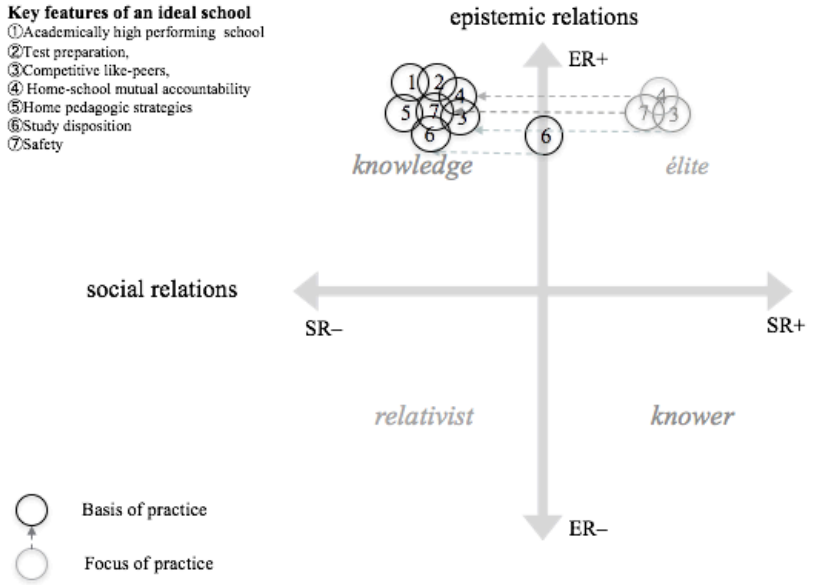
6.2.7 Analysis, parents with a credentialist disposition

By virtue of their own prior experience in high stakes testing schooling, credentialists were well equipped to understand the mechanisms of academic achievement in such an environment. Practices including seeking out high-achieving schools, creating a competitive peer environment, framing education as the mutual responsibility of teachers and parents, pushing children to achieve their academic best including through a suite of home pedagogic practices are evidence of a habitus well attuned to the 'rules of the game'. As such, their habituses can also be understood as capitals (Bourdieu 2006). In addition, in having sufficient economic assets to pay for supplementary schooling and, where necessary, Catholic systemic or independent schooling, meant credentialists can be understood to have two key capitals available to them that enabled them to target and select from a range of possible schools for their children from across the school field.

To understand the relationship between what parents sought from schooling and how they sought to realise this through school selection, practices can be further described in relation to their *focus* and their *basis*. As is outlined in 3.3.4, *focus* describes what is the particular concern or content of a practice, *basis* describes the underlying *basis* of legitimacy of a practice as it is revealed in its legitimation code (Maton 2014, p.31). Each of the key practices detailed in the subsections above are descriptions of the *focus* of practices. For most parents groups the *focus* and *basis* of practices appear to have the same strength of epistemic relations and social relations, thus the same legitimation code. However, this is not true for all and it is valuable detailing these for each group to outline what these reveal. These codings are as is illustrated in figure 6.1. *Basis* is illustrated on the chart as a numbered circle in black. For instance, credentialist parents choosing an academically performing high school to maximise marks are doing so on the *basis* this will aid academic achievement, a knowledge code (ER+, SR–) practice in this field. If the *focus* of a practice is different to its *basis*, this is illustrated as grey numbered circle, with a black numbered circle indicating its basis. For instance, in the example at ③below, parents emphasised the importance of academically competive peers. This demonstrates stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and stronger social relations (SR+), *élite codes.* This is thus represented in grey. However, the *basis* of this practice is academic achievement, so this is linked via a dotted line to black ③ a

knowledge code (ER+, SR–). This enables the *basis* of practices to be described and adduced, revealing the principles that underlie parents' practices.

Figure 6.1 **Basis of credentialists school selection practices**



For credentialists, as illustrated in figure 6.1, a majority of practices have a *basis* of academic achievement including:

①Academically high performing school;

②Test preparation;

④Home-school mutual accountability

⑤Home pedagogic strategies

All are thus coded as stronger epistemic relations, weaker social relations (ER+, SR–) locating these as knowledge codes practices.

Another set of practices appear focused towards dispositional and interpersonal development including:

③ Selection of competitive-like peers

⑥ Study disposition.

⑦ Safety

With an social and dispositional focus these are coded for both stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and stronger social relations (SR+), as is illustrated in the mapped greyscale numbers. However, parents underlying *basis* for these practices (Maton, 2014 p.31) – the underlying purpose to which they are turned – is also academic achievement. Therefore the *basis* for these practices is also stronger epistemic relations, weaker social

relations (ER+, SR–), as is illustrated in the mapped numbers in black, though a study disposition can also be understood as demonstrating relatively stronger social relations, hence its dual positions on the specialization plane. Overall credentialists are described as having a knowledge code basis for their school choice processes. This directly aligns with their key aims from a high school education.

6.3 RECOGNISING A GOOD SCHOOL, SOCIALLY-DISPOSED PARENTS

As described in Chapter five, socially-disposed parents' key academic concerns were that their child finish high school and be willing to undertake further study. This was underpinned by families' intergenerational schooling experiences, particularly the early-school leaving of most fathers in this group. Thus socially-disposed parents' academic ambitions for their children exceeded their own academic achievements. However, *relative* to parents in other groupings, parents with a social disposition placed the least emphasis on academic performance from school, as measured according to anticipated further study. Their stance therefore demonstrates relatively weaker *epistemic relations* (ER–). Conversely, the main asset parents with a social disposition wanted for their children from high school was happiness within themselves and the development of range of social qualities including self-confidence, a sense of direction and vocation, and social skills for the workplace**.** Using Specialization (Maton, 2014), these qualities were recognised as demonstrating stronger *social relations* (SR+). In specialization codes, parents with a social disposition are thus described as enacting a *knower code* (ER–, SR+). This meant their emphasis was on who their child could become in school, rather than how they performed academically.

In this section, the school selection practices of socially-disposed parents are outlined. These include: local school location; schools with social supports including family and friends attending; schools with a multicultural population; schools with explicit regulation and discipline; rejecting schools with a focus on academic performance; avoiding schools with low-aspiration families; and seeking social connection and guidance of teachers.

These practices reveal the parental habitus of parents with a social disposition is particularly attuned to the importance of social relationships, including in the school

field and they work hard to activate their social capital to support schooling outcomes for their children. Coding and analysis of these choice practices using specialization codes reveals parents' practices have a more academic basis than first appears.

6.3.1 School location: choosing local with constrained choices

Access and location were crucial to the school choices of parents with a social disposition. Foremost was the selection of a local high school, which was both deeply pragmatic and unquestioned. For instance, Rebecca, in common with most socially-disposed parents focussed on the school's location being close to home when responding to why son Riley attended the high school he did:

> It really was location more than anything… Riley's starting to come home by himself in the afternoons now, 'cause he can walk from his school as well. It's on the same street as us.

Most children from socially-disposed families attended a nearby public high school and none travelled outside the local area for schooling.

Most parents with a social disposition only considered one or two local high schools. While they described social benefits to this, parents' particular focus was on the logistics of travel to and from school and the costs. This meant the school selected was almost invariably a public one and only one socially-disposed parent canvassed an alternative – two local systemic Catholic schools. When asked whether they contemplated private schools, most parents indicated that this was not a consideration due to the cost of private school fees. With parents in this grouping more likely to be unemployed, in casual employment or working in low-paid service industries than parents in other groupings, socially-disposed parents were understood as likely having the least financial resources of all parents. This meant even public school choice was constrained. For instance, two of Faith's sons aspired to attending a local public sports-speciality high school. However, while they participated in club football programs, with only limited funds Faith did not have the money to enable them to play sport year-round, nor could she afford the additional private training that would enhance their chances of gaining a place in the school.

6.3.2 The conditions for happiness: family and friends attending

When choosing a school, parents with a social disposition were most concerned about how their children would feel in the school environment. For instance, Clara noted her first priority was her son's comfort in the school environment – 'I want him to feel comfortable with the school, happy with the school, so he would fit in.' Their children's happiness and 'fitting in' were central to parents' descriptions what they looked for in school selection.

To realise this socially-disposed parents prioritised schools where peers were already known from primary school or where family friends attended. Familiar peers were valued for both their familiarity in the school environment and the potential oversight this afforded. For instance, Faith favoured a particular local high school for son Winston because he had close relatives there already attending:

> He's got older cousins in Lemington [High] which is for me it's good that they're there, because they're able to guide, because he's very easily influenced. So I thought it would be good to have that older, you know, older relative in the place, if anything happens they call me.

Parents in this grouping were alert to the dangers of bullying and misbehaviour and frequently raised their reliance on the protective influence of known peers. This meant if an elder sibling attended a high school, their younger siblings almost invariably followed – even in the face of children's own preferences. For instance, while Assi allowed her eldest son input in choosing his high school, his three next siblings were all sent to the same high school despite each of their expressed preference for other schools.

This approach reflected how socially-disposed parents interacted in their wider social world. Families in this grouping described spending considerable weekend time with their extended family or community networks and relied on them for care and support, including financial support. School selection was often presented in this wider social context. For instance, having established a trusted peer group in the school in the form of her own children, Assi sought to extend the benefit of this to others in her community:

> I had a friend, her daughter started in year seven this year and she called up and asked me 'Does your kids go to Greenbank?' And I said, 'Yeah.' She goes,

> ‘How's the bullying?’ I go, ‘Listen, put your daughter in there, give it a go. My kids that go there. If they need help, let them go see her.’

For Assi, and other parents with a social disposition, social networks were important *social capital* and were an asset that could be also built in the school environment. This then could extend beyond their child to their wider community.

Socially-disposed parents also sought to establish their own relationships in schools, and prioritised opportunities for friendly association with teachers and school principals. Parents often describing volunteering in their child’s primary school – working in the canteen, assisting with in-class reading and school fundraising. While they presented these efforts as supporting the school, they prized the relationships they formed with teachers in the process. Primary school teachers and principals were trusted advisors and parent’s described seeking their recommendations on high school selection. While parents noted there were less social networking opportunities within the high school environment, they described seeking opportunities to connect with their children’s high school teachers through attending events like parent-teacher nights.

6.3.3 Conditions for acquiring social skills: the multicultural school yard

As described in Chapter 5, the parents with a social disposition aspired for their children to gain a range of social knowledges, skills and confidence from high school, particularly those useful in the workplace. They looked for schools that provided their children with a range of social opportunities for interaction. For instance, Assi recounted she sent her daughter to a co-educational rather than single-sex school as she considered it important she learn to talk comfortably with members of the opposite sex:

> I went to a co-ed and I prefer my kids to go to co-ed. I'm a scarfi [hijarb-wearing woman]. My daughter wears a scarf. And maybe for that [single sex schooling] it would be easier for her but then I want her to socialise, not to have that fear of boys or be too shy or maybe overdo it if she sees a boy. 'Cause then they don't know how to act.

That is, while Assi and her daughter were observant Muslims who wore hijabs, she chose to send her daughter to co-educational schooling so she would be socialised into dealing effectively with boys – a choice that was also made more feasible by her daughter having the protective presence of her elder brothers in the school.

Assi also recounted avoiding two nearby high schools she perceived as too dominated by 'Arabs', her own ethnic identity. She characterised this avoidance as protective – 'when you find there's a bigger group of one culture or one religion, things heat up more. Trouble seems to happen more it's like a mob game'. That is, her children were safer in a multicultural school environment where there was less chance of any one group dominating. But she also described one of these schools as having a reputation for girls leaving early to get married. This was something Assi herself had done and did not want her daughter to repeat. That is, in choosing a school for social reasons Assi presented this as both protective and also about positive social norming behaviour to ensure her children to successfully complete high school.

The benefits and trials of learning to negotiate a multicultural school yard were frequently raised by parents with a social disposition. This was particularly a factor for parents who identified English as the language spoken at home. For instance, Sophie described how, while many of her peers avoided some local schools because they perceived them to be too multicultural, she saw this as a virtue:

> I think for life skills, that's actually quite an important thing, to be accepting with all the cultures and customs there are different ways of doing things, seeing things, but the differences are okay.

Other parents were more equivocal, but even those expressing reservations about the size of the ethnic population in their children's schools noted the positive social negotiation skills their children were learning from this. For instance, Lorraine characterised her children as a 'minority' in their high school – 'Aussie kids are real novelties there'. While she expressed concerns her children would struggle to find friendship groups when there were 'so many Asians' or 'Lebanese' who she characterised as 'sticking together', she observed these were her anxieties and her children had learnt 'how to handle it'. That is, for parents with a social disposition, learning to negotiate a multicultural school environment provided useful skills in social negotiation.

What was particularly notable in parents' accounts of how their children acquired the negotiated social skills was where they situated this in school – in the schoolyard rather than the classroom. More than any other parent grouping, parents with a social disposition could be said to look to the schoolyard itself as a site of learning. That is,

the development of desired social skills was characterised as being developed through interpersonal interactions, rather than through structured classroom activity.

6.3.4 school discipline and an explicitly regulated environment

Parents with a social disposition expected student behaviour to be carefully monitored and were particularly supportive of explicit regulation in schools. Socially-disposed parents broadly equated 'disciplined' or well-regulated schools with being happy ones, with the role of the school principal particularly singled out for enforcing this. For instance, Rhonda approvingly noted the high school principal at her daughter's school had turned the school's reputation around through strict oversight of student behaviour:

> It's like a happy school. But before, they said it's a lot of bullying…that was five years ago. But now the principal there is, my daughter said she's like a terror [laughter]. That's why all the students are scared. But you know, the bullying's gone and it's like nobody now, do the cutting classes. Before, it's so many.

Parents in this grouping were approving of overt intervention and the enforcement of school rules. For instance, Rhonda also detailed how this principal enforced the new regime by visiting the local shopping mall before and during school hours to ensure no students were there. Parents also supported 'discipline' in the more generalised sense, detailing this was the manner in which children learnt essential social rules they'd also need for the workplace such as regular attendance, dressing to an appropriate standard and the proper manner in which to approach those in authority.

The approval of a disciplined school regime could also extend to the disciplining of their own children by the school. For example, Assi supported the school even when the police were called in relation to an infraction by one of her children – 'let them scare him' she commented, adding in the future he would hopefully not be so reckless. When parents with a social disposition did complain about school actions it was largely when the rules were perceived to be unclear, unfair or inconsistently applied.

6.3.5 Rejecting an explicit focus on academic performance

As described in Chapter five, the position for parents with a social disposition in relation to academic achievement was fraught: while their academic ambitions for their children exceeded their own level of education, compared to other parent groupings their

expectations of high school academic performance were relatively lower. Socially-disposed parents also lacked familiarity with the means to boost academic achievement. These same inconsistencies were evident when socially-disposed parents described the role of academic achievement in their school choice considerations.

Most parents with a social disposition were broadly aware how schools in their area performed in relative rankings, including HSC performance. For instance, when Faith's eldest daughter Harriet, who she characterised as 'serious' about her studies, was choosing a high school, Faith attended some information sessions run by her primary school on high school selection. These included information on how to use school performance data – such as NAPLAN scores and HSC scores – to inform high school choice, which she recounted passing on to Harriet to assist her. Faith referenced this same process when choosing a high school for her second child Winston. However, this time she chose a school that had one of the lowest HSC performance rankings in the area. This was because she preferenced Winston's comfort in the school environment due to its' performing arts program (an interest area for Winston), transition program from the local primary school and cousins already attending, over academic performance considerations.

This prioritising of social-emotional factors over academic achievement was particularly evident in how parents with a social disposition acted towards academically selective schooling. T wo parents with a social disposition (Rhonda and Lorraine) rejected places in selective schools or selective streams for their children on the grounds this would create unhappiness or stress for their child. For instance, in supporting her daughter's decision not to accept an offered place in an academically selective school, Rhonda noted:

> But she [daughter] doesn't like to go there [selective school]…because she said if you're in selective it's like you're a slave of the library, books, studying, homework. So I don't force her. As long as she's happy. As long as everything is pass. That's all right for me. I'm not so fussy.

That is, Rhonda specifically rejected academically-selective schooling as she believed it would lead to her child's unhappiness. As outlined in Chapter 5, for Rhonda this was in part was motivated by her own experience of a shaming culture towards students who had low exam marks in schooling in the Philippines. Rhonda sought to protect her

children from such practices. This is also consistent with the priority socially-disposed parents gave the development of social attributes – including self-confidence – in schooling over the direct pursuit academic achievement.

Parents with a social disposition also offered only broad generalities when describing the academic work undertaken in schools. For instance, when commenting on the relative academic differences between local schools, Faith maintained academic instruction would largely be the same in all schools:

> You have that trust that every school, you know, you assume that the teachers will do their job, and wherever they go they should be educated according to what the Department of Education has to be taught everywhere.

That is, parents with a social disposition expected, or at least hoped, government regulation would ensure consistent standards across all schools. This was unlike parents in every other grouping who differentiated between schools according to their academic performance or perceived academic culture, and were willing to intervene with schools in this where necessary. Parents with a social disposition only infrequently described intervening with schools in regard to academic concerns. For Faith specifically had a significant effect that is outlined below in 6.3.6.

6.3.6 Conditions for academic achievement: the school social environment

While parents with a social disposition did not seek to distinguish between schools academically beyond rejecting schools focussed exclusively on academic performance, they did assess their children's likely academic performance at different schools in another way. This was by distinguishing between school social populations, specifically, their perceptions about the academic aspirations of the families attending, a factor which sometimes contained ethnic assumptions. For instance, Lorraine bypassed enrolment for her children in their closest public school because the students she observed attending:

> It sounds really terrible when you say this. A lot of, like, refugee-type kids going there…I gathered the expectations of the kids weren't that great and I said, "Well, really? What's the point of going to school if you don't expect that much of them, sort of thing?

That is, just as Assi described earlier in 6.3.2, Lorraine attributed low academic achievement in schools to a lack of aspiration on the part of other students and their

families. That is, academic underperformance in schools was ascribed to social factors relating to the families attending rather than the academic actions of the school.

6.3.7 Conditions for academic achievement: social connection with teachers

Just as parents with a social disposition sought to foster amicable relationships with teachers, they also encouraged their children's positive relationships with educators. For instance, when Assi's eldest child Hadar dropped out of high school but failed to secure an apprenticeship, she insisted he return to schooling. She recounted his attitude to school now was vastly improved, which she attributed to a particular teacher:

> He's even topping classes where before he was below average…there is that respect now, you see him between him and them…Now he's decided he no longer wants to be a plumber. He wants to go in the Police force and be a Narcotics Officer or SWAT or Riot and he goes, 'due to the teachers – the teacher said to me 'is that really what you want son, being a plumber?''…He kept pushing him, pushing him and now, he's opening his mind up 'yeah, maybe I can be this person.'

That is, in Assi's account it was the development of a relationship of mutual respect with a teacher that made the difference to her child's sense of self and vocation and from this, the motivation to work to achieve academically. In this formulation, educational objectives – both social (develop a sense of vocation) and academic (finish school go on to further study) – were achieved by social means. Furthermore, the social preceded the academic. Thus parents with a social disposition can be described as pursuing social networks and relationships with educators ultimately for the academic as well as social goals, and encouraging the same in their children.

However, socially-disposed parents relied on this social approach to be converted into academic achievement by the school. The difficulty of this was exemplified in a story relayed by Faith. Faith's son Winston was in year 7 and she was concerned he was not getting sufficient homework compared to the work his sister had been given in year 7 at another (girls) high school. Faith described raising her concerns about this at a parent-teacher night at the school. However, rather than addressing this, the teacher instead told Faith that if she cared about academic achievement, she should pull her son out from the school and send him to another. Faith understood this as an extraordinary response from the teacher remarking:

> I can't even believe a teacher of a certain school would suggest such a thing to me. I think it was very stupid of her…I felt it's not the students, it's not the school, it's the teacher.

That is, Faith had raised her concerns in an appropriate format and had trusted the teacher to respond to these by addressing them with corrective action, or at least an explanation but was rebuffed. However, despite her obvious disquiet, Faith kept her son at the school as the social supports he had there – his cousins, his performance interests, his being settled in the school – were more powerful arguments to stay.

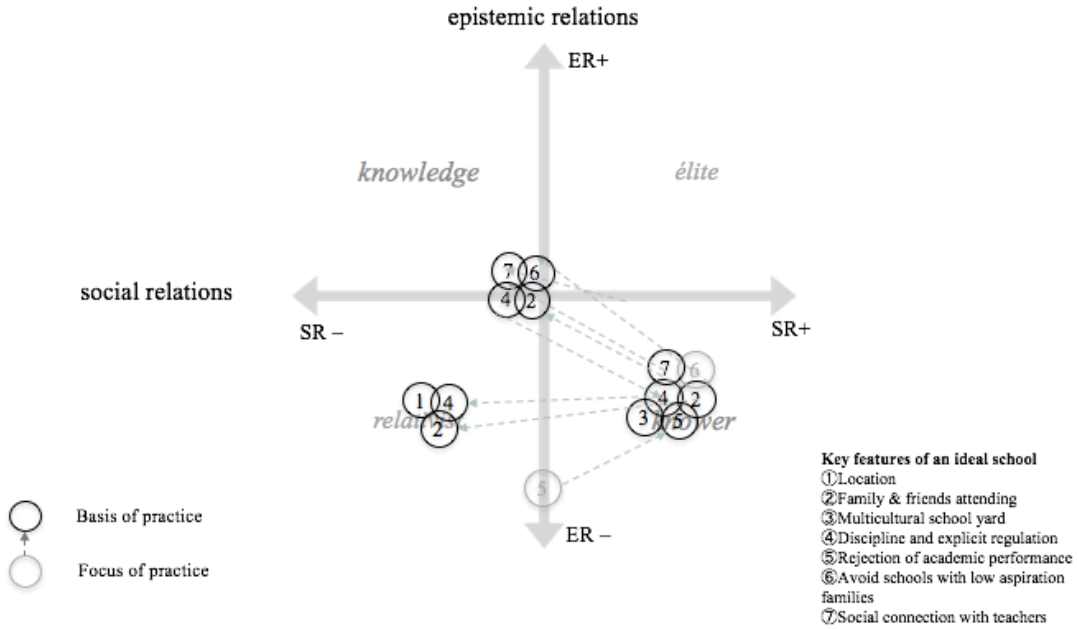
6.3.8 Analysis, parents with a social disposition

Informed by their families' prior history of early school leaving and interrupted or delayed educational trajectories, socially-disposed parents were alert to the danger points of failure within high schooling. This failure-avoidant habitus was evidenced in practices including choosing a local high school with established social connections, establishing social relationships in the school and avoiding schools with families perceived as lacking aspiration. However, in their avoidance of academically-selective schools, claims that academically all schools were basically the same and their proclaimed lack of knowledge as to how to enable their children's academic success, socially-disposed parents also revealed a lack of understanding of the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu 2006) of academic achievement. Parents greatest asset in the school environment was their social networks – social capital – both with teachers, and through their children and extended family networks. They approached schools as profoundly social environments and worked hard to extend these social benefits, investing in opportunities to support teachers and the school, valuing the social capital benefit these relationships brought, particularly in terms of educational support and advice.

