An Exploration of Parental Choice of School by Rural and Remote Parents

Submitted by

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree of diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (Appendix A).

Signed: Date: 16/02/2013

Michael McCarthy

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ABSTRACT

The parental choice of school process is a complex undertaking for parents. This complexity is evident when considered from the nuanced perspective of school choice by Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas. The social and geographic contexts of these parents give rise to unique challenges which shape the ways in which they choose a boarding for their children. The parental choice of school process consists of psychical constructions and processes which help parents define their understandings of 'good' schools and with which they engage in the boarding school choice process.

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents select a boarding school for their children. This will illuminate the reasons for changing enrolment patterns at a Catholic boarding school in north-west Queensland.

The following research questions emerged from a synthesis of the literature. These research questions framed the research process:

1. How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?
2. How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of boarding school for their child?
3. How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?
4. How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

Given that this study focuses on the ways in which parents engage with the boarding school choice process, an interpretive approach has been adopted. A constructionist epistemology underpins the study, and symbolic interactionism and Indigenous methodology are the theoretical perspectives. The methodology for this research is case study. Data were collected from a total of 36 participants (Indigenous/Non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote locations; Principals of the research site school; Indigenous Support Personnel at the system level) using focus groups and one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

Five major conclusions of this study contribute to new knowledge about parental choice of boarding school.

Contributions to new knowledge highlight:

1. That rurality, remoteness and local context shape the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in the boarding school choice process. Experiences of isolation, disadvantage and social disconnection both shape parents' understandings of 'good' schools and influence their engagement in the boarding school choice process

2. Social class typologies (middle- and working class) are reshaped by Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents during their engagement in the boarding school choice process.

3. That Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents select boarding schools for different reasons. Indigenous parents are seeking access to quality education in order to socially mobilise their children. Non-Indigenous parents select boarding schools that will offer their children opportunities for personal development, social skilling, and experiences which may broaden their understanding of the world. Two new school chooser typologies emerge as a result of this study: the Enfranchised Chooser and the Rural/Remote Chooser.

4. That Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents choose Catholic boarding schools for their capacity to transmit universal values, rather than education in the Catholic faith.

5. That Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process. Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents considered the racial composition of boarding schools during the school choice process.

ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIC	Assistance for Isolated Children
AIEF	Australian Indigenous Education Foundation
ASGC-RA	Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Area
BGA	Block Grant Authority
CEO	Catholic Education Office
CFF	Catherine Freeman Foundation
DEST	Department of Education, Science & Training
HEP	Higher Expectation Program
IEP	Indigenous Education Program
ISQ	Independent Schools Queensland
LEA	Local Education Authority
MCCEETYA	Ministerial Council for Children, Education, Employment & Youth Affairs
NAPLAN	National Assessment: Literacy & Numeracy
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
NSW DET	New South Wales Department of Education & Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OP	Overall Position (OP) is a rank of 1-25 achieved by eligible Year 12 students used for the purposes of tertiary entrance.
PFTE	Parents as First Teachers Education
PISA	Program for International Students Assessment
RAIS	Remote Areas Incentive Scheme
RREAP	Remote and Regional Education Area Program
SES	Socio-Economic Status

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CHAPTER 1 IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

Identification of the challenges for parents living in rural and remote areas in accessing Secondary school education for their children, in light of changing enrolment patterns at the research site school led to this study which addresses the question: How do Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas choose a boarding school for their children?

In recent years, there has been a growing concern around school choice, giving rise to government initiatives focussed on giving parents greater scope of options for choosing a school for their children (Australian Catholic University, 2011). However, there is a lacuna in the research, particularly in Australian education research, with regard to the ways in which parents engage in the school choice process. Furthermore, there is a paucity of literature in the area of parental choice of school by parents living in rural and remote areas. This is an important nuanced view of parental choice of school given the social, cultural and geographical diversity of rural and remote Australia. The challenges of school choice faced by parents living in these areas are very different from those faced by parents living in large regional and metropolitan centres. For the most part, rural and remote parents have limited school options which often necessitate enrolling their children in distant boarding schools. This suggests that parents living in rural and remote areas may construct notions of education which inform their school choice in particularised ways. This invites further exploration. Consequently, this study explores the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas choose a boarding school for their children.

This chapter details the impetus of the study and the context of Australian parental choice of a Catholic boarding school. An overview is provided of the research context, significance of the research and research design.

1.1.1 Impetus for the Study

In my role as deputy principal at a rural Catholic boarding school, it was my observation that parents living in rural and remote locations were faced with complex school choice decisions which were primarily the result of their geographical location. Indeed, this was in contrast to my observations in schools in larger regional and metropolitan areas in which I had worked. The challenges for parents living in rural and remote areas are precipitated, naturally, by distance and relative isolation, but adding to this complexity is the reality of urban drift and the concomitant decline in social capital, alongside the perils of drought and flood (Alston & Kent, 2006). In addition, Indigenous parents living in rural and remote locations are often challenged by economic and social disadvantages which present these parents with unique circumstances under which school choice decisions must be made.

The contexts of these groups of parents shaped the way they constructed notions of education and, in turn, the ways in which they engaged in the school choice process. This had implications for the boarding school in which I worked, where there were observable changes in enrolment patterns over time.

1.1.2 Researcher Positionality

As the deputy principal at the research site school, I held a position of power that had the potential to shape the gathering and interpretation of data. However, in my time in this role, I had engendered the trust and respect of the participants which enabled them to freely and willingly participate in this research. The participants accepted me as researcher who had some insights into the challenges of their school choice decisions. It was my role to interpret these experiences and tell their stories responsibly and with care.

1.1.3 Parental choice of Catholic boarding school in Australia

The data in relation to enrolment patterns in Australian boarding schools suggest that there is declining demand by parents for this type of education for their children. Further, the most marked decreases are to be found in the Catholic sector (National Catholic Education Commission, 2008, 2011). This can be explained by demographic shifts in Australia which have seen population densities shift in favour of large metropolitan centres. This has resulted

in a narrowing of the demand-side for boarding schools on account of the decreases in population in rural and remote areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Nevertheless, boarding schools continue to operate in Australia which suggests that these schools continue to fulfil a need in the education marketplace, albeit limited.

For the majority of parents, the selection of a boarding school is out of necessity. In many rural and remote locations, options for secondary school are limited, and in some cases limited to nil choice. These parents often make significant emotional and financial sacrifices in order to give their children access to quality secondary schools. These parental experiences are unique and are inherently related to their home contexts, differentiating this group of school choosers from their larger regional and metropolitan counterparts. The home contexts of this parent group include small rural communities, remote and very remote locations and the ways in which these parents construct their understandings of education and quality schools are intimately connected with their geography.

1.2 The Research Site Context

1.2.1 The Rural[1] Township

The rural township in which the research site school is located is situated in a rural township south-west of a large regional centre in North Queensland. The city was established through the discovery of gold in 1871. By the end of 1872, 3000 people inhabited the town, swelling to 25,000 by 1899. The town grew to be among the largest cities in Queensland. By the end of the First World War, numbers began to decline as gold deposits became scarce. After this time, the town became the centre of the local shire and of education, particularly for boarding schools and colleges. Currently, the town consists of three P-12 boarding colleges, two of which are independent and the other Catholic, administered by the diocesan Catholic education authority (CEO). There are three State primary schools, one State secondary school and a School of Distance Education catering for students from Prep to Year 12.

1.2.2 Catholic Education in the Rural Township

The first Catholic primary school was established in the town in 1882 by the religious order The Sisters of Mercy. By 1892, a boarding college for girls to Year 12 was founded, which

[1] The term 'rural' (and related terms) is used in this study to describe a geographical context where agriculture and parallel industry is dominant. The term is also used to contrast with larger regional and metropolitan contexts. The location of the research site school is designated as 'outer regional' according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Area (ASGC-RA).

also included an intake of day students. The Christian Brothers established a day school in 1902 and then a boarding college by 1914 so that students from the northern and western districts might be accommodated (Beatson, 2002). By this time, the religious order, The Sisters of the Good Samaritan, had replaced the Sisters of Mercy in the Catholic primary and girls' boarding school. Boarding enrolments increased throughout the proceeding decades, peaking at around 450 boarders across both the boys' and girls' boarding schools. Numbers remained steady at approximately 300 students from the 1970s and through to the latter part of the 1980s.