To understand what these practices reveal of socially-disposed parents' position in the school field, these practices are coded and analysed using Specialization to describe the principles at the basis of their practices (Maton 2014, p.31). This has been undertaken according to the same process outlined in 6.2.7 *Analysis, parents with a credentialist disposition.* As illustrated in figure 6.2, the stances taken by socially-disposed parents are more complex than they first appear, with several stances being put to more than one purpose, expressed as having different underlying *bases*. In this chart the *basis* of

stances is illustrated in black and the *focus* of a stances (if this differs) illustrated in grey, with arrows indicating a stance being put to a different or additional basis.

Figure 6.2 **Basis of socially-disposed parents school selection practices**



The majority of socially-disposed parents' practices had both a knower code *focus* (ER–,SR+) on social skills, dispositions and/or cultural distinction, and were aimed at developing these same social skills, dispositions and/or distinctions, thus also indicating a knower code *basis* (ER–,SR+) including:

② Family and friends attending

③ Multicultural school yard

④ Discipline and explicit regulation

⑦ Social connection to teachers

Another practice ⑤ Rejection of academic performance, was primarily aimed to student self-esteem and sense of self and therefore, while academic in *focus,* was principally aimed at social development which has an underlying knower code *basis*.

In addition, while the following practices had a knower code *focus*, parents also put them to work to enable academic achievement, which indicates a knowledge code *basis* (ER+, SR–). Thus the following have also been situated in the knowledge code:

②Family and friends attending

④Discipline and explicit regulation

⑥Avoidance of schools with low aspiration families

⑦ Social connection with teachers

These reveal parents with a social disposition are oriented towards academic achievement in more aspects of their school choices than they intially appear and represent themselves to be. Thus, while parents with a social disposition overtly downplayed the importance of a *focus* on academic performance and avoided schools that emphasised this, they also sought to support academic achievement through social practices, that is, they used these practices to support an academic achievement *basis*. This *code shift* is significant for it demonstrates that parents did have deliberate practices towards academic achievement in their school choice processes. However, as the example of Faith in 6.3.7 illustrates, parents with a knower code disposition are ultimately dependent on schools converting these knower code focussed approaches to the academic achievement outcomes they desire – which may not always have a successful outcome.

Finally, two key practices, had elements that were not based towards either academic achievement, nor social development. These were:

① School location

② family and friends attending (for safety and oversight)

As these neither related to academic achievement nor to the development of social dispositions or cultural distinction these were coded weaker epistemic relations (ER–), weaker social relations (SR–), locating these in the *relativist codes* (ER–, SR–). This is particularly signficant as these two factors were often the first or main elements parents offered as influencing their school selection processes. That is, the primary considerations parents with a social disposition took into account in their school selections had no basis in what they wanted their children to achieve from high schooling.

6.4 RECOGNISING A GOOD SCHOOL, ALL-ROUNDER PARENTS

Informed by their own positive trajectory through school, higher education then into the professional workforce, as outlined in Chapter 5, all-rounder parents wanted their children to develop a range of attributes from high school including social confidence, social awareness, cultural and/or sporting distinction, and sufficient grades to get into

university. In Specialization these were recognised as demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and stronger social relations (SR+), an *élite code* (ER+, SR+). This meant they placed an emphasis on both what their child could academically achieve from high school and who they became.

In this section, the key school selection practices of all-rounder parents are outlined. These include seeking a school that: developed their child's social and cultural attributes; supported academic performance to a level sufficient for entry to university; matched the specific strengths and needs of their child; enabled their child to develop cultural distinction; supported and complemented extra-curricular activities; cultivated similar peers; and was responsive to families. These practices reveal all-rounder parents' habituses are highly attuned to specific strategies for developing a range of attributes and achievements in schools. They expect to find in the school field a school well-suited to their needs and have the own cultural, social and economic capitals in the to choose a school they wanted.

6.4.1 Multiple opportunities for distinction and support and a perfect match

As all-rounders were concerned their children be able to acquire a range of attributes from schooling, and looked for schools with a wide range of facilities and programs that would enable their child's development of these – 'the kind of place that will give them every experience and every opportunity' in the words of one parent. Parents recounted assessing schools' resources, facilities and programs when weighing up the different options available to them, including specific supports that addressed their child's needs and strengths.

In this search, parents generally considered a full range of schools including public, Catholic and independent schools. For instance, when seeking a school for daughter Cassandra, Rosalie looked first for a school that offered an advanced music study program – including at HSC level – as she regarded music as her daughter's main strength and interest, and one that had been cultivated through extensive private studies from a young age. She also considered the school needed to have a strong academic program, be co-educational (for social balance) and have studious and calm peers. Despite teaching in an elite private school, Rosalie kept daughter in the public school system because she judged the Department of Education's inter-school music program

offered students a superior 'community of musicians and opportunities down the track, whereas if you go to a private school, you've got what they offer at the private school and that is it.' She also rejected the prestigious, selective College of Music, as she considered their science program weak and there was a risk 'you come out of there as a brilliant musician but you might totally have had it overcooked and you're sick of the music'. Two local public high schools were also rejected – including one with a performance specialty – as Rosalie's observations of students' behaviour outside the school were not positive. Cassandra was ultimately sent out of area to an academically-high-performing public high school that also offered extension studies in music for the HSC and had a large Asian student cohort, whom Rosalie considered to be more diligent peers.

As this example illustrates, school choice for all-rounders was undertaken in the context of their child's wider social and cultural development, enhanced by a range of enriching extra-curricular activities both outside and inside the school and intended to match the children's strengths, needs and interests.

6.4.2 Academic support plus

Despite apparently downplaying the importance of academic achievement in interviews, as is described in Chapter 5, all-rounder parents assumed their children would go on to university study. Thus, they sought high schools which would facilitate a strong HSC result. In interviews they demonstrated an awareness of different school performance results and paid close attention to the academic supports on offer. HSC results were often used to 'rule in' and 'rule out' schools, and monitoring of this could be ongoing. For instance, while Katrina was happy with the choice of Rosemount College – a high-fee independent girls' school – for her daughters at junior high level, she canvassed the possibility of moving the eldest to a higher-performing, more prestigious school for her senior years:

> We're also looking at the facilities, what do we get for our fees etc? Is it better value up there? My husband and I have also been looking at HSC rankings at Rosemount last year and saying 'what schools are higher up that's reasonable for travel for someone a bit older?'

That is, Katrina and her husband applied an ongoing 'cost-benefit analysis' to assess whether the money they were spending at the current high school would translate into the best results for their daughter or whether they should move her elsewhere.

All-rounders considered academic achievement to be influenced by the quality of school facilities and the engagement of school staff. For instance, Donna and Martin had originally intended to send their daughters to a local public high school. However, despite the school having a 'gifted and talented' stream aimed at academically-oriented students, after a school visit and coupled with concerns about the schools' reported HSC results, they judged the quality of the facilities and staff resources to be substandard and likely to affect their academic performances:

> Martin: We're confident in our own girls that they'll do well in the areas they want to do well in, but I guess from my perspective the results do indicate a bit about the culture. Like if the results are uniformly poorly, that indicates there is something or not happening in that school.

That is, parents in this grouping made a global assessment of the school environment evaluating staff, facilities, peers and programs together for their likely effect on academic achievement. In another example, a parent sent her daughter to a school whose facilities she noted were aging, but she considered the extended agricultural study programs on offer in the school compensated for this. Others observed the behaviour of students both in school (during open days) or outside school as offering similar indicators.

This capacity to weigh up the overall benefit or deficit of a school was also influenced by all-rounders capacity to supplement additional educational activities, including additional remedial support, as they considered necessary. All-rounders typically downplayed the extent of this –'We did was for an hour a week for a term or two to help her with maths when she was really losing her confidence and getting behind in it, and that was it,' observed Katrina. But each family in this grouping had at different times engaged external tutoring support for at least one of their children. Thus, when assessing a school's capacity to maximise academic performance, all-rounders considered not only the direct academic work that schools were doing but also factored in their own capacity to provide additional support where necessary.

In this study schools that focussed only on academic performance were largely rejected by all-rounder parents. This was both because they considered such schools too narrowly focussed – thus not contributing to their child's 'well-roundedness' – and that these limited academic enrichment and support to only a select few. For instance, Katrina recounted moving her eldest daughter out of a public school, Chisolm, mid-way through her primary years as she judged the school's heavy emphasis on progression to its academic opportunity class (OC) to be negatively impacting her daughter's overall opportunities:

> Chisolm is a very good school, but it's very, very focussed on academic achievement and on the top ranking and pushes the students very hard. If you're one of the students that is perhaps lagging behind they don't pick you up…

That is, parents with an all-rounder disposition considered academically oriented schooling to only be beneficial to academically gifted children to the detriment of students who needed additional support.

6.4.2 School selection and the development of social and cultural attributes

Their child's development of a range of social and cultural attributes from schooling was the key concern of all-rounder parents, as is outlined in 6.4.1 above. In addition to school support programs, parents in this grouping favoured schools providing social programs aimed at developing skills in citizenship, community, character and independence. For instance, Martin cited the community service program offered by St Brigids, a private girl's school, as what differentiated its approach from the local high-performing public school:

> The public schools have a focus on 'we'll individually focus on you helping achieve your full potential'. The thing we really liked about St Brigids is they have a really strong emphasis on service and developing yourself as an individual and an important part of that is service to community and contributing and having an engagement in our community. That had a really strong effect.

All parents in this grouping highlighted different ways the schools they selected engaged in character developments, often through involving students in charitable activities.

Parents were particularly positive too about school programs that emphasised the development of personal attributes like resilience, self-reliance and independence. For instance, Katrina stressed the preventative importance learning these skills:

> I like the fact that a lot of the schools now introduce value-add, more of these life-skill programs, that go alongside traditional education…how to be resilient around your studying years, how to manage under stress and pressure.

Parents in this grouping understood and planned for their children having many years of study to the HSC and beyond to university. They positively appraised schools that helped their children develop coping skills to enable this.

6.4.4 Peers and the social environment of the school and beyond

Unlike some other family groupings, all-rounders did not specifically seek schools where their child would find a familiar environment with known peers. None of the children in this grouping went to their local public high school, nor did they attend a school with a high proportion of peers from their primary school years. For some parents, this was a virtue: 'We were quite happy for her to go it alone and create new friendships and for us that was also a skill for her to learn, how to transition, how to adapt to change,' noted Katrina. That is, the development of new friendships with a wider range of peers was portrayed as part of their child's social development.

This was particularly the case if these new peers were seen to enable their children to develop their social negotiation skills, particularly with a range of peers from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, while Katrina did not overtly seek a school with a multicultural population, she noted the benefits for her daughter, compared to Chisolm, her previous primary school:

> If she had stayed at Chisolm it probably would have been predominantly an Anglo-Saxon group of friends she would have maintained. So she has some very close friends who are a different nationality to her, which I think, you know, is great – African friend, Indian friend, Asian friend, I think it's really good she's exposed to that…It's good she's learning that with respect to the multicultural society because unfortunately that's the world she's going to go into.

That is, there was a benefit in her daughter's exposure to a kind of 'controlled multiculturalism' as it would better enable her daughter to negotiate the wider social

world after school, one that Katrina knew from her professional workplace experience had changed, whether she liked these changes or not.

However desirable cultural knowledge was, all-rounder parents otherwise sought schools where the family peers were most like themselves, particularly those who also emphasised well-roundedness and participation in extra-curricular pursuits. For instance, although Carolyn had been heavily involved in her public primary schools' Parents and Citizens association, she dismissed the notion that her children would go on to the local public high school as she judged the families there were not sufficiently involved in their child's broad education:

> I used to mentor some of these people and it's like, I'm working, I've got two kids, I'm doing all this and you can't find half an hour to come to school and cover books?…Everyone wants the best for their kids but some people think getting the best for kids is sending them to school everyday and it's totally the school's responsibility.

Children of all-rounders led busy lives filled with extra-curricular activities, spending significant time in a range of sporting and cultural activities including club sports, individual sports and music, dance and drama classes. Parents expected the types of families attending their school of choice would also be willing and able to pursue this range of activities and experiences either complementing or as part of a school study program.

6.4.5 All-rounder's relationship between home and school

Parents with an all-rounder disposition approached their relationship with schools with considerable confidence. They were certain of what they wanted for their children and were comfortable asserting this in the school environment. In recounting their school selection processes, they described paying attention to how school personnel responded to them at events like school open days, using this to assess a school's suitability. For instance, Carolyn ruled one school out following the school open day because the school principal resisted further school visits:

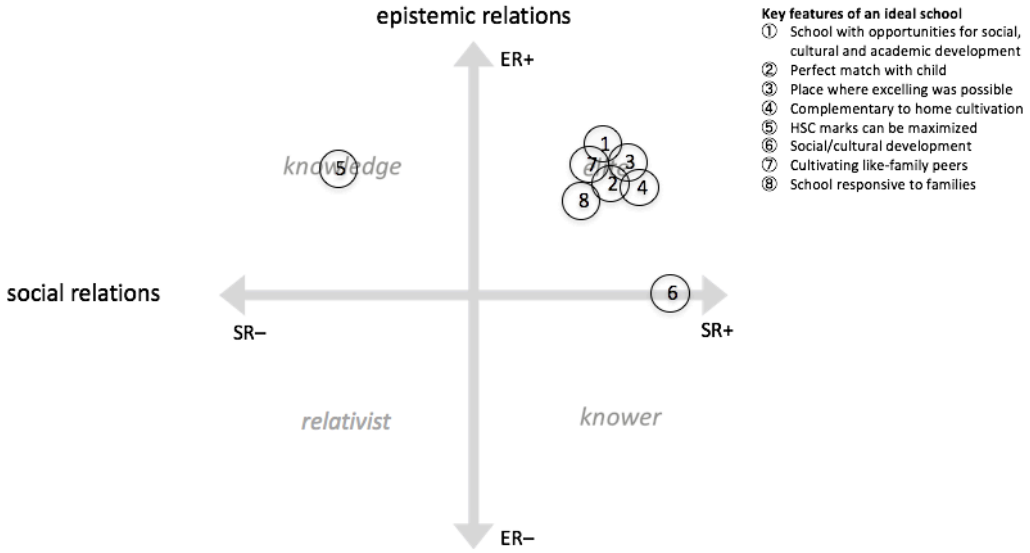
> Valley Heights high [was] very posh, very nice, very lovely looking, all very good. But they were very regimented about their approach and I thought 'I'm not so crazy about a school that can't let you come and look at it at another time'.

All-rounders expected their concerns to be addressed by schools and schools' responsiveness to them figured into their school choice considerations. In this regard, whether they were paying or not, parents' own capital – in the form of their own cultural confidence in the school setting – provided them with the assurance to traverse the school field, including the power to refuse schooling that was insufficiently responsive to their concerns.

6.4.6 Discussion and analysis, parents with an all-rounder disposition

Informed by their own successful experience of schooling and educational and professional trajectories, all-rounders sought out schools that could enhance their children's all round academic performance and social and cultural skills development. Schools were selected to match their child's individual needs, interests and strengths, including opportunities for their child to develop distinction. Particularly for the latter, the relationship between home and school was continuous and complementary, the range of activities between them providing a holistic and encompassing suite of support and enrichment. All-rounder parents had sufficient financial capital to enable them to consider schools across the different sectors and include in their calculations supplementary out-of-school support. They sought out schools with others like themselves, forging confident social networks with families likewise engaged in this broad range of academic, social and cultural development. These all-rounder parents can be described as not only seeking multiple capitals from the field, but also having multiple capitals they could activate within the field.

***Figure 6.3* Basis of all-rounder parents school selection practices**



To understand what these practices reveal about all-rounders position in the school field these practices are coded using Specialization to describe the principles at the basis of their practices (Maton 2014, p.31). This has been undertaken according to the same process outlined in 6.2.7 *Analysis, parents with a credentialist disposition*. As figure 6.3 illustrates, in their school choice practices all-rounder parents looked to schools with opportunities for social, cultural and academic development, matched to their child's strengths and needs. The majority of these practices had both a *focus* towards academic achievement and the development of social skills, dispositions demonstrating both stronger epistemic relations and social relations, an *élite code* (ER+, SR–). These had a *basis* in academic achievement and the development of social skills, dispositions and distinctions, thus also *elite basis* (Maton 2014, p.31). These school choice elements included:

① School with opportunities for social, cultural and academic development

② Perfect match with child

③ Place where excelling was possible

④ Complementary to home cultivation

⑦ Cultivating like-family peers

⑧ School responsive to family

⑤ HSC marks can be maximised which had academic achievement, a knowledge code, as a *focus* and a *basis*

⑥ Social-cultural development, had a knower code *focus* and *basis*.

What is also notable about figure 6.3 is that parents could match their focus to specific elements and unlike socially-disposed parents, were did not need to turn practices to other purposes. That is, the conditions in the field to suit their purposes exactly.

6.5 RECOGNISING A GOOD SCHOOL, CONSOLIDATORS

Informed by a strong first-in-family narrative of intergenerational progress, in their school selections consolidators looked to turn their hard-won educational and professional knowledges into an easier pathway for their children. As outlined in Chapter 5, consolidators, like all-rounders, sought both academic achievement and, particularly, the development of social skills and attributes from high schooling. In specialization codes consolidators were characterised as demonstrating both stronger epistemic relations (ER+) (for their aim to university study) and also weaker epistemic relations (ER–) (for the aim to vocational study); and as demonstrating stronger social relations (SR+), albeit with relatively less emphasis on leadership than all-rounders. In Specialization they are thus described as enacting an *élite code* and a *knower code*.

In this section the key high school selection strategies for consolidators are outlined. These include an emphasis on choosing a school that: was familiar to parents and engendered a sense of belonging, almost invariably a Catholic school; was structured and disciplined; had safe like-family peers; included self-development programs; had a fun learning environment; provided the opportunity for individualised support; and had values compatible with the values in the home. These practices reveal the parental habitus of consolidators led them to seeking familiar schooling opportunities for their children that enabled them to capitalise on their own hard-won schooling and professional knowledge.

6.5.1 Catholic schools, familiar to parents

For many consolidators the choice of Catholic schooling was unquestioned. For instance, when Natasha's described the decision to send her daughter to a Catholic high school, she presented this as simply a continuation of family practice – 'I wanted her to go to a Catholic girls' school mainly because I did and so did my sisters, we all went to the same school as my mom.' For most consolidator families, Catholic schooling offered a repeat of at least one parent's own school experience. Consolidators welcomed the familiarity of knowing the school structures and religious mores

associated with this schooling. For instance, Madu and Lahiru, first generation migrants from Sri Lanka, sought out Catholic schooling to provide an assurance of familiarity amidst the upheaval of migration. Noted Madu:

> When I went to St Thomas More, when I saw the, you know, a lady there and they have like a grotto, you know, like of Mary and they say the rosary and everything, I just took a liking. That's the environment I needed.

In seeking to repeat their own school experience, parents found a welcome environment with familiar rules and rituals.

When describing why they looked to Catholic schooling, parents in this grouping returned repeatedly to a feeling of belonging in school, a continuity between the values of the home and school and that it provided a sense of protection against the vicissitudes of the teen years. Many consolidators described enjoying school. For instance, when Alex recounted his own Catholic high schooling he said:

> I loved the mates, the atmosphere, still some of my best friends are from school. Strangely enough I liked study. I liked doing homework. I enjoyed it. I got on really well with the teachers. By the end of year 12 some of them were my mates.

Catholic schooling overall for most consolidators had been a positive experience, even those who volunteered they had not been strong academic performers. They therefore had their own schooling to draw upon to guide them in their school choice processes.

6.5.2 A place of belonging and safe peers

The most common condition consolidators' described searching for in a high school was a school where their child would 'belong'. This notion captures elements including a place their child would 'fit in', where 'friends for life' could be made with desirable peers and where there was a continuity between the values of the home and the school. These were significant for consolidators as they held, in common with parents with a social disposition, that if children were happy in school this would lead to educational success.

Consolidators often recounted observing the attitudes towards different schools of older high school students and friends in their broad social networks, using this to gauge which schools were likely to provide their own children with a sense of connection. For

instance, Sarah decided to send her daughter to St Brigid's when she observed her niece's high school graduation from there:

> I've been to a lot of graduations from my nieces and nephews over the years but I've never been to one like the St Brigid's one. I don't know what the other girls schools do like that, but they linked arms and they crossed arms as part of this chain that could never be broken, and the parents and I watched them just in tears, and when I saw that, I thought, that is my daughter…that's just what I want for her, that family feel.

As this quote illustrates, for consolidators the social bonds were both between students and also the institution. Of all parent groupings, consolidators were most likely to describe school identity as part of personal identity. That is, their child being a 'St Brigid's girl' or from 'Thomas More' was meaningful.

A schools' social composition also factored into consolidators' notion of 'fit' which at times led to different appraisals of the same school. For instance, St Brigid's – the same school Sarah above chose for her daughter – was ruled out by Katherine due to her perception the social environment would be excluding of her and her daughters:

> I'm never going to be the one that's driving around the Mercedes, I'm never going to have the bling…it keeps on coming back to my pet hate – I'm just not a materialistic person…going to St Brigid's my gut feel was this is going to make ladies out of my girls, going to Sacred Heart I just thought the girls are just going to fit.

That is, Katherine was unwilling to send her daughters into a school with a social milieu in which she felt uncomfortable. She also considered attendance there would lead to undesirable materialist pressures on her daughters, contrary to her values in the home.

Notions of 'social fit' could extend to a schools' ethnic mix, particularly if non-Anglo groups were prominent. For instance, Natasha described her daughter going to the Catholic high school the majority of her Catholic primary school friends were to attend as she considered the practices of the families there to be social restricting:

> Pretty much 95% of the girls at St Columba's are from Lebanese families and all their best friends were Lebanese. So they were all lovely but they don't allow sleepovers...all these sort of cultural differences. They're quite cliquey, and I didn't really get close to some of the mothers 'til she was in year 5.

That is, Natasha considered the social mix of the school meant her daughter would not have access to a full range of social experiences. Further, just as for Katherine above, Natasha felt that she did not fit with the other mothers. That is, for consolidators 'social fit' didn't only apply to their children, but to the family also.

However, ethnicity was not invariably a 'chose against' factor and was also at times treated positively if parents perceived the social values of families attending a school compatible with their own. Catholicism or Catholic schooling was often presented as the glue that enabled this. For instance, when Alex and Christine were discussing the social profile of their daughter and sons' high schools, they noted each school had sizable ethnic populations:

> Alex: The school she goes to, there are a lot of Filipinos, they're really religious, they really want to learn. Probably about 30 per cent, I don't know why, yeah, but they're a really good bunch of people.
>
> Christine: And the Indians are nice as well.
>
> Alex: Yeah, yeah, well Brendan's, probably out of his five best friends, two of them are Indian. He hangs out with them a lot.

That is, ethnicity was not relevant if the underlying social values of the families were shared.

Compatible social values were particularly important to consolidators as they presented the period of adolescence as fraught with danger, where children could easily 'go off the rails'. Consolidators sought schools where the friendships their children formed would be with safe peers who came from families with values like their own. For instance, Mario referenced his own adolescence when looking for a school for his daughters:

> I always believe at school you become who you hang around with. Peer group pressure. I was part of the nerdy group so to speak. I did my HSC, I did my university, didn't drink till I was 20, 21; didn't have my first girlfriend till I was 21. So all those strong beliefs, you know what I mean? And then when I look at the girls my daughter hangs around with, that's important to us.

Catholic schooling was presented as offering both a moral guarantee also functioning as a proxy 'sorting mechanism' for families with similar values. In the majority of families in this grouping one or both parents identified as Catholic, though this ranged

from those who identified as actively practising Catholic to those with a more 'cultural Catholic' approach. However, across this selection the majority asserted they had not actively canvassed public or other private school options, while those that had only considered public academically selective schooling or elite independent schooling.

6.5.3 Discipline, respect and the social code

Consolidators frequently described a school with 'good discipline' as essential, phrase that in fact captures several meanings. These include a school where students were socialised into acting appropriately, learnt to develop self-discipline and where explicit codes of social behaviour were enforced. For instance, when Jackie described why her daughter was sent to a Catholic girls' high school she stated:

> I send my child to learn respect, respect for her elders, respect for the teachers, no back-chatting. Obey the teacher, you know and respect one another in the playground. Dealing with children of diverse personalities. I want my child to, you know, learn to tolerate other children, their behaviours.

That is, for consolidators 'good discipline' meant student behaviour towards others in schools was codified, taught and regulated so that students developed the necessary social skills for negotiating the wider social world.

A school with good discipline was also sought for the protection it was perceived to offer. For instance, Madu this meant explicit enforcement of rules of behaviour:

> The main thing I wanted is the discipline for him as a boy…One thing [his school has] is they are very strict, anti-bullying, they are very strong about it... they give like a detention, like on Saturdays, they keep them for three hours.

Here 'good discipline' was linked to notions of personal safety, a safe environment and children being held accountable for their actions. Several consolidators approving cited examples of their chosen high school sanctioning students whose behaviours had transgressed particular behavioural codes of the school. Parents specifically highlighted the power of Catholic schools to sanction and suspend students for such behaviour.

This was particularly significant to consolidators for, as noted in 6.4.2, consolidators particularly regarded the period of adolescence as fraught with danger. They expected the school to play a role regulating children's behaviour and to provide programs such as camps and personal development activities that steered them on the right path.

Notions of 'respect' were frequently intertwined with discussions of discipline. Respect was associated with a sense of mutual obligation as to how to act towards others and expect others to act towards you. The social interactions of parents, teachers and students were all included in this. For instance, Christine framed this as characterising the teacher-student relationships at her son's school:

> The students are respectful to the teachers, but the teachers are respectful to the students as well, you know. They treat them with respect. They say 'we treat you with respect so you need to treat us with respect'. So they model the behaviour. It's all about modelling.

Consolidators expected teachers to model respectful behaviour to the students as well as reinforce the expectation students act respectfully to them. This was in keeping with their expectation there was a common social and moral code between schools and families.

6.5.4 Learning is individualised and academically supported

Just as consolidators verbally downplayed the importance of academic performance as described in the previous Chapter, they also downplayed academic performance metrics as part of their high school selection. For instance, when discussing the relevance of a school's curricular activities to a child's eventual HSC score, more than one parent said – 'if they're going to learn, they're going to learn anywhere'. That is, parents presented the student's attitude to learning as having a far greater impact than the school. However, this was belied by parent's actions. In practice, consolidators took a keen interest in school HSC performance and actively 'selected against' schools whose HSC performance was judged to be poor.

A similar pattern was evident when they evaluated different schools' academic merits. Consolidators downplayed schools that emphasised academic performance, particularly academically selective high schools. For instance, Alex had initially considered such schools for his children, but had changed his mind:

> When the kids were younger we were thinking selective schools, but then time went on we realised the selective schools nowadays are a lot different to how they were 15 years ago. Now it's all the kids who have been coached into the

> exams, and now the selective schools seem to be a bunch of average kids who work hard, rather than smart kids who can work more.

That is, selective schools' populations were perceived to reflect parent strategy rather than student talent, leading to the recruitment of the 'wrong' kind of student.

Despite their demurral, consolidators did take academic performance into account when 'choosing for' high schools. For instance, once Alex and Christine had narrowed their list down to one of two schools for son Brendon – Thomas More and Edmund Rice – they visited each school's open day and it was here they made their decision. Christine recounted:

> We went to the Thomas More tour and they told us how they beat Westminster [an elite private school] in their HSC and they did this, and they spurted all the academics, and we went out of there going 'this is brilliant, wow, this is fantastic they beat Westminster.' And we sat down in the Edmund Rice auditorium and the first sentence out of the principal's mouth was 'this is what we're going to do for your son' and I went 'that's what it's about'. It's not about who they beat, or where they come in the rankings or anything like that, it's about what are they going to do with your child. And the second he said that sentence I went 'that's where he's going to go to school'.

That is, consolidators did seek school's capable of fostering their child's individual academic performance. However, this was wrapped in a more personalised as well as academic approach. In this their practices resembled both the 'child-matching' approach of all-rounders described above in 6.4.2 and the 'child's happiness' approach of socially-disposed parents detailed in 6.3.2, also holding that if their children were happy in school, they would be academically successful.

6.5.5 Continuum between home and school

Consolidators presented themselves as confident in their chosen school environments and embraced the notion that, as fee-paying consumers, they had a substantial stake in their children's school. One parent drew the analogy that school fees were like 'having private health insurance, as opposed to just having Medicare'. Many recounted comfortably talking with teachers and being unafraid to challenge the school if they thought it warranted. Deanna framed this as an investment:

> You've got to invest as parents, and you've got to invest your time into your kid's education. It's not just a monetary investment. It's time. We run around three days of parent-teacher interviews, and if they've got seven teachers, we go and sit with seven teachers. Because we want to know exactly how they're performing.

Parents presented the home-school relationship as somewhere client-purchaser or a mutually-obliged partnership where it was the obligation of parents to reinforce the school by being informed as to their children's progress and being willing to intervene and remediate where necessary.

This mutuality was illustrated in the way some consolidators reacted to a significant pedagogic change that had occurred some local primary and secondary schools. Several Catholic schools in the area piloted a type of open learning classrooms that included students working predominantly in teams. Despite the desire to replicate their own schooling conditions detailed previously, the three families this affected were largely supportive – 'We've been teaching children the same way for hundreds of years. It's time, they had to change the school', noted one. This was in a large part because of the extensive communications parents described receiving from the school outlining the rationale for the new approach. These parents accepted a substantial change to school structures as the schools had made a concerted effort to bring them on board. Furthermore, as consolidators placed the greatest emphasis on school social practices – which remained the same – the changes to academic delivery were accepted.

6.5.6 Discussion and analysis, parents with a consolidator disposition

Consolidators sought schools where the social environment of the school formed a continuum with the world of the home. Seeking to smooth the path for the acquisition of their own hard acquired academic and social capitals for their children they looked to recreate their own past experience of schooling. In this field this meant selecting Catholic schools just as they had attended, where the rules were familiar and the social environment could be trusted. This was aided by their having the economic capital to pay the school fees of Catholic schooling, and with experience in this same school environment, a habitus functioning as a capital in to draw upon (Bourdieu 2006).

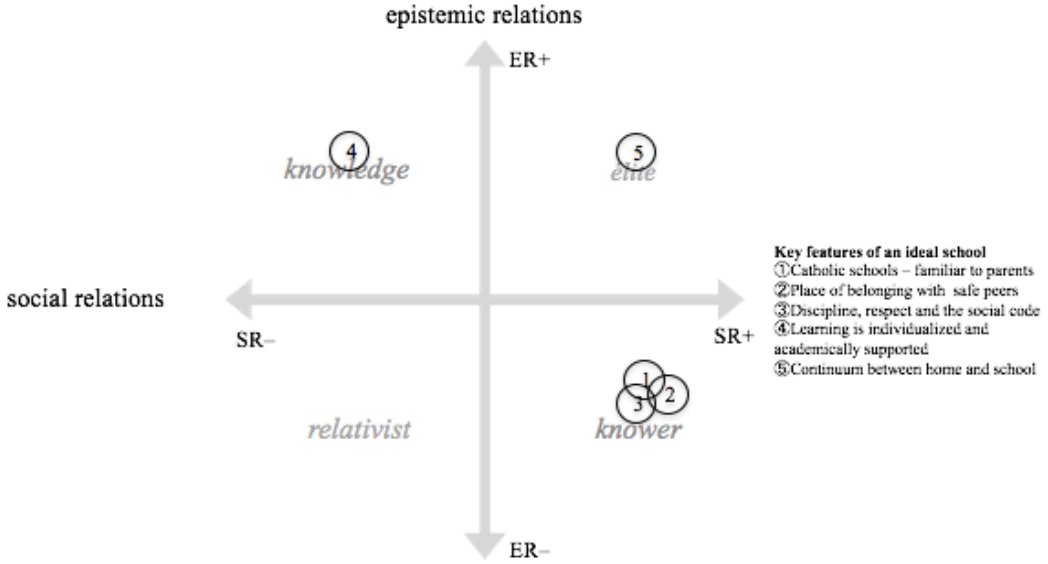
As Figure 6.4 illustrates, for consolidators, different elements of their school choice practices in school selection enabled them to match what they wanted from the field in different ways. This can be seen through both the focus of their practices and the underlying basis these relate to (Maton 2014, p.31). Social practices including attendance at ① Catholic schools; ② A place of belonging and with safe peers; and ③ Discipline, respect and the social code can be recognised as having a knower code *focus* (ER–, SR+). These also had a knower code *basis* (ER–, SR+) as they were aimed at developing students' social skills, dispositions and/or distinctions. That is, the underlying principle they are based on is building better *knowers*.

The practice of selecting for a school where ④ Learning is individualised and academically supported, can be recognised as having a knowledge code focus (ER+, SR–) and also a knowledge code *basis* (ER+, SR–) as it aimed directly at academic achievement.

In seeking a school where there was a ⑤ Continuum between home and school in both moral and religious values and academic support can be understood as an elite focus (ER+, SR+) and as having an elite basis (ER+, SR+), with the aim of developing and reinforcing both students academic achievements (ER+) and their religious, social and and moral development, all dispositional qualities (SR+).

In this way consolidators can be understood to be selecting a school in a field in which they could align the multiple attributes they wanted from a school with a 'perfect matched' school.

Figure 6.4 **Basis of consolidator parents school selection practices**



6.6 DISCUSSION: HABITUS AND CAPITAL, FOCUS AND BASIS IN ACTION

All parents interviewed for this study embarked upon high school choice as a considered process with a consistent rationale for the school choices they made. In this regard, all parents can be understood as 'ideal parents' as conceptualised by policy makers in Chapter 4, who as a key overarching principle, valorised parents making considered and rational school choices. The analysis from this Chapter also disabuses a stereotype presented in parent interviews also, of other parents negatively characterised as 'not caring' where they sent their children. As all parents sampled in this study had both a considered basis for their school choice decisions and a process for making these.

However, parents differed significantly as to how they sought to realise their aims from schooling in school choice, including the degree to which their school selections directly took academic performance – the key capital of the field – into consideration. Parents differed as to the degree to which they could call upon the knowledge and know-how from their own past experience in schooling and the workplace to realise their aims from high school selection (habitus), and different capacities to exercise capital in the school field to enable their school choices to realise their wider aims from schooling. This discussion that follows will focus on: how parental habitus and capitals enable or inhibit the school choices of parents in different groupings; and how parents work from their positions in the school field – as revealed in their specialization codes,

and the coding of their choice practices – to realise their aims from schooling in their school selections.

6.6.1 parental capitals and habituses on school selection

From the interviews and analysis outlined above, parents had varying capacities and constraints on exercising school choice in the school field of Doongara. Capacities and constraints included finances, or the economic capital available to them, and the degree to which their own past experience of the school field was able to inform their school choices, enabling for some, a habitus functioning as capital (Bourdieu, 2006). These have been outlined for each of the parent groups in the section summaries above and are briefly recapped below. What is of particular interest here, however, is the not just the broad capacities or constraints parents have in the field, but the ways they seek to operationalise the assets they have to realise their preferred outcome. These are revealed by comparing their specialization codes as constituted in Chapter 5, with the focus and basis of their practices (Maton 2014, p.31), demonstrating both the degree to which parents found a field that met their objectives from schooling, and also the degree to which they were able to act to secure these objectives. These are briefly recapped below in the order of credentialists, all-rounders and consolidators. After this socially-disposed parents are discussed as the difference between their knower code and the focus and basis of some of their practices uncovers practices hidden in the field and raises further questions raised about the effects of field itself.

Credentialist parents', despite their recent migration, had educational *habituses* primed to operate competitively within an education system that prioritised academic achievement, acquired in a fiercely competitive school environment. This informed their post-migration educational practices, including their school selections. Parents sought maximise their children's academic achievement from schooling, demonstrating a *knowledge code* (ER+, SR–). In their high school selections they had a *focus* on schools that would enable their child to maximise their academic performance, particularly their future HSC performance. All their practices ultimately were directed on this *basis*, demonstrating both a *focus* and *basis* in a *knowledge code*. Parents focussed their efforts on a range of strategies to ensure both access to a high performing school of choice and maintained an ongoing focus on academic performance, including through home pedagogic practices and supplementary schooling. That is, parents'

practices were focussed on the *knowledge code* and based in the *knowledge codes*. Parents had sufficient economic capital to afford these supplementary activities and, where necessary, independent or Catholic school fees. In addition, their habitus also acted as a capital providing them the knowledge and know-how to operate in an academically competitive school field. The effect was that credentialist children not only went to the schools assessed as most likely to aid their academic performance, but they effectively had an extended school day, enabling them more time to build their academic achievements in the school field.

All-rounders were most able to consider a wide array of school choices. With a *habitus* attuned to the demands of the professional workplace, past positive experiences in schooling and a successful educational and professional trajectory, parents with an all-rounder disposition approached school choice with a long list of criteria they expected would be able to be fulfilled by their school of choice. They sought both *institutional* and *embodied capitals* from schooling including the development of their child's academic performance, and social skills, dispositions and cultural distinctions, demonstrating an *élite code*. Parents had both sufficient *economic capital* to consider private schooling or public schooling across a wide geographic area, and a *habitus operating as capital* that enabled them to differentiate between schools most likely to suit the individual needs and strengths of their child.

With a *habitus* shaped by a sense of intergenerational progress in education and the professional workplace, consolidators intended their hard-won experience would make the pathway easier for their children. They looked to select schools similar to the ones they attended, enabling them to capitalise on their own knowledge of this particular schooling subfield, that is, to enable their habitus to operate as a capital. For the majority this meant a Catholic high school and they had sufficient *economic capital* to realise this choice. Consolidators sought different attributes from schooling for their children, including academic achievement and social skills, dispositions and cultural distinction, demonstrating an *élite code* (ER+, SR+) and (if focussed on vocational education) a knower code (ER–, SR+), though relative to all-rounders they were in a more moderate position. The focus of their practices demonstrated both belonging and happiness in schooling, consolidators sought both a social fit with family peers and a sense of identity and protection from the school institution, including compatibility with the

family's values. Consolidators thus positioned schools within the wider social contexts within which they and their children were part. Additionally, despite their verbal downplaying, they attended to schools' academic performance in their choice considerations, consistent with their emphasis of the need to progress to further study.

Parents with a social disposition made deliberate and considered school choices for their children for well-founded social and academic reasons, while at the same time having the most constrained choices of all parent groupings due to their lack of financial capital. With a habitus attuned to the risk of early school leaving and the importance of maintaining strong social connections in the school for protective reasons, as well as for social skill-building and school support and enrolment maintenance, socially-disposed parents chose schools with strong social networks. This also enabled parents to extend protective oversight of their children into the school yard and to foster their own social connections both with teachers and their wider community. However, this social capital investment in their children's education, meant parents with a social disposition were dependent on schools converting this into academic support, a stance that left them vulnerable to misrecognition or their concerns being dismissed.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This Chapter has demonstrated parents' capacity to select a high school that will facilitate their aim from education for their children is highly contingent on the capital they have in the school field and their past experience of this. It is also clear how much choice parents are able to negotiate in the school field varies widely, with the capitals parents are able to activate in the school field varying considerably, to the advantage of only some. In focusing specifically on the key capital of the field credentialists were able to match their own prior experience to the field. Likewise, consolidators focused specifically on a school sub-field – Catholic schooling – that they were both familiar with and that had a continuity with their wider community. All-rounders were the only group that did not turn their practices to other purposes, likely because they were best positioned to take advantage of a diversified school marketplace having the capital to consider the greatest range of schools and thus seek one best suited to their child. Socially disposed parents sought to maximise their social supports and social networks by choosing schools close to home, making a virtue of necessity. This raises the

question of how do we understand these differing strategies in relation to advantage and disadvantage in high school choice?

CHAPTER 7
ANALYSIS: PART IV
Revealed Advantage and Disadvantage in School Choice

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Thus far this study has outlined what parents seek from high schools for their children (chapter 5) describing four different parent groups: credentialists, socially-disposed parents, all-rounders and consolidators, each constituted by what they wanted their child to gain from schooling and described according to their specialization code. In Chapter 6 parents' strategies to realise their aims from schooling were described and analysed using the specialization codes to reveal the *basis* of parental decision-making. This demonstrated each parent group had a rational basis for decision-making consistent with their aims. However, socially-disposed parents were the least able to choose for what they wanted their children to gain from high schooling and were most restricted in the schools they were able to consider. This raised the question as to how advantage and disadvantage is enacted in the school field, which addresses the fourth research question *what do parents high school choices reveal about the mechanics of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?* This question is addressed in this chapter in two parts.

In 7.2 *Matching versus clashing the field*, the aims and actions of each parent group are compared to that of the 'ideal parent' and 'ideal process' outlined in Chapter 4. This brings together specialization codes of the political 'legitimate choice' constellation analysed in chapter 4, the specialization codes of the parent groups analysed in chapter 5, and the specialization codes of parents' school choice practices analysed in chapter 6 and describes which codes match and which codes clash. This analysis reveals how, with the knowledge codes dominant in the school field, all parents and students are positioned in relation to this. The insight this provides in relation to advantage and disadvantage in the field is analysed. This raises the question of whether exhibiting the right code is enough? This is addressed in 7.3 where the school choices of two families who experienced particular disadvantage choosing schools for their children, each of whom had a disability, are described and analysed. This reveals an underlying bias in selection by schools and parents against students who require additional educational resources.

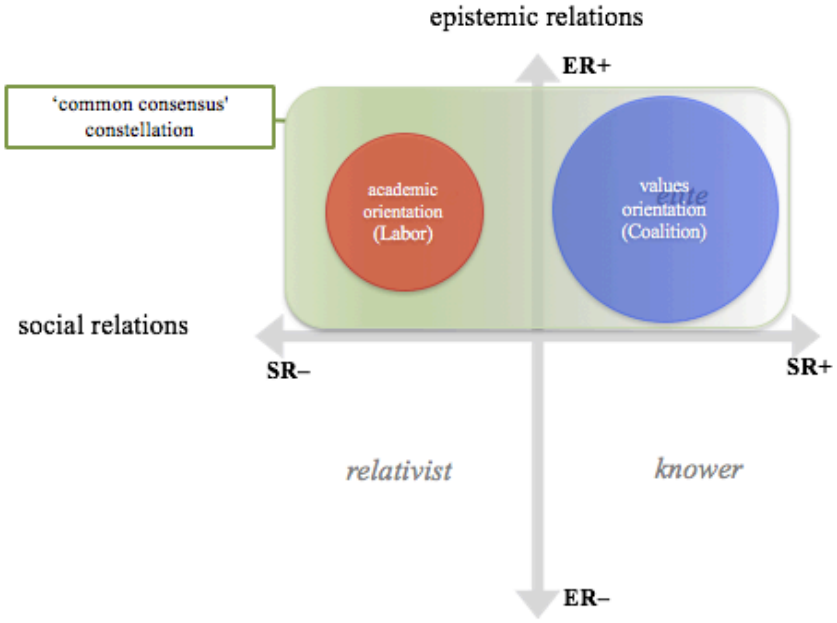
7.2 MATCHING VERSUS CLASHING IN THE SCHOOL FIELD

In Chapter 4 school choice as idealised by parliamentary policy-makers was described. This idealisation included that: school choice was a parental right; that parents should undertake this in a rational and considered manner; that this should be based on the best interests of the child and that governments role in facilitating choice included maintaining funding to government and non-government schools. The key basis of choice emphasised was a school's academic performance, which in Specialization demonstrated stronger epistemic relations (ER+). This located the idealised codes of the field in the knowledge codes (ER+, SR–) and the élite codes (ER+, SR+). This section then addresses the questions: do parents act as the ideal parent? Are their choices situated in the idealised codes of the field? To answer this, parent's priorities and practices in school choice as they are described and analysed in Chapters 5 and 6 are brought together with the idealised choice process. This enables an analysis as to which parents 'match' the code of the idealised parent and which parents' priorities and practices 'clash'. This provides an illustration of how different parents are able to understand the 'rules of the game' of the field (Bourdieu 2006). Based on this the parents who are most likely to experience advantage and disadvantage in the field can be described. Unlike in the preceding two chapters, the parent groups are described in the order of credentialists, all-rounders, consolidators and socially-disposed parents. This better enables a proximate clustering of differing parental advantages and disadvantages in the school field.

7.2.1 Seeing positions in the field, the ideal and the real

While the ideal choice process was situated in the knowledge codes and élite codes, two different ideal choosers were described. Parliamentarians with an 'academic orientation' focused solely on academic achievement as the legitimate bases of school choice, demonstrating a knowledge code (ER+, SR–). Parliamentarians with a 'values and standards orientation' focused on academic academic achievement and social or religious values as the ideal bases for choice, demonstrating an élite code (ER+, SR+). Figure 7.1 reproduces this on the Specialization plane below.