In 1994, the principals of the three Catholic schools and stakeholders including the Catholic Education Office[2](CEO), Christian Brother's Leadership Team and representatives from the Board of the girls' boarding college, met to establish a working group that formulated a plan for the future operation of Catholic education in the town. By 1998, the three Catholic schools had amalgamated to form what is now a unified P-12 college. The newly formed college would be administered under the auspice of the Catholic Education Office.

The amalgamated school, the research site school, is a P-12 co-educational day and boarding college. It has an enrolment of 600 students, the majority of which are day[3] students. The school attracts students from as far north as Bamaga, to the Sunshine Coast in Queensland's south-east region, including Indigenous students from a number of regions. It provides fully contained boarding facilities on separate campuses for male and female students.

In the year of amalgamation, the number of enrolled boarders at the school totalled 240. By 2002, this number had increased to 260 students. In 2010, the total number of boarding students was 115. Day school numbers have increased since 1998 and have remained steady at approximately 600 students from Prep to Year 12.

1.2.3 An Overview of Boarding Life at the research site school

Defining Australian boarding has been deemed a difficult task according to White (2004) as a result of the dearth of sociological research in this area. Indeed, the traditional definitions of boarding school are derived from the elite boarding schools of England (also known as Public Schools) and American preparatory schools (Cree, 2000). Such boarding schools are defined

[2] Refers to the systemic education authority in the diocese.
[3] A 'day' student is a non-boarding student.

in terms of proportion of boarders to day students, where boarders represent 75% or more of the total school population (Weinberg, 1967). Few Australian 'boarding schools' meet this criterion. Therefore it is more appropriate to define Australian boarding schools as day schools with the provision of boarding facilities (Cree, 2000). This is an important distinction because day schools and *actual* boarding schools consist of very different routines, particularly where the day school predominates.

Boarding life is defined in structure and routine. The schedule (Monday-Friday) for a boarding student at the research site school is outlined in Table 1.1

Table 1.1 Boarding Routine

TIME	ACTIVITY
6:30am	Rise; Showers; Dress
7:00am	Breakfast
7:30am	Showers; Preparation for day school
8:00am	Depart for day school
3:30pm	Residence open; free-time/training/tutoring; showers
6:00pm	Dinner
6:30pm	Chapel
6:45pm	Study
8:30pm	In residence
9:00pm	Lights-Out (Years 4-9)
10:00pm	Lights Out (Years 10&11)
10:30pm	Lights Out (Year 12)

Students are able to access a range of extra-curricular activities offered in town, and many of the research site school students participate in a variety of activities, particularly sport. Students are also afforded time in the schedule to go on 'town leave' twice per week to purchase items varying in necessity. Although students' movements are restricted for reasons of supervision, they are given opportunities to be alone away from the residences.

Prospective students and their families are taken through the three boarding houses (one for girls; two for boys) as part of the enrolment process. Each boarding house was built and/or refurbished in stages. Therefore, each residence varies in terms of quality and/or disrepair.

1.3 The Research Problem and Purpose

This study arose from the researcher's experience as a member of senior administration at the research site school. At the commencement of the tenure period in 2005, it was observed that

the research site school's structure, particularly in relation to staffing, had not altered since amalgamation in 1998. Boarding facilities were offered on separate campuses for male and female students, meaning that facilities were duplicated on each site. Staffing levels had remained constant since amalgamation despite declining enrolments. Further, capital funds were used to upgrade boarding facilities and to refurbish existing facilities for use as classrooms. However, boarding enrolments at the research site school had been falling for some time. From the period between 2002 and 2007, there had been a 52% decrease in the number of boarding students. This was over ten times the national trend for Australian Catholic boarding schools in the same time period (National Catholic Education Commission, 2002, 2006).

By the end of 2005, the enrolment projections by the research site school's Board and Finance committees for the following year remained modest. Current students were not re-enrolling and families with long-standing connections with the research site school were enrolling their children in boarding schools in larger regional and metropolitan areas. It was evident that boarding school was still an option considered by families in rural and remote areas. However, there was a perception by families that the research site school was not meeting their needs. In addition there was an absence of a concerted effort to develop strategies to address the enrolment challenges. Some of this loss in enrolments was lessened by an increase in interest from families in a nearby regional centre. This nearby regional centre was not traditionally a feeder area, and the majority of these students were boarding on a weekly basis. For parents enrolling their children from this area, boarding was a final resort for their children whom they considered to be unruly, ill-disciplined or were socialising with an undesirable peer group. Generally, these students had previously been enrolled in State schools, had high levels of absenteeism, often presented with behaviour difficulties or had a familial background which was unstable or dysfunctional. The transition to boarding was very difficult for some of these students and their enrolment for many of them was often short-term.