Figure 7.1 **Parliamentarians and the ideal school choice specialization codes**



To illustrate the degree to which parents conform to the ideal choice process and which ideal chooser, these two sets of positions in the field can be brought together on a specialization plane. This enables a comparison to be made of the relation between the idealised parent chooser and parents aims and actions in actuality.

7.2.2 Code matching: credentialists in the field

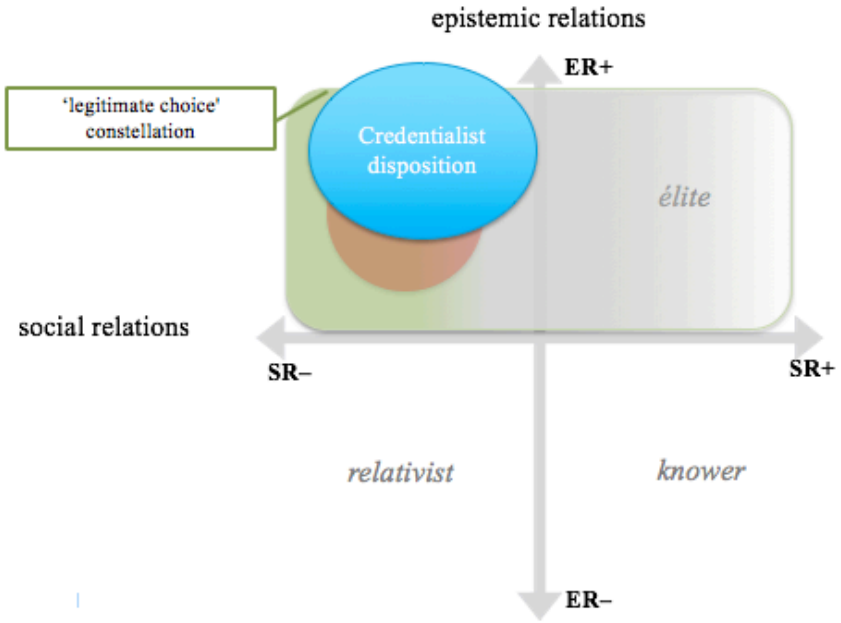
As relatively recent migrants – most having migrated to Australia in the previous five years – credentialists had the least time of all parent groups to plan for high school choice in the Australia school field (summary Appendix K). Yet within a short space of time this group had successfully negotiated entry into a high school of their choice. To understand how credentialists were able to position themselves so effectively in schooling in NSW it is useful to compare their aims and strategies to that of the ideal chooser.

As illustrated in Figure 7.2, with a key aim of maximising academic performance from schooling and focussing only on this outcome, credentialists demonstrated stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and weaker social relations (SR–), a *knowledge code*. This is situated within the same code areas as the idealised choice process, producing a *code match*. Thus credentialists can be described as 'ideal choosers'. That is, credentialists are choosing schools in accordance with how the 'rules of the game' as they are set in the NSW school field (Bourdieu 2006; Maton 2014).

Credentialists described pursuing a suite of strategies focused on maximising school academic performance, including pursuing enrolment into an academically high-performing high school. In addition, they engaged in practices including: test preparation; cultivating competitive like-peers; emphasising home-school mutual accountability; home-based pedagogic strategies which included supplementary schooling; cultivating a study disposition in their children. The underlying basis for all of these practices was academic achievement, again demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and weaker social relations (SR–).

In their aims and strategies, credentialists were informed by their own past experience of successful schooling in a high-stakes testing environment and a successful educational trajectory from high school to higher education, the professions and successful migration. The assets they brought to the Australian school field to achieve a successful outcome in their school choices, were both the economic capital to pay for supplementary schooling and/or private school fees if necessary, but most particularly a *habitus* attuned to the strategies for success in a school environment dominated a high stakes testing. In encountering a school field dominated by the same underlying conditions and valuations as they previously had experienced credentialists can also be described as having a habitus acting as capital (Bourdieu 2006).

Figure 7.2 **Credentialists and the ideal school choice specialization codes**



Furthermore, in pursuing only academic achievement in the school field and using this as a basis for their school selections, credentialists resemble the 'ideal parent' outlined in the 'academic orientation' by Labor speakers who promoted this as the sole basis for school choice. That is, their aims and their strategies were perfectly matched to the conditions of a school field dominated by the capital of academic achievement and as idealised by the party that enacted further measurement in the school field through NAPLAN and the MySchool website, both of which were integral in credentialist parents' high school choices.

7.2.3 Code matching: all-rounder parents in the field

All-rounder parents had high expectations of the schools they were looking to for their children. They had multiple aims from schooling that were complemented by a wide range of extracurricular activities outside school hours. School selection was undertaken particularly with an eye to the professional workplace and the skills, dispositions and knowledges that would enable their children to establish professional lives. In an intensive and extensive high school choice process that typically began in the middle of the primary school (Appendix K) they considered the widest range of schools – both public and private – and across the widest geographic area.

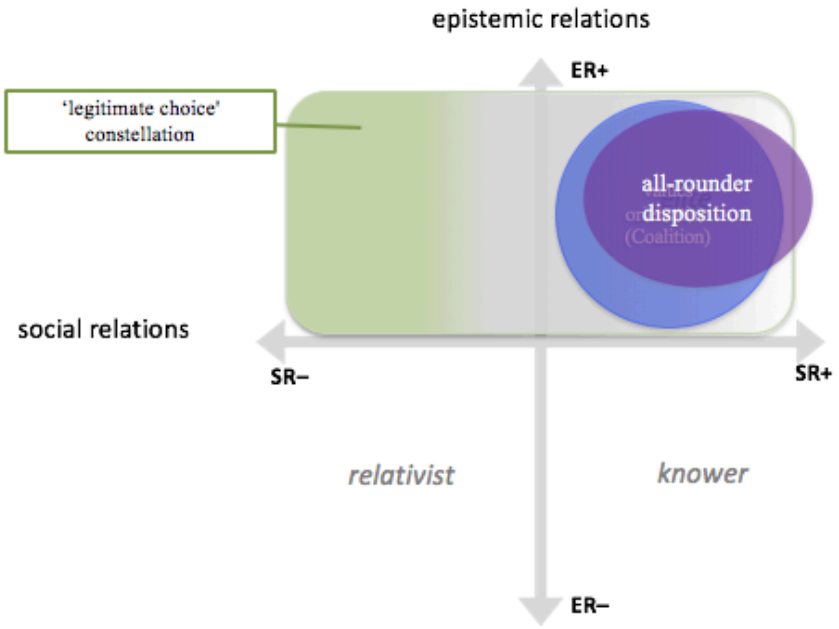
As illustrated in figure 7.3, in seeking high schooling that would enable their children to achieve sufficiently high marks to enter university, develop social dispositions, including for social leadership, and a range of cultural distinctions, all-rounders, enacted both stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and stronger social relations (SR+), demonstrating an *élite code*.

To secure these outcomes from schooling they focused on a school: with opportunities for social, cultural and academic development, directly matched to their child's needs and talents; where HSC marks could be maximised; with similar intensively acculturating families; that was responsive to them. In their school selections parents were able to address each of these factors in the schools they chose. Cumulatively, these practices can be recognised having bases with both stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and stronger social relations (SR+): an *élite code*. In addition, parents demonstrated specific practices aimed at academic achievement, including monitoring school performance results, also demonstrating *knowledge code* (ER+, SR–) practices.

As illustrated in figure 7.3, when all-rounders situated in the élite codes (ER+, SR–) are brought together with the idealised choice process described in parliamentary discourse, this produces a *code match*. Thus, parents with an all-rounder disposition can also be described as understanding and working within the 'rules of the game'.

In their aim and strategies all-rounders were influenced by their own educational continuity, which took them from positive school experiences to studies in higher education then on to a professional workplace. This trajectory meant they had the financial assets to consider a wide range of school options. Parents were able to travel with ease across the school field, able to draw upon their own schooling which informed their assessment of the range of elements that could be expected in a good school, attuned to the necessary strategies in school and the professional field after, and the capacity to plan a continuity between home and school extra-curricular activities. Thus in addition to economic capital, all-rounders' can also be described as having habituses acting as capital (Bourdieu 2006).

Figure 7.3 **All-rounders and the ideal school choice specialization codes**



In their multi-capital approach to schooling, seeking a range of outcomes, including academic achievement as well as social dispositions as the bases of their school selections, all-rounders resemble the 'ideal parent' outlined in the 'values and standards' orientation by Coalition speakers, who outlined 'ideal choosers' as seeking schools that would enable both academic

achievement as well as social values as the bases for school choice. That is, in their aims and strategies all-rounders were able to follow ideal choice processes and were perfectly matched 'ideal choosers' in the school field.

7.2.4 Code matching: Consolidators in the field

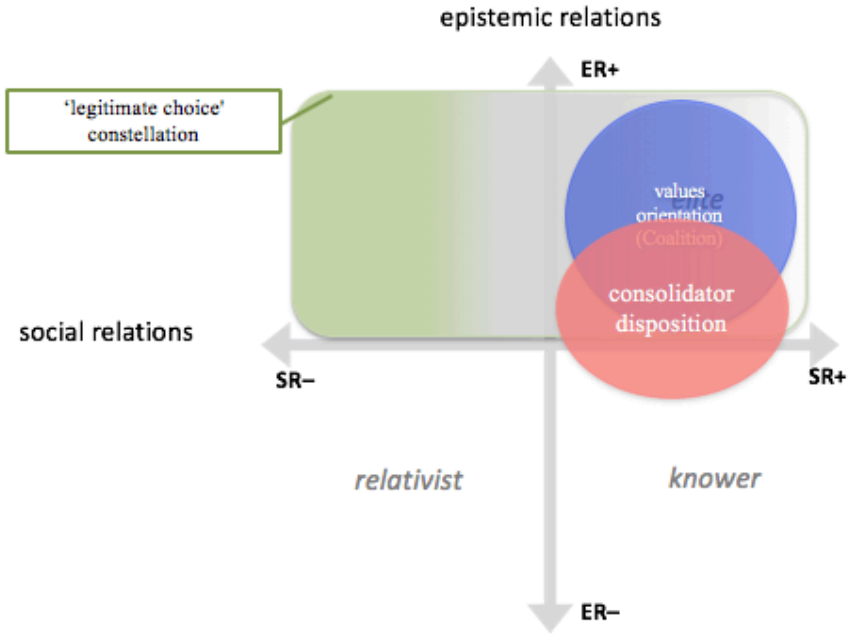
Consolidators school choice processes were the most deliberative of all parent groups. With many the first in their families to go to university and enter the professional workplace, they were keen to ensure this same pathway was easier for their children. Similar to all-rounders, consolidators emphasised both academic achievement and the development of social skills and personal development from schooling. Having largely had a positive experiences of (usually Catholic) high schooling, consolidator parents sought to repeat this same experience for their children. Almost without exception consolidator children attended Catholic systemic or Catholic independent high schools. Parents presented this as ensuring a continuity of values between home and school.

As is illustrated in figure 7.4, while consolidators downplayed academic performance for its own sake – such as studying for NAPLAN – they expected their children to go on to further study after high school, preferably at university, thus overall demonstrated stronger epistemic relations (ER+). Some also canvassed entry into a business-oriented trade, thus demonstrating weaker epistemic relations (ER–) in this specific practice. Consolidators also emphasised the development of personal skills related to self-knowledge and self-confidence as necessary for professional life and participation in the wider community, demonstrating stronger social relations (SR+). As such they are described as demonstrating an *élite code* (ER+, SR+), and some also some *knower code* (ER–, SR+) practices if oriented to a trade.

In their school selection practices consolidators outlined a detailed understanding of the processes of Catholic school entry and of all parent groups, spent the longest period of time planning their high school choices (Appendix K). With acceptance into Catholic schools conditional on meeting specific entry requirements, parents in this grouping put their own acquired knowledge of the mechanisms of Catholic schooling to work to ensure their children gained admission to their school of choice, often commencing this at the same time as they were choosing a primary school. Consolidators had a long list of criteria they focused on when looking for a school, embarking on a process of progressive elimination and visitation where they considered factors including whether their children would find a sense of belonging in the

school, school discipline and pastoral care, school academic record and individualised learning support. But the bases of these school choice practices were both academic, demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+), and socially-oriented, demonstrating stronger social relations (SR+). In choosing to repeat the experience of a school system they knew, consolidators were able to capitalise on their knowledge of the Catholic school sub-field with a habitus operating as capital (Bourdieu 2006), while they also had sufficient economic capital to pay for this, and were thus able to maximise their 'feel for the game'.

Figure 7.4 **Consolidators and the ideal school choice specialization codes**



Furthermore, in pursuing both academic achievement and social practices, particularly related to the development of personal dispositions and values, consolidators resemble the 'ideal parent' as outlined by Coalition speakers who put forward a 'values and standards orientation' as the ideal basis for parents' school choices. That is, in their aims and strategies they produced a *code match* with the 'ideal parent' described in Coalition policy-political discourses outlined in chapter 4.

7.2.5 Code clashing: parents with a social disposition in the field

Parents with a social disposition superficially appeared to have the least complex high school decision-making of all parent groups. They embarked on their school selection process near the end of primary school – later than all-rounder and consolidator parents (Appendix K) – and they all sent their children to local public high schools that were, if not the nearest choice to

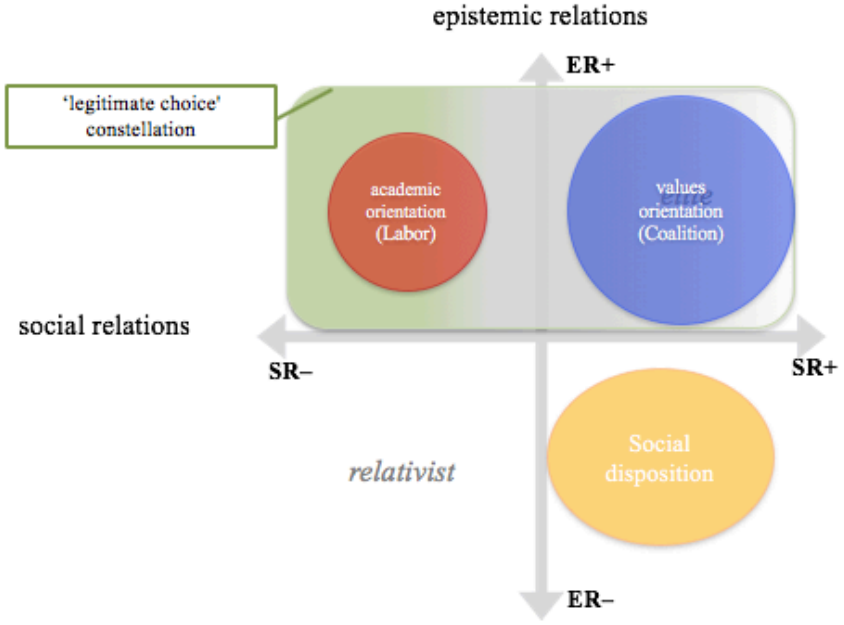
home, still nearby and readily accessible by public transport. Unlike parents in all other groups, socially-disposed parents were not in a financial position to consider fee-paying private schools or supplementary schooling, nor were they able to readily transport their children outside the area. In these elements, parents were bound by constraint. Their high school choices were also disconnected from other educational decisions such as primary school choice and few were able to consider supplementary schooling or tutoring support except as it was offered by schools. In these ways socially-disposed parents also conformed to a stereotype presented by some other parents in interviews of 'parents who don't care' about schooling or school choice. This was usually used to dismiss parents who sent their child to their nearest public school, allegedly without canvassing alternatives, or taking into account school academic performance or their child's specific needs.

Yet, as outlined in chapter 5, socially-disposed parents' school choices were deliberate, including their decision to send to socially-connected local schools, and they put considerable planning into finding a school with the right conditions for their child. As figure 7.5 illustrates, they aimed for their children to gain confidence and a sense of self from schooling, and knowledge of the social mores they would need for the workplace, demonstrating stronger social relations (SR+). Their aims and strategies were informed by family experience, the mothers' attributing the early-school leaving of most fathers to their lack of self-confidence. In keeping with this, they downplayed a focus on academic performance as destructive to the development of self-confidence, demonstrating weaker epistemic relations (ER–), enacting a *knower code* (ER–, SR+). However, with this basis for school selection, socially-disposed parents demonstrate a *code clash* with the idealised basis of choice described in the parliamentary discourses. That is, the outcomes they are seeking from schooling do not directly align with the outcomes understood to be the basis of selection in the field by the policy makers of the field.

Parents with a social disposition rejected schools that were overtly focused on academic achievement, and strongly preferred schools where their children would be happy, they were thus described as demonstrating weaker epistemic relations (ER–) and stronger social relation (SR+) demonstrating a knower code. Therefore in what they directly sought from schools, socially-disposed parents demonstrated a *code clash* with the ideal chooser in the school field. In their school selections many socially-disposed parents sought to break with their own school experiences, many describing negative experiences exacerbated by learning difficulties,

second-language learning and/or personal disruptions including extended illness and family and housing breakdown. They specifically focused on choosing high schools in which their child would be in a familiar and welcoming environment, with known peers and a social milieu diverse enough to be protective. They avoided high schools they considered would disrupt this, including ones with a strong focus on academic performance. As outlined in chapter 6, socially-disposed parents focused on a socially and emotionally supportive school environment as they considered this to be *precondition* for academic achievement. That is, they sought out school environments that provided a basis in which academic learning could take place. In this, while the practices they demonstrated could all be described as having a knower code *focus*, parents were trying put these to a knowledge code *basis*. That is, their underlying bases for what they wanted from schooling was more academically-oriented than they initially presented. However, as their socially-oriented focus in school selection was so explicit, this is still recognised as a code clash.

Figure 7.5 **Socially-disposed parents and the ideal school choice specialization codes**



Enclosed within this code clash are three key challenges for parents with a social disposition. First, despite their relatively higher academic aspirations compared to their own educational experiences, relative to other parent groups who all emphasised concrete academic performance goals and specific further plans for tertiary study, socially-disposed parents' academic ambitions for their children were relatively more modest, less concrete and they were dismissive of any emphasis on academic performance that was likely to lead to their children's

confidence being challenged. This meant despite socially-disposed parents being the only group to aspire to a higher level of education than one or both parents had achieved, in the school field it is possible they will be seen as unambitious for their children.

Second, parents with a social disposition invested in their children's education through their social relationships with schools, particularly through volunteering and relationships with their childrens' teachers. These practices demonstrate stronger social relations (SR+) and as they are not directly related to academic performance in the school, demonstrate weaker epistemic relations (ER–). Therefore in the majority of their practices even in the school environment socially-disposed parents demonstrate a knower code (ER–, SR+). This again represents a *code clash* with the basis of achievement in the field. This in contrast to credentialists approach to teachers, which in directly focussing on academic achievement and the provision of homework, enacts a *knowledge co*de (ER+, SR–). This code clash means socially-disposed parents are reliant on schools to recognise their social investment and convert this to academic support. As the story of Faith illustrated, (outlined Chapter 6.3.7), relying on schools to do this work can leave parents vulnerable to misrecognition or having their concerns ignored. Socially-disposed parents also relied on a similar social conversion for their children's academic needs to be developed in schools. That is, the primary focus of their school choice decisions was on the social conditions in schools. These were aimed at enabling in their children a sense of confidence in the school environment, personal development and social skills. These in turn were presented as pre-conditions which would then enable academic achievement. That is, while the focus of their practices can be recognised as demonstrating stronger social relations (SR+), these served a dual purpose, with the bases of such practices also academic achievement, demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+). However, this also produces a code clash with the dominant codes of the school field. Such a code clash means socially-disposed parents, and their children, are vulnerable to having their academic ambitions unrecognised, misunderstood, dismissed or unsupported.

The third challenge for socially-disposed parents is their knower-code practices (ER–, SR+) clash with the knowledge codes (ER+, SR–), and élite codes (ER+, SR+) valorised by the political discourses of the school field as outlined in chapter 4. That is, their approach clashes with both the 'ideal chooser' presented in the Labor 'academic orientation' (ER+, SR–) and the 'ideal chooser' presented in the Coalition 'values and standards orientation' (ER+, SR+). As such, their practices are also likely to be invisible and vulnerable to being misunderstood in

the political field also, the dominant field of influence on the school field. This raises the question as to where advocacy for parents with a social disposition lies in the political field.

Three of the four parent groups in this study demonstrate ideal choice processes and in their bases of choice represent different realisations of the 'ideal chooser'. Parents with a credentialist disposition, as dedicated pursuers of academic performance, demonstrate a *code match* with the political 'academic orientation' and a *code match* with the dominant codes of the school field. Parents with an all-rounder disposition and parents with a consolidator disposition each demonstrate *code match* with the political 'values and standards orientation'. However, parents with a social disposition, who demonstrate weaker epistemic relations (ER–) and stronger social relations (SR+) are positioned outside the 'legitimate choice' constellation. Thus they are vulnerable to having their practices in school choosing misrecognised, misunderstood or delegitimised both in the field of political power but, as this field refracts a strong influence into the school field, within the school field also.

7.2.6 Code matching, code clashing and advantage and disadvantage in school choice

The analysis in this chapter demonstrates which parents are able to understand the 'rules of the game' of parental school choice in the school field. These parents are recognised through comparing the basis of their school selections with that of the code that dominates the field. A *code match* indicates parents recognise and can realise what is required in the field, a *code clash* indicates parents may not be able to recognise nor realise what is required in the field. On this basis three of the four parent groups in this study can be described as playing by the rules of the game: credentialists, all-rounders and consolidators. However, in demonstrating a code clash, parents with a social disposition can be seen to be more likely to struggle to realise their aims in and from the school field. This analysis raises a further question: is it sufficient to play by the rules of the game to be successful in school choice in the school field of NSW? I now turn to address this question by examining two case studies that suggest exhibiting the right codes may be insufficient.

7.3 DISADVANTAGED CHOICE, PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

This section considers the cases of two families who were described experiencing disadvantage in their high school selections. These were two families who had a child with a disability[1].

[1] These two students and their conditions are referenced using the language their parents used to describe them.

Their cases illustrate most acutely how it is not only parents' actions that shape the school choice opportunities for students, but also the opportunities made available to them in the field itself.

Five families in this study identified as having a child with a disability. The experiences of families were most elaborated in the narratives of two parents: Rebecca, who described son Riley as having attention deficit hyper-activity disorder (ADHD); and Ronnie, who described daughter Gabrielle as having complex needs including autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and ADHD. For each interview the mother only was interviewed, though each identified as being in a partnered family relationship. In the other three families, it was a sibling to the child who was the key focus of the interview who was identified as having a disability. With 4.9 per cent of all school enrolments comprising children with a diagnosed and funded disability (Gonski et al. 2011), the proportion of 2 from an interview cohort of 28 families represents an indicative sample.

Based on analysis of their aspirations from schooling for their children, Rebecca and Ronnie belonged within two different parent groupings – socially-disposed parents and consolidators respectively. However, their practices and the challenges they experienced selecting a high school also set them apart from other parents in these groups in specific ways. In the following section each parent is characterised first in relation to what they wanted their children to achieve from schooling, as is described for parent groups in chapter 5. Second, how they sought to realise this in their school selections, as is described for parent groups in chapter 6. Finally, how schools' differing responses to them and their child's needs changes distinguishes them from other parents.

7.3.1 What parents want: parents of a child with a disability

Each parent of a child with a disability was clear about what they wanted their child to achieve from schooling, similar to other parents in this study. Rebecca emphasised she hoped son Riley would gain 'self-esteem and confidence' from schooling. The importance of this was reinforced by Rebecca's own upbringing, which she described as difficult and included her leaving school early because she had left home and was supporting herself. Now having almost finished a bachelors' degree, she aspired for Riley to have a better school experience than she and that he would go on to a trade or university. But while she wished for Riley's educational journey to be easier than her own, her aspirations from school, relative to other parents

demonstrated weaker epistemic relations (ER–). Likewise, with an educational focus strongly oriented to Riley's self-esteem and confidence as keys to his future success, Rebecca demonstrated stronger social relations (SR+). In this she can be characterised as other parents with a social disposition as enacting a *knower code* (ER–, SR+).

Ronnie also had clear aspirations from schooling for daughter Gabrielle. With a builder husband with his own business, Ronnie aspired for Gabrielle to be able to follow a trade and be skills-focused in her working life. In this aspect she demonstrated relatively weaker epistemic relations (ER–). However, Ronnie also detailed strategies for strengthening Gabrielle's academic and social performance, including extensive coaching support aimed at her academic performance, demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+). She also strongly emphasised the importance of Gabrielle gaining 'self-esteem and finding her things that she's good and strong at and what she wants to be' from her schooling, demonstrating stronger social relations (SR+). In addition, the family were practicing Catholics and Ronnie focused on the value of Catholic schooling both for its' continuity of values between home and school, and her experience of the system. In these ways, in common with other consolidators, Ronnie partially demonstrated an *élite code* (ER+, SR+), while in her relatively more restricted academic aspirations, some practices demonstrating weaker epistemic relations, thus elements of a *knower code* (ER–, SR+).

7.3.2 A good school: parents of a child with a disability

High school choice for Rebecca, in common with other socially-disposed parents, was a combination of expediency and social-support. Pragmatically, she first nominated location close to home as the main reason Doongara High was chosen. She also described looking for a school that would facilitate Riley's sense of self, hoping, for instance, he would be provided 'little awards and things along the way and that builds his self-esteem'.

Ronnie, like most consolidators, looked primarily to a school that would provide an emotional sense of belonging –'social was more important for me than academic because I can provide her tutors'. Identifying as an observant Catholic, the sense of belonging she sought was connected to a sense of Catholic identity: 'we're very religious. We go to mass every Sunday…I like her to understand the good parts of her religion the same way I did, and she's not going to get that by attending a public school.'

However, in other aspects of school selection, these parents' practices diverged from others in their group. These differences related to the limited number of suitable schools available to them, schools' reactions to their child, their use of supplementary supports and the ways they approached schools more broadly.

7.3.3 No chance to be chosen: constrained choice and disability

When Ronnie and Rebecca looked for schools that would foster the outcomes they wanted from schooling, each considered a number of high schools. In their investigations each also recounted being rebuffed when meeting school principals, who had no will to offer extra support, particularly if additional funding were not secured. For instance, unlike other parents with a social disposition, Rebecca had widened her search beyond public schooling to also consider some local low-cost religious schools:

> We had almost booked him into a Christian school and we had a really big heartfelt sort of chat with the principal and you know, 'Can you offer anything…' I called another Catholic school, and they said, 'We can't offer anything different to any other student,' and I thought, 'Well, really, what's the point?'

Rebecca eventually concluded private schools were unwilling to provide additional resources to support Riley's needs unless a special funding grant could be procured – 'If there's no funding they won't help you'. She settled on her best choice being to send Riley to the public high school they were in the catchment area for, and put aside any additional money she would have otherwise spent on school fees for home tutoring support.

The school Rebecca chose was Doongara High School, which was only a short walk from home. Doongara was regarded as a desirable high school by some other parents in this study as it offered academic selective and enrichment streams. However, in common with other parents with a social disposition, Rebecca was suspicious of the negative effects of these. This was not only due to a fear it would induce stress or poor self-esteem, but also the result of her previous experience with an academically-oriented primary school Riley had attended:

> I felt like they just focused on the gifted and talented and they didn't really care about the struggling students, right? For me, the fact that it was a selective high school, it was like, "Oh. Great."

That is, Rebecca was concerned Riley's academic needs would remain unaddressed in the school because its academic focus on high-achieving students would bias attention away from those with learning challenges. She sought to assuage her doubts by pinning her hopes on the

notion that associating with academically-oriented students would positively influence Riley to develop good study habits.

Ronnie too found her school choices constrained. After investigating three Catholic high school – two systemic and one Catholic independent – she settled on Holy Cross, one of the smaller Catholic systemic high schools in the area and the only one she considered offered the supports Gabrielle needed. While Ronnie pursued both academic and social supports, she described the social environment as being most crucial. For instance, she considered it important Holy Cross was a co-educational school because Gabrielle didn't 'get along with girls so well'. However, much as she valued the social sense of belonging, Ronnie also knew no other child from her daughter's primary school would be attending this school. This was in a large part due to the main reasons she was choosing the school:

> Holy Cross doesn't have a very good name. Years ago, they were known as the trade school, like you send your kid there if they don't want to achieve…

That is, the only school Ronnie found suitably supportive for her daughter was avoided by many other parents precisely because such supports signalled the children attending needed them, and they were therefore likely to be low academic performers. Indeed, Ronnie herself considered the schools' cohort likely to be lower-achieving, noting the school also accepted a sizable population of refugee children. Ronnie shared her peers concerns about the schools' lower ambitions and worried her academic and social aspirations for Gabrielle may not be realised if the school proved not as ambitious of her daughter's potential as she was.

Ronnie also found her preference for Catholic schooling created constraints. In the first instance she noted state schooling offered greater support to children with a disability, thus the decision to choose Catholic schooling meant less access to resources overall. However, as well as choosing Catholic schooling for the social and religious reasons outlined above, Ronnie also characterised Gabrielle having difficultly negotiating different social stances and belief systems, due to challenges in her thought processing. In opting for a Catholic school with a more socially-restricted environment, Ronnie had hoped to reduce the opportunity for this kind of social conflict. However, only a few weeks into high school she was aware there had already been one incident of conflict in the school playground between Gabrielle and a child from a Muslim background. Indeed, contrary to Ronnie's plans, the school, in offering a more socially-conservative environment, had attracted a range of parents seeking this, including a sizeable Muslim population.

Thus, each parent of a child with a disability ultimately experienced more constrained high school choice than other parents, with fewer schools willing or able to offer them the supports their child needed to achieve the same outcomes as other peers. Each had stories of private schools particularly discouraging their child's enrolment. In addition, although they sought the same school conditions as others in their grouping, they also had to accommodate more compromise within their choices, settling for 'best available' school, rather than 'best fit'.

7.3.4 Parents' advocacy and supplementary support

By the time they came to high school selection, Rebecca and Ronnie had a reservoir of experiences as to how primary schools had responded, or not responded, to their child's needs. Each described repeatedly advocating to primary schools to secure resources for their child and each had moved their child from primary schools they considered had been unwilling to meet their needs. For instance, Rebecca recounted moving Riley from one school when he was taken off a 'reading recovery' program for not showing sufficient progress, the school deflecting responsibility for this by questioning whether Riley's issues stemmed from problems at home. Likewise, Ronnie had moved her daughter in primary school, seeking a more personalised school environment. Both mothers maintained they considered the schools had failed in their core obligations. 'We expect children to be able to get a good education. That's not an unreasonable expectation for every child. So that is their obligation to do that,' said Ronnie.

Rebecca and Ronnie referenced these experiences when describing their expectations for high school selection. Ronnie described how, having experienced a primary school willing to respond to her child's needs, she was confident asserting this to a high school. She recounted in nuanced detail how her daughter reacted in classroom and social situations, describing how she now picked a delicate line with teachers between advising on effective behavioural strategies while trying to not overstep into what schools regarded as their expert territory. In these actions, both Ronnie and Rebecca asserted themselves more forcefully into the school environment than other parents in their groupings.

All parents in this study who had children with a disability also relied on additional tutoring or supplementary support outside regular school instruction for their child. Rebecca secured twice-weekly maths tutoring and music lessons for son Riley. Ronnie outlined a long list of additional supports for Gabrielle including attendance at special 'social skills' camps and in-

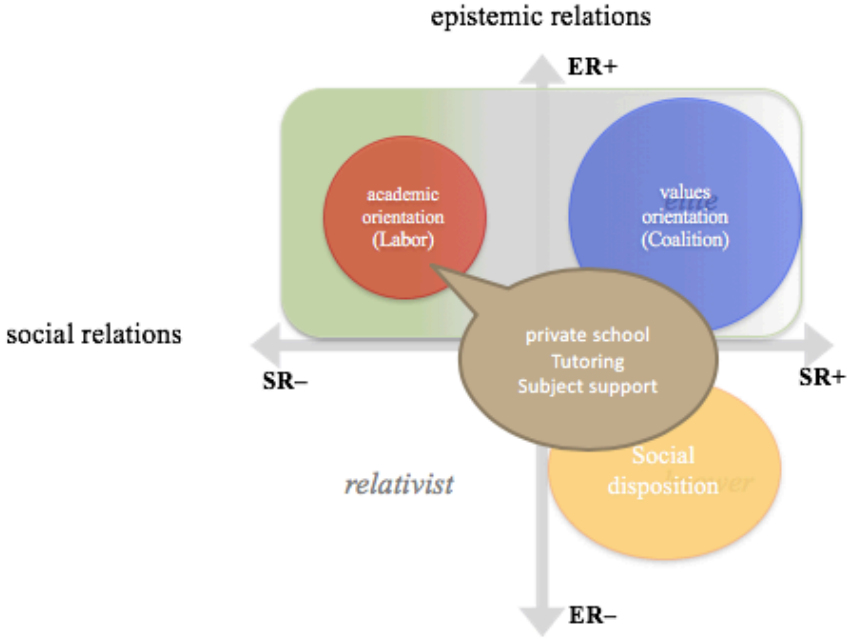
school counselling. Thus, for these parents, supporting their child meant a combination of seeking a school willing to work with their child to provide in-school assistance and private or grant-funded tutoring outside, with educational support neither wholly the work of the school nor the family, but a constant negotiation between the two.

7.3.5 Analysis, parents of a child with a disability

To understand these key differences the school priorities and high school choice practices of parents of a child with a disability are also analysed using specialisation codes. As outlined in the above in regards to the outcomes sought from schooling, Rebecca enacted a *knower code* (ER–, SR+) and was thus described as having a social disposition; and Ronnie an *élite code* (ER+, SR–), though with *knower code* orientation for future study options and was thus described as having a consolidator disposition.

However, the experience of each parent reveals an important limitation of school choice in the school field. While Rebecca's aims from schooling enacted a *knower code* (ER–, SR+) in her practices, as illustrated in figure 7.7, particularly canvassing private schooling and securing tutoring support for Riley in specific subject areas, she demonstrated stronger epistemic relations, weaker social relations (SR–), that is, she enacted *knowledge-code* practices (ER+, SR–). That is, unlike others in this grouping she did not present the mechanisms of academic achievement as 'unknowable' or simply down to her child's individual talents, but also the result of school practices in relation to her child. However, despite Rebecca's willingness to increase her academic focus, thereby becoming more like the 'ideal parent', this did not open up further school options to her.

Figure 7.7 **Rebecca changing position in school field**



Ronnie's position was different. While her supplementary schooling practices were extensive and included weekly supplementary social schooling and school holiday camps focused on social skill building demonstrating stronger epistemic relations and stronger social relations (ER+, SR+), an élite code. However, overall her practice was already in this code. Further practices in this code did not increase the number of school choices available to her. Indeed, further practices arguably restricted the choices further as they identified her child as having challenges both to the school and, crucially, to other parents. Thus, the she was now faced with the dilemma that in selecting for greater academic and social support, she was also selecting for a more social restricted school cohort.

Having learnt they could not rely on the school system to recognise and address their child's needs, parents of a child with a disability became more assertive within schools to the point where they were willing to remove their child from a school that failed to meet their expectations. That is, they increased their focus on academic achievement, demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+), and in removal from a familiar social environment, thus weaker social relations (SR+), enacting a *knowledge code* (ER+, SR–). However, this did not increase the school choices available to either of them.

7.4 DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

This chapter has brought together parents school choice decision-making with that of the ideal parent envisaged by parliamentary policy-makers. It has been able to compare the outcomes parents sought for their children with that of the 'ideal parent' through a comparison of the underlying principles each used for choice as expressed as the specialization codes of each (Maton 2014). These codes, which describe the 'rules of the games' (Bourdieu 2006), enable what is struggled over in the field to be made explicit. Analysis of school choice as it is idealised by policy-makers revealed a constellation dominated by an emphasis on academic achievement, which coded in Specialization was understood as demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+), which thus included both knowledge codes (ER+, SR–) and élite codes (ER+, SR–). Comparing this constellation with the underlying bases of parents school choices established that three out of four parent groups in this study demonstrated a *code match* with the 'idealised parent' of parliamentary policy makers. Specifically, this means credentialists, all-rounders and consolidators could all be considered 'ideal choosers'.

For credentialists, the similarity between the high stakes testing of the NSW school field and the high stakes testing in the school fields in their countries of origin meant their migrated aims and strategies from schooling again matched the school field. Such strategies are likely to be successful in the NSW school field particularly, which proportionately has a greater number of high performing academically selective schools than in any other Australian state, entry to which is via competitive exam (McGowan & Evershed 2018). All-rounder parents found a field well suited to the range of attributes, including academic achievement, they expected their children to achieve from schooling. As the most advantaged parents in the school field they were able to take advantage of a wide range of schools in their school selection strategies to select for the specific elements they sought. Consolidator parents, in seeking to repeat their own Catholic school experience, engaged in a field in which their prior school experience provided advantage in terms of the strategies to gain entry to access to their preferred school, while because of the size of the Catholic school system, they were able to find a school that matched to their needs. In these ways school choice enabled parents in this study to gain access to schools for their children that suited their needs and desires.

However, the cases of socially-disposed parents and parents of a child with a disability illustrated how the field does not suit all families. Despite embarking on a deliberate school choice process, socially-disposed parents produced a *code clash* with that of the ideal parent. That is, their emphasis on social skills and dispositions from schooling, demonstrating a

knower code (ER–, SR+), did not conform to the 'rules of the game' which primarily emphasise academic performance. Specifically, by approaching schools socially, creating and valuing the social networks of the school, and by seeking social dispositions and skills for their children as preconditions for later academic success, socially disposed parents and their children are vulnerable to misrecognition in schools, particularly as parents who 'don't care' about academic success.

The case for parents of a child with a disability also illustrates how the force of the knowledge code in the field produces a field that is not suited to all students. Here, even if parents were the right code – as was the case for Ronnie – or if they changed their practices to those more oriented to academic achievement, enacting knowledge code practices – as was the case for Rebecca – more school choice options did not open up. That is because in a competitive marketised system, schools also choose students. With the rules of the game dominated by a knowledge code, students who are unlikely to reward a school on this basis are not desirable for school recruitment. This indicates that each of these parent groups, socially-disposed parents whose focus for school choosing has a social basis and parents of child with a disability, whose children do not fit the ideal code of the field, are at a disadvantage in the school field.

Finally, three out of the four groups of parents also resembled the 'ideal parent' as described in the two orientations of policy makers. In focussing on academic achievement only, credentialists demonstrated a *code match* with the ideal parent described in the 'academic orientation' promoted by Labor speakers. In focussing on academic achievement and the development of social dispositions, all-rounder parents and consolidators demonstrated a *code match* with the 'values and standards orientation' promoted by Coalition speakers. However, parents with a social disposition, with their decision-making situated outside the knowledge codes had a *code clash* with both the 'academic orientation' and the 'values and standard orientation'. This means their decision-making did not conform to that idealised by either of the main political forces in Australia. This raises the question as to whether they are at a wider disadvantage as their decision-making is not represented as valid by the major political parties.

7.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has analysed the effects on parental school choice of a field dominated by the capital of academic achievement. This has been undertaken by comparing the basis of parent school choice of each parent group with the 'ideal chooser' described in policy-political

discourses in chapter 4. Through a description of the code matches and the code clashes of the specialization codes of the different parent groups with the specialization codes of the 'ideal chooser', the capacity of each group to play the 'rules of the game' has been analysed. This has demonstrated three parent groups – credentialists, all-rounders and consolidators – all match the field and thus choose a school as idealised by policy makers. However, socially-disposed parents have a code clash with the ideal parent, indicating they are not ideal choosers and are therefore more likely to be misrecognised in the field. Further analysis of parents with a child with a disability demonstrated that even if parents do play by the rules of the game in school choice, if schools consider their child likely to require additional academic support, they are unlikely to be chosen. This demonstrates disadvantage in the field is not simply overcome by the actions of parents, but it also endemic in a field in which academic performance is the key basis of legitimacy of the field.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to understand how parents made sense of school choice and through this, to examine how the individual school choice decisions of parents collectively affected families around them. This was to provide an insight into the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in school education. This has been undertaken by describing and analysing the high school selections of a group of parents in a case study area with an 'ideal market' and comparing their actions with how school choice is idealised as working in public-policy discourse. Drawing on the literature from the field, this thesis deduced a need to find a way to integrate the multiple intersecting elements that have been described as influencing parental school choice from previous school choice studies. These include parents self-described choice factors, parents' social position and the settings of a competitive and marketised school field. To address these, this study argued it was necessary to adopt an approach that went beyond empirical descriptions of choice factors or assigning parents to preconstructed social class or cultural categories, but rather to use an approach able to reveal the principles that underlay parents school choices. Such an approach needed to reflect parents' lived contexts and how this was structured by the wider influences on the school field itself, including the collection of schools parents were choosing between and were being chosen by. Most particularly, what was needed was a way of describing the varying capacities parents had to secure their desired school choices, including the influence of their own past experience in schooling, their current assets and the conditions in the local school field, informing both their knowledge of the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu 2006) and their ability to play it.

This research investigation focussed on parents' school choice actions in "Doongara", a defined case study area that represented an 'ideal market' in Sydney. Taking a qualitative approach, it included 28 semi-structured interviews with parents about their high school choices. These were analysed and compared with that of an 'ideal parent' and 'ideal choice process' as had been described from parliamentary discourses on school choice in federal and NSW state parliaments. These were contextualised with an account of the historic trajectory of

key institutions in the school field, including the influential role the field of political power has on the school field.

This study was framed around following research questions:

1. How is parental school choice constituted in the Australian school field, including how it is described and regulated?
2. What do parents seek from high schooling for their children?
3. How do parents seek to realise this through high school selection?
4. What do parents high school choices reveal about the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage in the school field?

To address these questions this study drew upon field theory, particularly the schemata of field, capital and habitus as conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1994; Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu 2005 [2000]; Bourdieu 1998; Bourdieu 2006; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992); and Legitimation Code Theory, particularly the dimension of Specialization as conceptualised by Maton (2014, 2016a,b). This enabled the development of a relational framework and language of legitimation for parents' choice processes in this field.

To establish the different positions in the field a detailed description was made of the key foci of parents' school choices and the practices they undertook to secure these. These were then analysed to determine the bases that underlay these practices. These were then compared to the underlying principles in the field as described in the 'ideal parent' and 'ideal choice process' developed from an analysis of parliamentary discourses on parental school choice. This revealed the 'rules of the game' and which parents' were most able to play this to their advantage.

Outlined below is a summary of the key findings of this research and a discussion of the implications of these. Each of the research questions is addressed within this discussion. In the summary that follows, rather than recounting the substantive results that have already been reported in the chapter, I emphasise what the dynamic model that has been created using field theory and the specialization codes from LCT has enabled to be revealed. Following this is an outline of some of the key substantive, methodological and theoretical implications of this research, including the potential of this research to enabling the imaging of new possibilities.

8.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study demonstrated while all parents in this research project actively participated in the same school marketplace and made high school choices on a consistent and rational basis as idealised by policy makers, the opportunities available to them in the school field were different. This was both in relation to the outcomes they were seeking from schooling and the schools available to them to choose.

Four different groups of parents have been described, based on their aims from schooling. Through analysis of these groups, parents' capacity to 'play the game' of school choice is described. This is both in relation to parents' effectiveness using their differing assets in the school field to secure their desired school choice outcomes, and also how elements within the school field itself structure which schools families are successful in realising their aims in. Particular attention in this analysis has been paid to the role academic achievement plays in parents school selection strategies. This was revealed to be important to all parents, even those who apparently downplayed its significance. However, there was a divergence between parent groups as to how academic achievement was to be realised from school choice and in schooling more broadly and the degree to which it should be foregrounded as a primary aim.

This analysis has revealed parents' capacity to play the game is not equally shared either in relation to the assets they were able to activate in the field to secure their school choices, nor how they were able use these to help realise their aims from schooling. This difference is crucial to understanding the different opportunities parents experienced in the field.

8.2.1 Understanding the 'rules of the game' of school choice in NSW

To understand how parental school choice has come to be constituted in the NSW school field and address the first research question, how parental school choice has evolved and is currently regulated in the school field of NSW was described. This was through an analysis of the historic trajectories of key elements that constitute the contemporary school field, with the principals of current regulation revealed in a constellation analysis of parliamentary speeches on school choice. The historic analysis outlined revealed the field of school education was primarily influenced by the field of government power, which exercised power over it through government legislation and regulation, and through school funding. School choice was a concept embedded within education from the start, even if there was a period from the mid

twentieth century where comprehensive schooling was the norm for most. It can be described as a *doxa* of the field (Bourdieu 1977, pp.165–7).