The focus for marketing the research site school was at agricultural shows in small rural townships. These areas had represented the traditional target market for all the boarding colleges in the township. The research site school would usually send a staff member and enlist the assistance of a parent living in the area of each show. They would be responsible for informing prospective students and their parents of the research site school's offerings in

terms of boarding facilities, curriculum, extra-curricular activities, and fee structures. Additionally, the research site school also advertised in rural publications which included newspapers and magazines. In 2002, the research site school commissioned the consultancy firm AEC Group to review marketing strategies and make recommendations for future action. The review included a survey of families in the catchment areas for boarding enrolments. It identified the various reasons that parents selected particular boarding schools, the criteria of choice and the factors important to parents when selecting a school. The report also identified the following weaknesses for the research site school relevant to boarding enrolments:

- Academic performance (Overall Position [OP] results) of Year 12 students significantly below Queensland averages
- Low completion rate of students who begin Year 11 at the school.
- Expensive boarding fees when compared with other non-government schools operating locally.
- Being perceived as an "Ag[4] school".
- Being perceived as a school catering mainly for Indigenous students.

In order to address enrolment fluctuations it was recommended that the research site school update its overall image by adopting a new slogan and logo, extending advertising campaigns to include newspapers and direct mail packages, designing new signage and staging various promotional events. These recommendations were implemented by the school at a total cost of $42000. Although many of the weaknesses were addressed, boarding enrolments remained in decline.

Furthermore, there was an increasing interest by Indigenous families living in isolated areas seeking to enrol their children at the research site school. The majority of these students were eligible for government financial assistance such as Abstudy[5]. In 2007, Indigenous students represented over half of the research site school's total boarding population, and 10% of all Indigenous students enrolled in Catholic boarding schools in Queensland. This increase coincided with the growing emphasis on Indigenous education in the diocese and particularly funding priorities, articulated in the diocesan Indigenous Education policy and the Indigenous Education Strategic Directions Plan (2005-2008). However, the rapid increase in enrolments

[4] A school catering for students with an interest in agricultural studies.
[5] Federal government education funding program to support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

of Indigenous students placed some pressure on the human, learning and physical resources in the school. Of particular concern was staffing, particularly Indigenous support staff for the residences. The research site school found it difficult to offer their Indigenous students culturally appropriate support and this had consequences for their performance at school. The paucity of appropriate inter-cultural education for students also meant that conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students became commonplace. For the most part, there was a tacit attitude of discontent between these groups of students.

In the 2006 state-wide school performance data, the research site school ranked in the top five schools in the state for academic performance. Further, the school had a range of curriculum offerings consistent with larger regional and metropolitan secondary schools. Despite this, enrolments of boarding students remained in decline. It became evident that academic performance was not necessarily a key criterion (Seiffert, 1993) in the selection of the school. The downward trend in boarding enrolments over time was regularly considered in light of national enrolment trends for Australian boarding schools while overlooking the need for careful consideration of the available data. Closer analysis would have illuminated the obvious difference between local and national enrolment trends.

In 2007, a review of staffing levels across the entire research site school was undertaken. This process ended with a number of staff being offered redundancies, particularly in the areas associated with the boarding section. Consequently, staffing structures for the residences were altered, resulting in the worsening of student-staff ratios. This attracted some criticism from families who claimed that this compromised students' care and did not represent value in terms of their current fee commitment.

The research site school also experienced instability with regard to the Principalship. In August of 2007, the foundation principal of the research site school retired after 10 years of service. The successive principal announced his resignation seven weeks after deciding on a change in career, and a new principal was appointed for the commencement of 2008. There was uncertainty on the part of some teaching and boarding staff with regard to the research site school's future directions, given that the principal is charged with the responsibility of articulating the organisation's purpose (Sergiovanni, 1999) . This was particularly evidenced in meetings and informal discussions between the researcher and select staff. It was clear that the challenge for the township's boarding schools as providers of rural education was

sustaining enrolments in the context of the rural recession (Garnaut, 2006) and the reality of the urban drift (Alston & Kent, 2006). This challenge is unique given that the majority of Australian boarding schools are established in large regional or metropolitan areas.