This analysis also revealed parental choice in the NSW school field is more restricted than it appears. In particular, I argue the field bends towards serving the interests of parents who could be broadly described as the professional middle classes, both in the forms of schooling available and the means of accessing these. This is especially in the creation and maintenance of school institutions aimed at developing distinction in students. These include academically-selective schools, independent élite schools and more recently, comprehensive schools with school specialties. The developments and maintenance of these has been driven by a desire to attract and retain middle-class parents. It is supported by discourses on academic ability, talent, and merit, all of which align with the interests of middle-class families. This affirms Connell's (2003, p.237) contention that the expansion of school choice effectively imposed the market system that had characterized elite school education across the entire system, including onto working-class families.

A separate strand of discourses centred on equity in schooling drove the expansion of comprehensive schools, a key intention of which was the development of a universal schooling form to avoid 'locking in' working class children to vocational education. However, while comprehensive schooling was intended to accommodate both equity and academic ability, the continued middle class drift away from public schools, which commenced in the 1970s, and the response of governments to this by increasing academic and performance specialty places in these schools, evidences the ongoing domination of middle-class academic and distinction-oriented concerns in the constitution of the school field.

How the field of political power idealises parental school choice was revealed through a constellation analysis of parliamentary discourses on school choice to produce a description of an 'ideal choice process' and 'ideal chooser'. This revealed the ideal choice process entailed parents undertaking a rational consideration of schools, assessed as those most beneficial to the child, particularly in relation to promoting academic achievement. Academic achievement was identified as the key capital of the field and, using the specialization codes, this was analysed dominated by stronger epistemic relations. Parliamentary policy-makers only differed as to whether the sole basis for parental school choice should be academic achievement, characterised as an 'academic achievement orientation' as exhibited by Labor speakers; or

whether choice should be based on academic achievement and the development of social dispositions, characterised as a 'values and standards orientation', by speakers from the Coalition. The specialization codes of each of these were analysed, revealing the 'academic achievement orientation' had a *knowledge code* (ER+, SR–) basis, and the 'values and standards orientation' had an *élite code* (ER+, SR+) basis. These two orientations represented ideal choosers. This provided the basis for operationalising an analytic description of *field* as there was now an 'ideal choice process' and 'ideal choosers' against which recounted actual parent school selection practices could be compared.

8.2.2 Why what parents want matters - conceptualising parents aims from schooling

To answer the second research question *What do parents seek from high schooling for their children?* – this study outlined what different parents described as important their children achieve from high school. These outcomes were recognised as key *capitals* to be gained from schooling. Grouping parents together by common aim, four groups were described: credentialists, who sought academic achievement, with the aim of their children going to a prestige course in university; socially-disposed parents who sought social skills including self-confidence and a sense of direction; all-rounder parents who sought academic achievement, social dispositions and cultural distinction; and consolidators, who sought academic achievement and social dispositions. That is, recognised key capitals from schooling enabled parent groups to be constituted based on their practices, rather than by relying on preconstructed categories.

To understand why such capitals were important to parents and to get beneath the surface *focus* of parents' empirical descriptions of their school aims, that is to understand the *basis* of parents' priorities from schooling, the capitals were analysed to reveal their specialization codes. These uncovered differing parental priorities:

Credentialists only sought academic achievement from schooling and downplayed the acquisition of social skills, dispositions or cultural distinction, demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and weaker social relations (SR–), a *knowledge code* (ER+, SR–). That is, what their children achieved from schooling was more important than who they become;

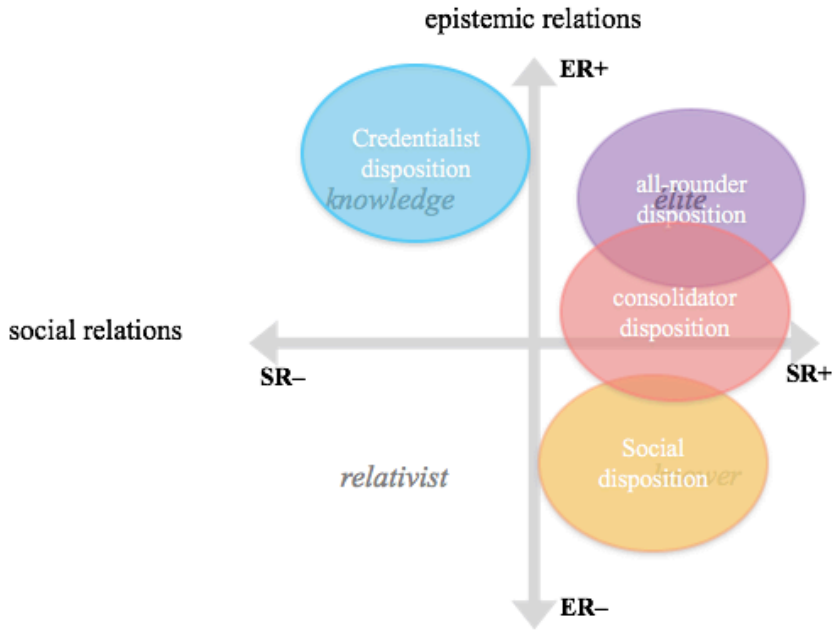
Socially-disposed parents downplayed academic achievement, seeking instead for their children to develop social skills, self-confidence and a sense of direction, demonstrating weaker epistemic relations (ER–) and stronger social relations (SR+), a *knower code* (ER–, SR+). That is, who their children became was more important than what they could academically achieve;

All-rounders emphasised both the acquisition of sufficient marks to enter university and the acquisition of skills in social leadership and cultural distinction, demonstrating both stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and stronger social relations (SR+), an *élite code.* That is, what their children achieved and who they became was important;

Consolidators also pursued academic achievement either to university or vocational level, and social skills, including self-confidence and a knowledge of self from high school. In this they were described as demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+) if their aim was university or weaker epistemic relations (ER–) if aiming for vocational studies. Their pursuit of social dispositions demonstrated stronger social relations (SR+). Consolidators therefore enacted an *élite code* (ER+, SR–) but had some *knower code* (ER–, SR+) practices in relation to outcomes from high school.

Placed on a specialisation plane as illustrated in Figure 8.1 the strength of this approach is evidenced, for it allows a nuanced positioning of parents to be described, relative to each other. Thus consolidators can be illustrated relative to all-rounders, even though they share some common aspects of their codes. This means parents' positions are not only able to be described in relation to the bases of their practices but also the relative strength of their relations to each other. This overcomes three significant weakness in factor-based and class-based research: first in describing the *basis* of parents aims from schooling, rather than differing foci, differing parents can be characterized without long empiric descriptions. Second, placed on a specialization plane, parents can be differentiated relative to each other based on their practices. Third, this dynamic model overcomes the built-in presumption of pre-categorisations such as social class or ethnicity and enables new instances to be described and added to the relational picture of the field.

***Figure 8.1* Four parent groups**



This comparative analysis of parents' narratives revealed that apparently common terms for the outcomes they wished their children to gain from high school including 'academic achievement' or 'social skills' hid differing meanings for parent groups. Parents also had differing benchmarks for what constituted success. For instance, academic success for credentialist parents meant entry into a desirable course at a prestige university, while for socially-disposed parents academic success entailed completing high school; social skills for socially-disposed parents included social conformity and knowing how to act, while for all-rounders this captured notions of social leadership. Further, parents in some groups verbally downplayed the importance of certain categories, while their actions towards achieving this indicated that rather than being unimportant, it was taken for granted, an *illusio* (Bourdieu 1996b, p.231). For instance, all-rounders and to a lesser degree, consolidators downplayed the importance of academic achievement in their interviews, but the former presumed their children would go to university and the latter hoped they would, with both being willing to take remedial action to ensure this. This reveals that relying on everyday language to describe parents aims from schooling fails to capture the meaning, variation or actual expectation that underlies parent responses. This again underlines the value of this model in enabling relative depiction of parents' meanings to be illustrated.

8.2.3 Analysing how parents seek to realise their aims through high school selection

To answer research question 3 - *How do parents seek to realise their aims from high schooling for their children through high school selection?* – the school selection strategies of parents in each parent group was described. This revealed parents strategies were consistent with their aims from high school: credentialists sought enrolment in schools they assessed as most likely to maximise their children's academic performance; socially-disposed parents sought schools in which they children would feel happy, settled and protected; all-rounders sought schools that provided programs that matched the range of attributes they were seeking for their children; consolidators sought Catholic schools that offered a sense of belonging, individualised support and discipline. That is, all parents can be described as embarking on school choice in a considered and rational basis.

Each parent group also sought to activate the capital they had in the field in order to achieve their school choices. However, parents had distinctly different capitals and capacities to activate these. Three of the four parent groups used financial capital to either purchase elite schooling, supplementary schooling or both. It was only socially-disposed parents who were almost entirely reliant on schools for educational instruction.

All parents also sought to use their previous experience to enable their school selections to be realised. Of particular interest here are credentialists who were able to use their previous knowledge of achievement in a high-stakes testing school environment, acquired overseas in their own schooling. This was an effective strategy as their practices, informed by a habitus attuned to high stakes testing, demonstrated a *knowledge code* and was thus revealed as a *code match* to the school field in NSW which also could be recognised as having a *knowledge code*, dominated as it is by high-stakes testing. Consolidators too deliberately sought a school field they were familiar with – Catholic systemic schooling – enabling them to confidently navigate that school systemic environment. In this way parents in each group can be described as having *habituses acting as capital*. The basis under which this can be recognised is the *code match* between the practices and the field. The group with the greatest disadvantage in this field were parents with a social disposition who frequently expressed their school choices in relation to what they didn't want their child to experience, that they had. This is reminiscent of the research of David et al. (1997) in the UK who described working-class mothers avoidance of schools they considered likely to provide a home for the racism they had experienced. However, as avoidance doesn't inform aims or capitals from schooling, this isn't regarded as a habitus acting as capital.

The value of this systematic relational description of parent practices, that brought together parents aims from schooling, capital, habitus and the mechanisms of the field, is revealed when analysing the common school selection factor of 'peer group'. All parents described peers as important in their high school selections. But each parents group put this to differing purposes. For credentialists, seeking like-peers enabled both a competitive learning environment to be created, furthering their aim of academic achievement from schooling, as well as providing a reassurance of safety, including that their child would not be bullied for their study disposition. For all-rounder parents, peers were part of the school ecology, and a diverse peer group was another cultural asset to help their children develop dispositional skills. Consolidators were seeking 'friends for life' for their children – with safe peers from families like themselves. Socially-disposed parents put peers work, not only seeking known peers to provide comfort and protection for their children – their key aim in a school – but through this, to create an environment in which academic achievement, particularly in the form of finishing high school, would take place. In this way, socially-disposed parents took their key asset in the school environment – their own social capital – and tried to enact the same strategy with their children.

8.2.4 Analysing field and the mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage

In creating a model that has enabled the underlying principles of parents' desires from schooling and practices in schooling to be compared both with other parents and the idealised parent as described in the field of political power, this thesis has provided an analytic and visual tool that illustrates advantage and disadvantage in school choice in school field. This is through a description of when the underlying principles 'code match' or 'code clash' with the ideal parent.

Advantage and disadvantage was particularly revealed in the relationship parents had to the dominant capital of the field, academic achievement. Based on the analysis of the principles of the field as set by the field of political power and the historic relations of the field, parents whose aims or practices matched the knowledge codes or the elite codes had an advantage. For instance, credentialists pursued academic achievement exclusively and were demonstrably successful in the range of strategies they used towards this. However, the success of these strategies – imported from their previous experience of academic performance in a high-stakes testing environment in their countries of origin and which thus constituted a habitus acting as

capital – was only possible because these also matched the underlying capital, and the high-stakes testing conditions of acquiring it, of the NSW field. That is, it was driven by the privileging of high stakes testing in each field. To put it another way, if NSW school academic achievement were to be measured in another way, it is open to question whether these same set of practices would be successful.

Parents whose school choice practices lay elsewhere than academic achievement and thus 'clashed' with the capital in the field were at a disadvantage, as it outlined above for socially-disposed parents. This also extended to students whose results were unlikely to enhance the published academic performance of schools in the field. This was particularly revealed in the two case studies of parents of a child with a disability. In each case the parents participated in very active school choice processes, seeking the educational supports they considered their children needed. However, in each case the parents' found their choices constrained. For one parent, this was because, despite their being one of the only socially-disposed parents to consider sending their child to a fee-paying independent school, they were unable to find a school willing take their child on with additional support. That is, their child did not match the type of student rewarded in the field. The other parent was able to find a school that provided additional supports, but this meant a more constrained social group, as, because the school was identified as supporting children with additional needs, it was avoided by many other parents. In each case this can be understood as an effect of a field in which academic achievement is the key capital.

In this thesis I argue this analysis reveals that disadvantage in school choice ultimately does not lie in parents' aims from schooling, nor how they seek to realise this in a school. All parents made their school choices on a rational basis for well-founded reasons – even socially-disposed parents who did not directly focus on academic achievement. Rather, what was most crucial in parents' capacity to realise their aims in school choice wasn't their educational decisions, it was the conditions created by their position in relation to others in the field and their position relative to the 'ideal chooser'. This was exemplified in the revelation that socially-disposed parents were the only parents relying on schools for schooling. All other parent groups used additional forms of supplementary education school to support their children, either remedially or directly to enhance performance. This meant even if socially-disposed parents were to choose the same schools as other parent groups and even if they were choosing for academic performance, they would still be at a relative disadvantage in educational instructional time.

8.3 SUBSTANTIVE CONTRIBUTION

The particular substantive contribution this thesis makes to school choices studies has been the importance of understanding how advantages and disadvantage in high school choice is created by the dynamic effects of the conditions in the NSW school field. Specifically, it is created by the primacy of academic performance intersecting with parents prior schooling and workforce experiences and current assets. That is, through the effects of field, capital and habitus, as revealed in operationalising these through the specialization codes (Maton 2014). This has revealed particularly that socially-disposed parents are engaged in their children's schooling and school choices, but in ways that are less likely to be recognised or rewarded in the field. Classically such parents would have been classified according to preconstructed categories, particularly based on 'class' or ethnicity. As socially-disposed parents had the lowest levels of education or economic capital of all parent groups they could have been classified as 'working class' or 'disadvantaged'. As they were the least likely to select a school based on its' academic performance they could readily have been misrecognised as typical of parents who didn't know, didn't care or had constrained choices so couldn't 'do' choice well. Such deficit approaches have long been associated with working-class parents, who are frequently presumed to lack ambition for their children. However, a two-step analytic process revealed parents were far more engaged in the *basis* of the field than they initially presented. Description of socially-disposed parents first focussed on the factors they considered important for school choice – social skills, dispositions and confidence (stronger social relations, SR+), while the important academic performance was downplayed (weaker epistemic relations, ER–) a *knower code*. Then further analysis of their choice practices revealed this was because they considered these social and dispositional qualities to be a necessary pre-condition for academic success in schooling, particularly in their focus on successful school completion and the development of a sense of vocation which could lead to further study. They thus aimed to turn practices with stronger social relations to academic outcomes, stronger epistemic relations. This surfacing of parent schooling intentions is important, for it renders visible a group of parents and their practices to illustrate both the basis of their code clash with the field, but also the academic work parents were doing.

It would be possible to write in a complex web of ways different parent groups illustrate groups previously described in research from the school choice field. Many of the practices of socially-disposed parents do resemble that of some other parents characterized as working-class or

disadvantaged in some other studies. All-rounder parents and consolidator parents also resemble some other advantaged, middle-class or cosmopolitan parents described elsewhere (Davies & Aurina 2008; Maxwell & Aggleton 2015; Wang 2016). Their practices do resemble those of other parents employing a 'concerted cultivation' approach (Lareau 2002, 2003, 2011), seeking a well-rounded education (Aitchison 2006; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington 2009) that can also be positional (Crozier, James & Reay 2011; Freund 2001; Power et al. 2003). Socially-disposed parents avoidance of negative schooling has some resemblances to working class parents described by Reay & Ball (1997). However, it wasn't the purpose of this study to reverse engineer class or social categories, but rather to point to a new relational way of approaching parent practices that reveals processes and logics that have been hidden until now. This was the case particularly with credentialists, who fit within an emerging body of research.

The practices of credentialists speak to a growing body of work examining the academic success of Asian-background students in education globally, popularly encapsulated in the 'tiger mother' concept in USA by Amy Chau (2011). This is particularly in relation to a set of descriptions characterising the home-based pedagogic practices of high-achieving Asian migrants and the ways they are shaping schooling and the school field. For instance, while credentialists situated themselves in the Indian middle-class, their intensive home-based pedagogy resembles the intensive home-study practices of the middle-class Chinese parents described by Spriprakash, Proctor and Hu (2016). They also shared similar dissatisfactions to a perceived lack of rigour in Australian schools as observed Ho (2019b) in her study of Asian-Australian parent practices. Credentialist parents desire for a more reciprocal relationship with schools and intensive home study echoes the work of Watkins and Noble (2013) who coined the notion of the 'scholarly habitus' to describe such dispositions. The particular contribution this understanding of credentialists brings to such works is first in expanding the defining attributes of such parents beyond ethnic, cultural or racial identifiers to a method for characterising the underlying principles they desire from schooling, encapsulated in the description of a 'credentialist disposition' and the identification of their intensive and focussed academic practices the enactment of a *knower code* in the specialization codes. Second, in emphasising the importance of field, this study underlines the importance of understanding schooling contexts both in the pre-migration and destination countries. For credentialists, the underlying principles of each school field – both characterized by an emphasis on academic performance in high stakes testing – meant their schooling and school choice practices in the new school field still produced a 'code match'. This has been more fully described in Aris

(2017). To also express this in Bourdieusian terms, this provides an illustration of how a particular parental habitus towards schooling can act as capital in a new school field if the field shares the underlying characteristics of the prior field.

In some of their practices credentialists also bear a resemblance to what Ball (2009) has termed the global middle class, a 'service class' or professionals and managers who move with their families around the world in the employ of multinational corporations. In his depictions of this group Ball, situates parents' school choice-making in global cities (Ball & Nikita 2014). In this study this was more closely expressed in the locations credentialists imagined in their childrens futures, most describing their children's post-university trajectories as potentially taking them anywhere. This is useful because it places parents' aspirational choices, particularly their aim for their children to attain a higher degree qualification from a reputable Australian university, within the context of a global marketplace for credentials. It also points to powerful influences in the school field for this group not only coming from the Australian economy, but a sense of possibilities or threats in the global economy.

8.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

This thesis has offered a method for operationalising Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus (1984, 1986, 1993). This is significant for as outlined in Chapter 2 Literature Review, while Bourdieu's work has frequently been applied to school choice studies, the majority of studies that do so have applied notions of 'capital' or 'habitus' singularly, rather than employ them in the relational schemata Bourdieu emphasised lay at the heart of these relations between them (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). However as Maton (2018) has outlined, operationalising this relationship is not straightforward and Bourdieu himself did not readily offer a way to do so. Maton (2018) describes how there is a missing element within Bourdieu's equation – and that is the means by which to operationalise this or show the missing 'x' variable. The use of specialization codes has been used to understand this missing 'x' in this field – that is, the basis of legitimation that underpins the school field and which is struggled for. This study, in using Bourdieu's schemata of field, capital and habitus with the elements both in relation with each other and with the specialization codes from LCT (Maton, 2014) has provided a theoretical and methodological way to do so.

The innovation of describing a 'legitimate choice' constellation to analyse the points of common agreement using the dimension of Specialization (Maton, 2014, 2016a,b) provided

the first building block for creating an operationalisation of Bourdieu's schemata of field, capital and habitus in this research study. Specialization explores practices in terms of knowledge-knower structures, whose organising principles are provided by specialization codes (Maton, 2014, 2016a,b). In this study this enabled a specific a *language of legitimation* to be created for describing and analysing the school *field* and the role of parental school choice within this. The development of a constellation analysis of parliamentary discourse on school choice helped reveal elements of the doxa of the school field. This includes the confirmation of academic performance as the uncontested basis of legitimacy in the field, providing a benchmark against which parent actions could be confirmed.

This framework for analysis provides a mechanism to reveal the struggles of the field, what is being struggled over and how different groups are positioned in relation to this. Most particularly, it enabled this thesis to reach behind an empirical *focus* to the *basis* of practices and the principles that lie beneath, revealing the underlying mechanisms of advantage and disadvantage as the work in the particular field under examination. What this research contributes is the creation of this dynamic model that reveals the underlying legitimacies that drive the school field, shaping and positioning all who interact within it.

8.5 UNEXPECTED FINDINGS

The alienation of parents of a child with a disability within the field was an unexpected and unwelcome finding from this research. Most particularly, the empirical descriptions of the struggles parents had in accessing the educational supports they needed for their child functioned as unwelcome signal that not all students are perceived equally, confirming some pre-existing literature on the subject. Roy (2016) for instance has detailed research showing schools are 'deliberately disregarding disability standards through rejecting school places, denying the opportunity of access to activities and offering minimal, if any, support to children with disabilities.' A recent NSW auditor-generals report (Department of Education 2016) reported one in four of the 300 respondents had been told there was no place for them in their local school. This points to deep systemic issues when working with these students. In this study when these parents' practices and experiences in the field were analysed, this revealed how a competitive school field set up to reward academic achievement does not have within its own reward system a mechanism to engage with students who will not provide a reportable reward for schools. This also reinforces a deficit message to parents and other students that such students are a threat to their own academic performance and are thus to be avoided. This

not only requires further research but also arguably provides the impetus for policy action that examines how these settings signal to schools the value of pre-selecting only some students – those most able to reward schools with academic achievement. To repeat what the mother of one of these students said in interview: 'We expect children to be able to get a good education. That's not an unreasonable expectation for every child. So that is their obligation to do that.' That the system does not encourage schools to do this is a problem in the system.

8.6 POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS AND WEAKNESSES

In a study of this size it is not possible to claim a generalisability of the group of families as family types. Nonetheless, the concepts that have arisen from these finding should have utility in wider studies. All of the parent groupings merit further study and further elaborations of the range of practices parents undertake in schools.

This study identified four different groups of parents based on their approach to high school choice. As these groups arose from the data – rather than from pre-selected categories – they ranged considerably in size. That is, while parents had been selected for interview to reflect an indicative range of social, cultural and geographic backgrounds, this did not result in equally sorted parent groups. One group particularly was small – all-rounders only consisting of four families. As a result, while there was much opportunity for rich description from these families, who all provided highly articulate and detailed interviews, the relatively small number captured in this designation means it is possible some essential characteristics of the group have been under-described or not yet recognised.

Additionally, the two case studies of parents of a child with a disability point to the need for further research in this area, particularly relating to the effects of field on school selection of students and school positioning in relation to perceived student populations. This particularly suggests further research that considers how other students are positioned in the field that is dominated by a metric of academic performance.

8.7 FINAL WORDS

This thesis has come full circle. Since I first was confronted by the question of school choice while holding my firstborn, I have chosen primary and high schools for my two children. I am,

like my subjects, familiar with the MySchool website. I am a veteran of many school open day presentations where facilities and programs are touted by enthusiastic teachers and which include inspiring senior students wheeled out in the hope you will see your hopes and dreams for your child reflected in them. I've had many schoolyard conversations with equally anxious parents. Yet in truth, for all the many hours, days and weeks spent agonising about these choices they will, objectively, make only small differences to the end results my children will receive when they finish school. More important will be the friendships, the *becoming* of high school. This is what they will remember. We are also fortunate. The schools around us are all good. Both my children have gone to public high schools. I was glad this was the choice I could make. Where I live such schools are well supported, so these also come with a community of like-minded peers. My children are having a middle-class upbringing, full of extra-curricular activities, dance, karate and sports at the local field with additional maths coaching when they need it. I am, if I am to be honest, an all-rounder and fortunate for having the sufficient money to be so.

When I was interviewing the families for this study I was struck by how every one of them said at least one thing I related to. Over and again parents hoped that high school would be a positive experience for their child. That the necessary learning would occur. That it would be a place their children could grow into good people, rather than a place that got in the way of this. But the HSC also loomed large. It is absurd schooling can be reduced to two numbers, but in NSW it can. When you sit for your final high school exams you get two marks. An HSC, which is a weighted summary of how well you've just performed and an ATAR, your ranking against all other students in the state. The latter determines your pathway to further study. All parents wanted school to be more than this, but its gravitational pull is hard to resist as the stakes are so high.

So even though we were searching for high schools in different parts of the city I found myself seeing my options through my subjects' eyes. Talking with credentialists about parent-teacher mutual accountability made me look closer at how teachers explained the specifics of how they would work with my child. After talking with all-rounders I looked at every school for its ecology of opportunities. Seen through consolidator eyes, schools were a place of belonging, while socially-disposed parents got to the heart of it all – will my child be happy? All these approaches should lead to a good school. The shame is, the way the system is currently set up, this isn't all schools.

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APPENDIX A
Speeches Log
Schools Assistance Bill 2008
Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008

#	Speaker	Date	Affiliation	House of parl.
1	Andrews, Kevin, MP	Tuesday, 21 October 2008	Liberal	House of Representatives
2	Arbib, Sen Mark	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Labor	The Senate
3	Baldwin, Robert, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Liberal	House of Representatives
4	Bidgood, James, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
5	Billson, Bruce, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Liberal	House of Representatives
6	Bishop, Sen Mark	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Labor	The Senate
7	Bradbury, David, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
8	Briggs, Jamie, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Liberal	House of Representatives
9	Burke, Anna, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
10	Butler, Mark, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
11	Carr, Sen Kim	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Labor	The Senate
12	Champion, Nick, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
13	Cheeseman, Darren, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
14	Crossin, Senator Trish	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Labor	The Senate
15	Fielding, Sen Steve	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Family First	The Senate
16	Fifield, Sen Mitchell	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Coalition	The Senate
17	Forrest, John, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
18	George, Jennie, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
19	Gillard, Julia, MP	Wednesday, 24 September 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
20	Gillard, Julia, MP	Tuesday, 21 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
21	Haase, Barry, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
22	Hale, Damian, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives

23	Hawke, Alex, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Coalition (Liberal)	House of Representatives
24	Hayes, Chris, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
25	Humphries, Sen Gary	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Coalition	The Senate
26	Irons, Steve, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
27	Irwin, Julia, MP	Tuesday, 21 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
28	Jackson, Sharryn, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
29	Johnson, Michael, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
30	Kroger, Sen Helen	Tuesday, 2 December 2008 Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Coalition	The Senate
31	Lindsay, Peter, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
32	Macdonald, Sen Ian	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Coalition	The Senate
33	Marino, Nola, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
34	Mason, Sen Brett	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Coalition	The Senate
35	Milne, Sen Christine	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Australian Greens	The Senate
36	Mirabella, Sophie, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Coalition (Liberal)	House of Representatives
37	Neal, Belinda, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
38	Neumann, Shayne, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
39	Neville, Paul, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
40	Perrett, Graham, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
41	Pyne, Chris, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
42	Ripoll, Bernie, MP	Tuesday, 21 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
43	Saffin, Janelle, MP	Tuesday, 21 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
44	Scott, Bruce MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
45	Sherry, Sen Nick	Monday, 10 November 2008	Labor	The Senate
46	Simpkins, Luke, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
47	Robert, Stuart, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
48	Sullivan, Jon, MP	Tuesday, 21 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives

49	Thomson, Craig, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
50	Trevor, Chris, MP	Thursday, 16 October 2008 Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives
51	Tuckey, Wilson, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008 Monday, 20 October 2008	Coalition	House of Representatives
52	Xenophon, Sen Nick	Tuesday, 2 December 2008	Independent	The Senate
53	Zappia, Tony, MP	Monday, 20 October 2008	Labor	House of Representatives

Total number of speeches	53
Total number of speakers	52

APPENDIX B
Speeches Log NSW

Education Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009
Education Further Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009

Education Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009				
	Speaker	**Date**	**Political Affiliation**	**House Of Parl**
1	Mr John Aquilina	24 June 2009, 11.24 A.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
2	Mr Mike Baird	24 June 2009, 12.49 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
3	Mr Andrew Constance	24 June 2009, 11.56 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
4	Mrs Dawn Fardell	24 June 2009, 12.26 P.M	Independent	
5	Ms Verity Firth,	18 June 2009, 10.44 A.M	Labor	Legislative Assembly
6	Ms Verity Firth	24 June 2009, 1.20 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
7	Ms Verity Firth	25 June 2009, 10.29 A.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
8	Ms Verity Firth	25 June 2009, 10.49 A.M.	Labor	
9	Mr Thomas George	24 June 2009, 1.18 P.M	Labor	Legislative Assembly
10	Ms Pru Goward	25 June 2009, 10.46 A.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
11	Mrs Shelley Hancock	24 June 2009, 11.09 A.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
12	Mrs Shelley Hancock	25 June 2009, 10.42 A.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
13	Mr Brad Hazzard	24 June 2009, 12.06 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
14	Mr David Harris	24 June 2009, 12.40 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
15	Mrs Judy Hopwood	24 June 2009, 11.57 A.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
16	Mr Kevin Humphries	24 June 2009, 1.08 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
17	Dr John Kaye	24 June 2009, 8.17 P.M.	The Greens	Legislative Council
18	Dr John Kaye	24 June 2009, 9.34 P.M.	The Greens	Legislative Council
19	Dr John Kaye	24 June 2009, 9.48 P.M	The Greens	Legislative Council
20	The Hon. Charlie Lynn	24 June 2009, 9.14 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Council
21	Ms Clover Moore	24 June 2009, 12.03 P.M.	Independent	Legislative Assembly
22	Reverend The Hon. Fred Nile	24 June 2009, 8.11 P.M.	The Christian Democratic Party	Legislative Council
23	Reverend The Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes	24 June 2009, 8.57 P.M	Independent	Legislative Council

24	The Hon. Robyn Parker	24 June 2009, 6.17 P.M. Resumes 8.00 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Council
25	The Hon. Robyn Parker	24 June 2009, 9.44 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Council
26	Mrs Karyn Paluzzano	24 June 2009, 11.01 A.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
27	Mr Adrian Piccoli	24 June 2009, 10.35 A.M	Coalition (Nationals)	Legislative Assembly
28	Mr Adrian Piccoli	25 June 2009, 10.32 A.M	Coalition (Nationals)	Legislative Assembly
29	Mr Greg Piper	24 June 2009, 11.53 A.M	Independent	Legislative Assembly
30	Mr Geoff Provest	24 June 2009, 11.39 A.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
31	Ms Lee Rhiannon	24 June 2009, 9.00 P.M.	The Greens	Legislative Council
32	Mr Anthony Roberts	24 June 2009, 12.30 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
33	The Hon. Penny Sharpe	24 June 2009, 6.17 P.M. 24 June 2009, 9.16 P.M	Labor	Legislative Council
34	The Hon. Penny Sharpe	24 June 2009, 9.40 P.M	Labor	Legislative Council
35	Mr Rob Stokes	24 June 2009, 1.04 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
36	Mr John Williams	24 June 2009, 11.45 A.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly

Education Further Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009				
	Speaker	**Date**	**Political Affiliation**	**House Of Parl**
1	Mr Greg Aplin	9 September 2009, 10.22 a.m.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
2	Mr Peter Besseling	8 September 2009, 6.27 P.M.	Independent	Legislative Assembly
3	Mr Steve Cansdell	9 September 2009, 10.52 A.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
4	Mr Andrew Constance	9 September 2009, 11.14 A.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
5	Mr Robert Coombs	8 September 2009, 5.10 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
6	The Hon. Catherine Cusack	9 September 2009, 6.04 P.M.	Coalition	Legislative Council
7	Mr Peter Debnam	8 September 2009, 6.54 P.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
8	Mr Victor Dominello	9 September 2009, 11.26 A.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
9	Mr Peter Draper	9 September 2009, 10.16 A.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
10	Mrs Dawn Fardell	8 September 2009, 5.04 P.M.	Independent	Legislative Assembly
11	Ms Verity Firth	2 September 2009, 10.10 A.M	Labor	Legislative Assembly

12	Ms Verity Firth	9 September 2009, 11.36 A.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
13	Mr Thomas George	9 September 2009, 10.08 A.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
14	Ms Pru Goward	8 September 2009, 6.30 P.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
15	Mrs Shelley Hancock	8 September 2009, 4.40 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
16	Mr David Harris	8 September 2009, 4.26 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
17	Mr Brad Hazzard	8 September 2009, 5.18 P.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
18	Ms Katrina Hodgkinson	9 September 2009, 11.01 A.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
19	Mrs Judy Hopwood	8 September 2009, 5.58 P.M	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
20	Mr Kevin Humphries	9 September 2009, 10.37 A.M.]	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
21	Dr John Kaye	9 September 2009, 6.23 P.M. 9 September 2009, 8.00 P.M.]	The Greens	Legislative Council
22	Mr Phil Koperberg	8 September 2009, 6.04 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
23	Mr Nick Lalich	8 September 2009, 5.33 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
24	Mr Gerard Martin	8 September 2009, 4.55 P.M	Labor	Legislative Assembly
25	Dr Andrew Mcdonald	8 September 2009, 6.42 P.M	Labor	Legislative Assembly
26	Reverend The Hon. Fred Nile	9 September 2009, 8.25 P.M.	The Christian Democratic Party	Legislative Council
27	Mrs Karyn Paluzzano	8 September 2009, 5.49 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Assembly
28	Mr Adrian Piccoli	8 September 2009, 3.58 P.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
29	Mr Greg Piper	9 September 2009, 11.20 A.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
30	Mr Geoff Provest	8 September 2009, 6.14 P.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
31	Ms Lee Rhiannon	9 September 2009, 8.34 P.M	The Greens	Legislative Council
32	Mr Andrew Stoner	8 September 2009, 5.40 P.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
33	The Hon. Henry Tsang	9 September 2009, 6.02 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Council
34	The Hon. Henry Tsang	9 September 2009, 8.42 P.M.	Labor	Legislative Council
35	Mr John Williams	8 September 2009, 6.46 P.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly
36	Mr Ray Williams	9 September 2009, 11.30 A.M.	Coalition	Legislative Assembly

Total number of speeches	72
Total number of speakers	45

APPENDIX C

High Schools in Doongara LGA[i]

School[ii]	Type	Enrolment 2013	ICSEA[iii] (2013) (Av 1000)
Westminster College	Independent (high fee), single-sex (boys)	1527 (K-12)	1163
Rosemount School for Girls	Independent (high fee) single sex (girls)	694	1160
Shelby Protestant School	Independent (low-fee), co-educational (K-12)	374 (K-12)	1116
St Brigids School for Girls	Catholic Independent (high fee), single sex (girls)	923	1112
The Arts High	Independent (high fee) co-educational	92	1088
Mundara Christian School	Independent (low fee), co-educational (K-12)	917 (K-12)	1084
St Mary's Girls	Catholic, (low-cost) systemic, single sex (girls)	1027	1078
St Thomas More	Catholic, (low-cost) systemic, single sex (boys)	1007	1073
Greystone High	Public comprehensive (with academic selective streams), co-educational	787	1068
Trinity College	Catholic, (low-cost) systemic, co-educational	983	1068
Doongara High	Public, comprehensive (with academic selective streams), co-educational	848	1047
Sacred Heart Ladies College	Catholic, (low-cost) systemic, single sex (girls)	1091	1033
Mount Elizabeth Girls	Public, single sex (girls)	1055	1035
Meadowlea Arts High	Public, comprehensive (with performing arts selective stream), co-educational	964	1022
College of the Holy Family	Catholic, (low-cost) systemic, co-educational	1182	981
Lachlan Macquarie High	Public, comprehensive, co-educational	1488	966
Bond High	Public comprehensive, co-educational	337	955
Holy Cross	Catholic, (low-cost) systemic, co-educational	418	954
Greenbank High	Public comprehensive, co-educational	732	937
Barford Boys High	Public, comprehensive, single sex (boys)	488	873

[i] While this list usefully indicates the scope of high schools in the Doongara local government area (LGA), families were recruited for this study on the basis their children attended primary school in the Doongara area. A small number of families interviewed had children who were attending or were to attend a high school outside but proximate to the Doongara LGA.

[ii] All schools have been de-identified and given pseudonyms

[iii] In the Glossary for the My School website, the ICSEA index is described: 'The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to enable meaningful comparisons of National Assessment Program – literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia. Key factors in students' family backgrounds (parents' occupation, school education and non-school education) have an influence on students' educational outcomes at school. In addition to these student-level factors, research has shown that school-level factors (a school's geographical location and the proportion of Indigenous students a school caters for) need to be considered when summarising educational advantage or disadvantage at the school level. ICSEA provides a scale that numerically represents the relative magnitude of this influence, and is constructed taking into account both the student- and the school-level factors.' (accessed 29.4.2015)

APPENDIX D
Demographic profile of Doongara

Income

Household income levels of Doongara in 2011 compared to Greater Sydney indicated slightly less households earned a high income and a higher proportion earned a low income. Overall, 17.9% of households earned a high income compared to 23.6% for Greater Sydney, while 20.5% of households earned a low income, compared to 18.3% for Greater Sydney.

Compared to the City of Sydney in 2006 Doongara had a lower proportion of residents from high income households (23.7 per cent of households in Doongara, compared to 29.5 per cent in the City of Sydney) and a larger proportion of low income households (29.5 per cent compared to 16.8 per cent).
(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006).

Highest qualification received

The educational qualifications of residents City of Doongara and the City of Sydney were comparable with no significant differences.

Qualification level	Percentage in Doongara	Percentage in Greater Sydney
Bachelor or Higher degree	26.2	24.1
Advanced Diploma or diploma	8.9	9.0
Vocational	12.9	15.1
No qualification	39.8	40.5
Not stated	12.1	11.3
Total persons aged 15+	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2011

Occupations

The most common occupations were professionals (23.3 per cent), clerical and administrative workers (17.8 per cent) and technicians and trades workers (13.4 per cent). The most common industries worked were manufacturing (10.8 per cent), Health Care and Social Assistance (10.8 per cent) and the Retail Trade (10.4 per cent).
The occupational range was broadly comparable to Greater Sydney, though Doongara had slightly more managers, clerical workers, technician, trade workers machinery operators, and labourers, and slightly less community and personal service workers and sales workers than Greater Sydney.

Occupation	Percentage in Doongara	Percentage in Greater Sydney
Managers	10.6	13.3

Technicians and Trades Workers	12.5	12.2
Community and Personal Service Workers	8.3	8.8
Clerical and Administrative Workers	17.3	16.2
Sales Workers	8.7	9.0
Machinery Operators and Drivers	6.2	5.7
Labourers	8.2	7.3
Inadequately described	2.2	2.0
Total Employed persons aged 15+	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2011

Employment

Employment rates in Doongara and Greater Sydney were comparable.

Employment status	Percentage in Doongara	Percentage in Greater Sydney
Employed	93.0	94.3
Unemployed	7.0	5.7
Total Employed persons aged 15+	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2011, from 'Doongara' Community Profile

Housing

The dominant housing tenure in the area is rental and in 2006 Doongara had a higher proportion of households in housing stress than in the Sydney city region (Doongara City Council 2009b).

Ethnicity and language spoken at home

Doongara has experienced considerable overseas migration and in 2011, 40 per cent of the population originated in countries where English was not their first language (ABS). The most common languages spoken at home were Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean and Hindi, and India, China and Lebanon (in that order) were the most common birthplaces for overseas born residents (ABS area profile). All three groups comprise a considerably greater proportion of the population than in the greater Sydney. Slightly more than half (52.6% of high school students living in the Doongara LGA lived in households where a language other than English was spoken at home (ABS, 2011 Census, Doongara).

Birthplace	Percentage of overseas born Doongara	Percentage of overseas born in Greater Sydney
India	8.2	2.0
China	6.8	3.4
Lebanaon	3.8	1.3

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2011, from 'Doongara' Community Profile

Religious profile

There has been a decrease in the percentage of the area that broadly identify with a Christian religion (down to 58.3 per cent in 2006, from 70.9 per cent in 1996) and an increase as those identifying with 'non-Christian' ones (18.4 per cent in 2006, an increase from 9.5 per cent in 1996). Of Christians, the dominant group remains Catholic, (29.2 per cent in 2006, slightly down from the 33.3 per cent identifying in 1996). A greater decrease was from those identifying as Anglican (from 19.1 per cent to 13.0 per cent). There was an increase in those identifying with Islam (5.0 per cent to 8.2 per cent), Hinduism (2.0 per cent to 5.3 per cent) and Buddhism (1.7 per cent to 3.5 per cent) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, 1996).

Number of children attending high school in Doongara in 2011

Government	5,935
Catholic	2,780
Non-Government	919

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census

APPENDIX E

School Choice Survey to Parents

Name of child _____ Class _____

High School _____

Please circle yes or no for the following questions:

1. Is this your first child to attend this school? Yes/no
2. If you have other children do they also attend high school? Yes/no
3. Does your child live in the catchment area for this school? Yes/no

Please give short answers to the following

4. About how many families, if any, did you know attending this school prior to your child starting here? _____

5. What number of high schools did you seriously consider your child attending?

   _____

6. Which other schools were they?

   _____

7. When did you first start considering which school your child would attend?

   _____

8. What were the key elements that led you to choose this school for your child?

   _____

Could you please tell us a few details about your family:

What is the language spoken at home?_____

What postcode do you live in? _____

How many people live in your household? _____

Do both parents live together? _____

What type of home do you live in? (circle)

House	Unit
Townhouse/terrace house	Other

Do you (circle)

Own your housing	Rent your housing

How long have you lived in the broad Doongara area? (circle)

Less than one year

1-5 years

6-10 years

10+ years

What is your highest education level? (circle)

Mother	**Father**
Left school before year 10	Left school before year 10
Finished year 10 high school (or similar)	Finished year 10 high school (or similar)
Finished HSC (or similar)	Finished HSC (or similar)
TAFE diploma (or similar)	TAFE diploma (or similar)
Undergraduate degree	Undergraduate degree
Post-graduate degree	Post-graduate degree

Current occupation

Mother _____ Father _____

Full-time/part-time/casual/self-employed Full-time/part-time/casual/self-employed

Would you be willing to participate in an interview or a focus group (group discussion) conducted out-of-school hours on how and why you chose this school? Yes/ No

Do you give permission for the researcher (Sharon Aris) to contact you?
Yes/No

If yes, could you fill in the following information (as is relevant for your family)

Mother’s name	Father’s name
Contact phone numbers	Contact phone numbers
Contact email	Contact email

APPENDIX F

What knowledge? Which knowers? How parents choose a high school for their children

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a study of how families choose a high school for their child to attend.

This independent research project is to investigate what families see as most important in a school education and what elements they consider to be essential for their child's future. The aim is to provide information to educators and government policy developers that will enhance high school education quality.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Sharon Aris. It will form the basis for the degree of doctor of philosophy at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Senior Lecturer, Dr Karl Maton.

(3) What does the study involve?

Initially this study involves filling out a short survey about how you chose your child's school and a bit about your family.

Following this, families may be invited to participate in an in-depth interview at a place and time convenient to them; or to participate in a group interview with other parents from the school, again, at a mutually agreeable time and place.

(4) How much time will the study take?

The survey should only take a few minutes to fill out and return via class teachers.

If you are invited to participate in an interview or focus group these are anticipated to last 60-90 minutes.

This interview will be recorded using an audio recorder. Focus groups will be recorded using an audio recorder and a video one. The recording will be kept in the researchers office and she will have sole access to this. This will be stored for seven years.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent to filling in the survey or participating in an interview or focus group. If you do consent - you can withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with The University of Sydney or with the [insert relevant oversight office].

If you submit a survey you can indicate you have only agreed to participate in the survey part of the study by ticking the box in relation to no further contact. This survey can be submitted anonymously, however once it is submitted this way your responses cannot be withdrawn.

If you participate in an interview you may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

If you take part in a focus group and wish to withdraw, as this is a group discussion it will not be possible to exclude individual data once the session has commenced.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to information on participants and what they said. Participants and participating schools will not be identified by name in any published report.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from the study.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

You are welcome to tell other people about your involvement in this study.

(9) What if I require further information about the study or my involvement in it?

When you have read this information, Sharon Aris will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Sharon Aris, sari7271@uni.sydney.edu.au or 0409 245 005.

(10) What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact The Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep

APPENDIX G
Parent Interview List (anonymised)

	Recruitment method	Interviewees	Child name/s	Primary school category	High school category
A	snowball	Alex & Christine	Sonia Helena Brenden	Catholic systemic	Catholic systemic (girls) Catholic systemic (boys)
B	screener questionnaire	Rosalie	Cassandra	public school	public school (comprehensive)
C[1]	screener questionnaire	Anh		public school	public academic selective
D	screener questionnaire	Prabal & Meera	Bina Anuj	public school	public high school (partially academic selective/enrichment)
E	screener questionnaire	Uditi	Uruashi Saji	public school	public high school (partially academic selective/enrichment)
F	screener questionnaire	Rebecca	Riley	public school	public high school (partially academic selective/enrichment)
G	snowball	Katherine	Orphelia Andee	Catholic systemic	Catholic systemic (girls)
HI	screener questionnaire	Rhonda	Jacinta Paula Rory	public school	public high school (partially academic selective/enrichment)
JK	screener questionnaire	Madu Lahiru	Jason	Catholic systemic	Catholic systemic (boys)
L	snowball	Sarah	Lexie Stella Joshua	Catholic systemic	Independent (catholic girls)
M	snowball	Jackie	Nigella Verity Dominica	Catholic systemic	Catholic systemic (girls)
N	screener questionnaire	Padma & Sachit	Sani	public school	public school (girls)
O	screener questionnaire	Aashi & Sadar	Sona Ravi Dev	public school	catholic systemic (girls) catholic systemic (boys)
PQ	screener questionnaire	Clara	Ahmed	public school	Public school (coed)
R	screener questionnaire	Rony	Gabrielle	catholic systemic	Catholic systemic (coed)
S	screener questionnaire	Lorraine	MaryAnne Ryan	public school	public high school (partially academic selective/enrichment)
T	screener questionnaire	Sabrina	Abe	public school	Catholic systemic (boys)
UV	screener questionnaire	Assi	Layla	public school	Public school (coed)

[1] Interview not included in data analysis due to poor quality of data due to language barrier

W	snowball	Donna & Martin	Rachel Kate	public school	Independent (catholic girls)
XYZ	screener questionnaire	Saachi & Sachetan	Padma Janani	public school	Public school (selective)
A2	screener questionnaire	Mario	Calista	Catholic systemic	Independent (catholic girls)
B2	screener questionnaire	Natasha	Bronson	catholic systemic	Catholic systemic (boys)
C2	screener questionnaire	Carolyn	Clarinda Anthony	public school	Public school (coed)
D2	snowball	Faith	Harriet Winston Michael Nate	public school	Public school (coed)
E2	screener questionnaire	Sophie	Joshua Roan	public school	Public school (coed)
F2	screener questionnaire	Patrick & Deborah	Lilliana Jacob Jack	catholic, systemic	Independent (catholic girls) Catholic systemic (boys)
G2	screener questionnaire	Marlene	Elijah Nicholas	public school	catholic systemic (boys)
H2	snowball	Katrina	Indigo	public school	Independent (girls)

Key informant interviews

JK2		Principal A		Public school	Phd book 1 pp 96-100
L2		Principal B		Public school	Phd book 2 pp 11-16

Appendix H

Semi-structured interview guide

1. Can you tell me how your child came to attend 'x' high school?
2. How did the school choice process unfold for your family?
    - How many schools did you consider?
    - What did you know about your chosen school already?
    - What stood out as important?
    - How long did it take you to choose a school?
3. What was important when choosing a school? What were the deal-makers and the deal-breakers?
4. Was this your first choice of high school to attend?
5. When did you start looking for a high school?
6. Who did you talk with about the school? Was this something a lot of your friends talked about or did most just choose the local school?
7. What has your child's experience of primary school been like? Where did they attend? Why did they attend this school? Did your child's primary school experience play a role in your choice for high school
8. How important was the peer group going to this school? Are the other families like yours or different?
9. What other schools were under consideration?
10. What role did your son/daughter play in the choice process? Were they given a say?
11. Do you have much to do with the school? Have you become involved in any activities?
12. Could you use your own high school experience to help you in choosing?
    (mother and father each captured)
    - What kind of school did you attend? Did this help you choose a school for your child?
    - How did you find school?
    - What education have you done since leaving school?
    - Has school and tertiary education made a difference to your life course?
13. Family work history
    - Employment (including level of autonomy, decision-making) continuous years employment
    - income (indicators of disposable – holidays in past 12 months – location, length, number of car/type of car, or household income range)

- family history of class
- ethnicity
- religion

14. What activities has your child participated in in the last week? How much free time do your children have?

APPENDIX I

Interview D coding sample

Interviewer & parents "Prabal and Meera"

	Descriptive & thematic codes (using "")	Specialization codes
Interviewer – so you wanted the competition P – to be clear, he does reports each and every day, otherwise he will become complacent and her won't study, whatever these things, so we formed that as one of the major factors	"competition makes you strong"	ER+
Interviewer – that's interesting. And that does that reflect what school in India is like – that you need to be that driven and competitive? – or is that more the ex-patriot community, the Indian community here M – no P – no, all of India is like that. And today when you see China and India, whatever people are there, that is why people are migrating from there Interviewer – oh ok	Extra work reflects competitive nature of schooling in India (and China)	ER+
P – medical especially, medical doctors, you go to UK, 90 per cent of doctors are Indian, 90 per cent Interviewer – I hadn't thought of that, so so there's so much competition in India because so many people are qualified, you have a better chance migrating M - yeah P – yeah, so within India, the competition is too high, so	Less competition here for work for smart Indians "Land of opportunity" "PLU"	ER+
M – yeah, in their class, in their school, children they score 99.8 – the ATAR 1- children scored same level P – the third decimal after the decimal, they select the first one	Indian system – live or die by the rankings [down to decile points] "rank pressure"	ER+
M – so we parents, all the time after our children, study, study (laughs) Interviewer – well that's an interesting thing, certainly Chinese parents push their kids to study, but do you find other groups don't push their kids as hard?	Social pressure on parents to make children study "people like us"	ER+
P - I think I had a bit of study discussion with colleagues, what I found here is, in preference to education, they give more emphasis on practicality of the person being groomed, whereas in Indian and Asian education, it's more of an analytical one, ah, numerical abilities, analytic, those directions Interviewer – ok P – here, for example, here some students, you hand a dollar and ask them to do shopping and come back again he cannot do it, but a local one, they will do it. That thing I have seen that. That is the hard part in Asian education I'd say. More the practicality for life, is, given here, is here to learn. I don't know how	Characterise Aus families 'practical skills', Indian families parent peers 'analytic skills' "analytic v practical" "Hard v soft skills"	ER+, SR–

APPENDIX J

EDUCATIONAL PROFILES – PARENTS' HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

PARENTS WITH A CREDENTIALIST DISPOSITION

Mother's highest level of education: credentialists/aggregated mother survey respondents								
		Left before Yr 10	Finished Yr 10	Finished HSC	TAFE Cert/Dip	Undergrad	Post grad	Total
credentialists	No.	0	0	0	2	1	2	5
	Percent	0	0	0	40%	20%	40%	100
	decile	0	0	0	0.40	0.20	0.40	1.00
mothers overall	No.	6	12	14	27	13	25	97
	Percent	6%	12%	14%	28%	13%	26%	99[1]
	decile	0.06	0.12	0.14	0.28	0.13	0.26	0.99

◊ Mother self-described occupations: teacher, nurse, auditor, homemaker

Father's highest level of education: credentialists /aggregated father survey respondents								
		Left before Yr 10	Finished Yr 10	Finished HSC	TAFE Cert/Dip	Undergrad	Post grad	Total
credentialists	No.	0	1	0	1	2	1	5
	Percent	0	20%	0	20%	40%	20%	100
	decile	0	0.20	0	0.20	0.40	0.20	1.00
fathers overall	No.	No.	6	12	14	27	13	25
	Percent	Percent	6%	12%	14%	28%	13%	26%
	decile	decile	0.06	0.12	0.14	0.28	0.13	0.26

◊ Father self-described occupations: finance, social educators, auditor, service manager

[1] Due to rounding, the percentage expressed totals to 99% for this row

PARENTS WITH A SOCIAL DISPOSITION

Mother's highest level of education: social disposition/ aggregated mother survey respondents								
		Left before Yr 10	Finished Yr 10	Finished HSC	TAFE Cert/Dip	Undergrad	Post grad	Total
Social mothers	No.	1	0	1	3	2	0	7
	Percent	14%	0	14%	43%	29%	0	100
	decile	0.14	0	0.14	0.43	0.28	0	0.99
mothers overall	No.	4	13	7	34	21	20	99
	Percent	4%	13%	7%	34%	21%	20%	99[2]
	decile	0.04	0.13	0.07	0.34	0.21	0.20	0.99

◊ Mother self-described occupations: retail worker, beautician, stay-at-home parent x3, sales, early childhood teacher, student x2,

Father's highest level of education: social disposition/aggregated father survey respondents								
		Left before Yr 10	Finished Yr 10	Finished HSC	TAFE Cert/Dip	Undergrad	Post grad	Total
social fathers	No.	1	2	2	2	0	0	7
	Percent	14%	29%	29%	29%	0%	0%	101[3]
	decile	0.14	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.0	0.0	1.01
fathers Overall	No.	6	12	14	27	13	25	97
	Percent	6%	12%	14%	28%	13%	26%	99[4]
	decile	0.06	0.12	0.14	0.28	0.13	0.26	0.99

◊ Father self-described occupations: services manager, construction worker, sales, builder, concrete cutter, form worker, director own business,

[2] Due to rounding, the percentage expressed totals to 99% for this row
[3] Due to rounding, the percentage expressed totals to 101% for this row
[4] Due to rounding, the percentage expressed totals to 99% for this row

PARENTS WITH AN ALL-ROUNDER DISPOSITION

Mother's highest level of education: all-rounders/aggregated mother survey respondents								
		Left before Yr 10	Finished Yr 10	Finished HSC	TAFE Cert/Dip	Undergrad	Post grad	Total
all-rounder	No.	0	0	0	0	3	1	4
	Percent	0	0	0	0	75%	25%	100%
	decile	0	0	0	0	0.75	0.25	
mothers Overall	No.	6	12	14	27	13	25	97
	Percent	6%	12%	14%	28%	13%	26%	99[5]
	decile	0.06	0.12	0.14	0.28	0.13	0.26	0.99

◊ Mother self-described occupations: music teacher, lawyer, business analyst, currently stay-at-home parent (former finance manager)

Father's highest level of education: all-rounders/aggregated father survey respondents								
		Left before Yr 10	Finished Yr 10	Finished HSC	TAFE Cert/Dip	Undergrad	Post grad	Total
all - rounder	No.	0	0	1	1	1	1	4
	Percent	0	0	25%	25%	25%	25%	100%
	decile	0	0	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
fathers overall	No.	No.	6	12	14	27	13	25
	Percent	Percent	6%	12%	14%	28%	13%	26%
	decile	decile	0.06	0.12	0.14	0.28	0.13	0.26

◊ Father self-described occupations: publisher, chef, real estate agent, finance manager

[5] Due to rounding, the percentage expressed totals to 99% for this row

PARENTS WITH A CONSOLIDATOR DISPOSITION

Mother's highest level of education: consolidators/aggregated mother survey respondents								
		Left before Yr 10	Finished yr 10	Finished HSC	TAFE Cert/Dip	Undergrad	Post grad	Total
Consolidators	No.	0	0	0	7	4	0	11
	Percent	0%	0%	0%	64%	36%		100
	decile				0.64	0.36		1
Mothers Overall	No.	6	12	14	27	13	25	97
	Percent	6%	12%	14%	28%	13%	26%	99[6]
	decile	0.06	0.12	0.14	0.28	0.13	0.26	0.99

◊ Mother self-described occupations: book keeper, accountant, dressmaker, supervisor, hairdresser, home maker, financial planner, sales agent, administrator

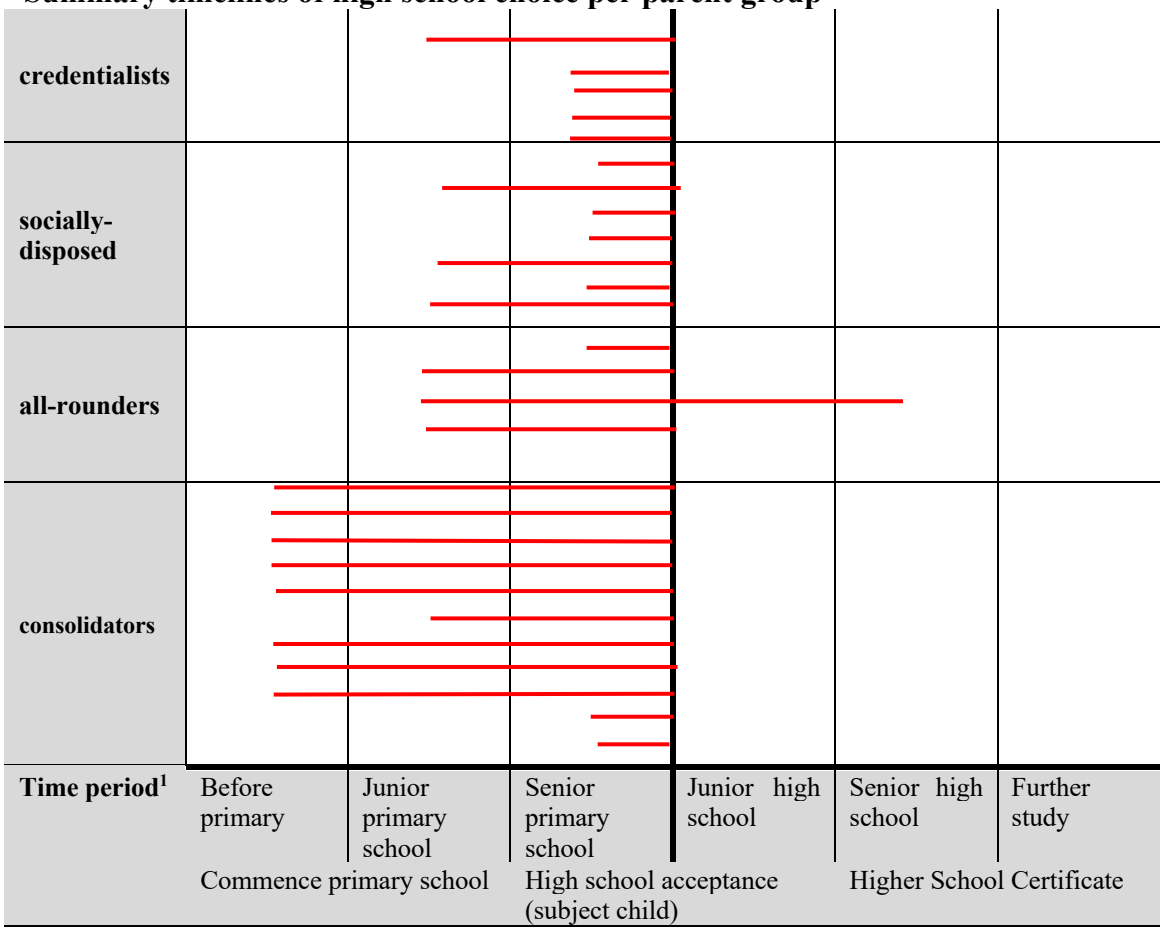
Father's highest level of education: consolidators/aggregated father survey respondents								
		Left before Yr 10	Finished yr 10	Finished HSC	TAFE Cert/Dip	Undergrad	Post grad	Total
Consolidators	No.	0	0	0	5	2	4	11
	Percent	0%	0%	0%	46%	18%	36%	100%
	decile				0.46	0.18	0.36	1
Fathers Overall	No.	No.	6	12	14	27	13	25
	Percent	Percent	6%	12%	14%	28%	13%	26%
	decile	decile	0.06	0.12	0.14	0.28	0.13	0.26

◊ Father self-described occupations: project manager, engineer, accountant x2, business owner, finance director, roofing contractor, finance manager, self employed

[6] Due to rounding, the percentage expressed totals to 99% for this row

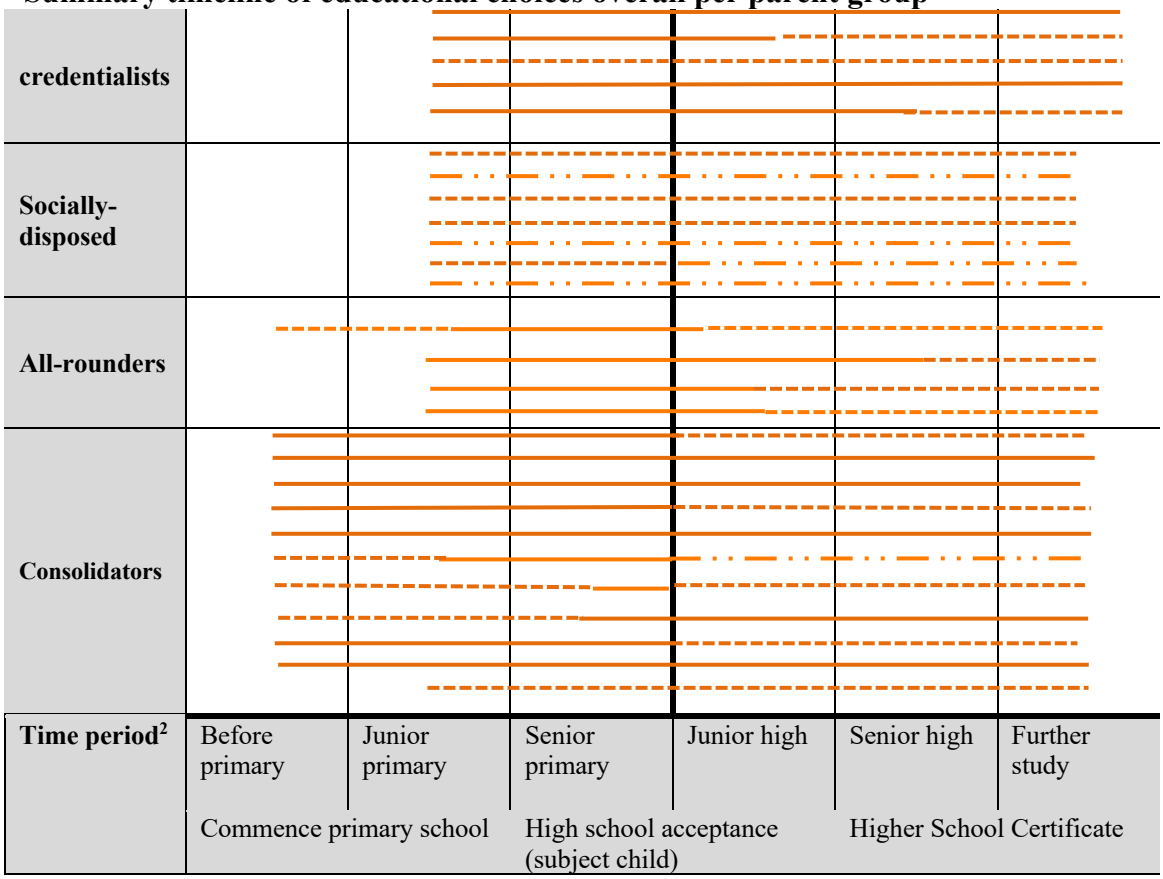
APPENDIX K

Summary timelines of high school choice per parent group



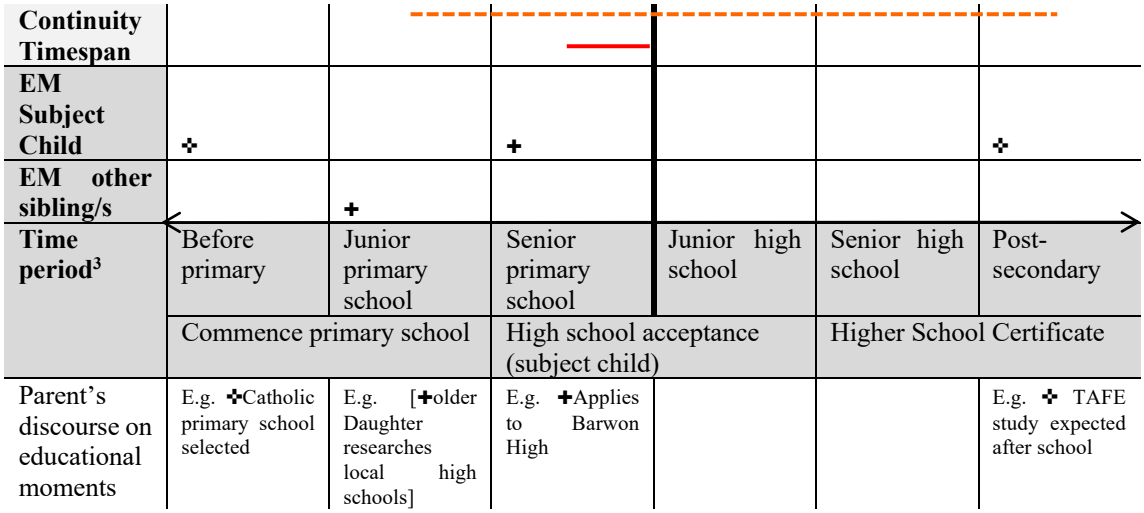
[1] Because this is reconstructed from parent interviews, the time period is based on parent recollection, which parents largely referenced as periods such as 'before school', or 'around year 5'

Summary timeline of educational choices overall per parent group



[2] Because this is reconstructed from parent interviews, the time period is based on parent recollection, which parents largely referenced as periods such as 'before school', or 'around year 5'

Timeline key



time point: position on timeline

educational moment[4] (EM) [illustrated as ✣ or ✚]: time point in which educational choice decisions are made by parents or decisions are anticipated by parents are needing to be made. For future decisions the strength of description of concrete particulars (for instance, type of institution, type of study, desired study outcomes) is noted. This includes decisions made in relation to primary, secondary and tertiary study.

high school choice moments: EM time points directly related to high school choice (illustrated as ✚, otherwise ✣). If a EM decision for a sibling directly effects the child who was the main subject of the interview this EM is noted in their timeline also as

time range: (red line) total length of time for high school choice process for child who was main subject of the interview

educational continuity: (orange line) indicates the strength of continuity between educational moments for the child who was the main subject of the interview. Strength is defined by the emphasis parental narratives placed on how past decisions effected present and future choices and the concreteness of the details provided. This is elaborated as:

- ‘strong continuity’ – parents discourse links educational practices including school choices to future post-secondary study options
- ‘weak continuity’ – generalised parental discourse on links between educational practices in high school including school choice and post-secondary study but no concrete particulars (indicated by an unbroken line between educational moments)
- ‘no continuity’- no link in parents discourse between high school choices and post-secondary study

The timeline enables a description of the key **focus of the research** specifically:

- The *time span* from start of a parent-nominated start of the high school choice process to commencement of high school
- The number of *educational moments* (expressed as the *educational choice volume*)
- *Continuity or discontinuity through time*: whether educational moments are presented by parents connected or disconnected

[3] Because this is reconstructed from parent interviews, time periods reflect how most parents described their educational decision points. Most parents referenced time in generalized blocks such as ‘before school’, or ‘around year 4’. In this chart, junior primary school refers to years K-3, senior primary school refers to years 4-6.

[4] *Educational Moments* references Bourdieu’s descriptions of the interplay between capital and habitus as involving moments of a whole, rather than discrete varieties of any thing, and in this the habitus itself is an expression of capital (Bourdieu 2006) *Forms of Capital*). This signals in these moments parental habitus also functions as a capital with possible value to their child in the educational environment.