The data indicate a gradual decline in population in rural areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006), as well as the decreasing demand for Australian Catholic boarding schools (National Catholic Education Commission, 2002; 2006). This situation is seemingly reflected in the changing enrolment patterns of boarding students at the research site school which is the focus of this research.

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in the boarding school choice process. This will illuminate the reasons for changes in enrolment patterns at a Catholic boarding school in north-west Queensland.

1.4 Research Design

The focus of this study is on the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas choose a boarding school for their children. Therefore the general research question for this study is:

- How do parents'/caregivers' living in rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children?

The literature review (Chapter 3) generated four research questions which, in turn, focused the design of the research:

1. How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?
2. How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of boarding school for their child?
3. How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?
4. How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

1.4.1 Epistemology

This study adopts constructionism as the underpinning epistemology. Constructionism asserts that reality, as perceived by human beings, is the result of meaningful social interaction (Stahl, 2003). That is, the lived world is shaped and influenced by interaction between human beings and constructionism is the study of meaningful human action (Neuman, 2006). This study explores the ways in which parents living in rural and remote areas engage in the boarding school choice process. Constructionism is most appropriate for this study in that it is an exploration of the ways in which the parent participants construct and define notions of education generally, and certain schools specifically, and the role that human interaction plays in school choice-making.

1.4.2 Theoretical Perspectives

This study focused on the ways in which parents construct understandings of education and schools, and how this shapes their engagement in the boarding school choice process. Symbolic interactionism is one of the theoretical perspectives of this study because it provided the most relevant lens through which to understand the meaning-making of parents during the school choice process. The root images of symbolic interactionism (the intermutual, socially constructed characteristics of humanness) were utilised in order to arrive at a holistic understanding of the meaning-making of participants as they engage in the boarding school choice process.

This study also incorporated the theoretical perspective entitled Indigenous research methodology. This theoretical lens enabled a deeper understanding of the ways in which Indigenous parents engage in the boarding school choice process by acknowledging and valuing the relevance of Indigenous knowledges. This theoretical perspective also shaped the research design by recognising that traditional forms of Western research problematise Indigenous people as objects of scrutiny and observation (Martin, 2003). Thus, this research is cognisant of both the methods through which data is gathered, interpreted and discussed, and the positionality of the (non-Indigenous) researcher.

1.4.3 Research Methodology

The case study was selected as the methodology for this research because it invited the examination of contemporary, naturalistic, cultural and interactional phenomenon in its real

life context (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995). The case study was selected as the orchestrating approach to the data gathering because it enabled a refined view of the ways in which participants constructed meaning around education and schools in rural, remote locations, and in relation to social class and cultural contexts.

1.4.4 Participants

The case study was bounded to include parents of students that had selected the research site school as a boarding school for their children. Through maximal variation sampling, parent participants were selected according to geographical location (rural/remote), socio-economic status, and racial background. These sub-groupings were representative of the research site school's boarding population and allowed conclusions to be drawn. Table 1.2 summarises the geographical profile of the parent participants according to the Australian Standard Geographical Classification –Remoteness Area [ASGC-RA] (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). This information is relevant where it is understood that human beings define and are defined by their interactional (lived) contexts (Charon, 2004; Hewitt, 2003).

Table 1.2 Geographical profile of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parent participants

ASGC-RA	Number of Locations	Number of Participants
Outer-Regional (Rural)	4	12
Remote/Very Remote	9	20

Indigenous participants resided across five of the total 13 participant locations. Of these 5 locations, two were historically designated as missions or reserves[6] (Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012). The remaining three locations were areas settled by Europeans as stock routes or for the location's agricultural potential. In all cases, Aboriginal reserves were established (Queensland Government, 2012b).

In addition, the current and previous principals were selected in order to provide a multi-perspectival analysis of the demographic changes at the research site school. Finally, system level Indigenous education workers were included as participants in order to glean a variety of perspectives and to provide insight into the socio-cultural dimension of Indigenous parent boarding school choice.

[6] Refers to government-designated land to which Indigenous people were forcibly removed.

1.4.5 Data Gathering Strategies

The data gathering strategies used in this study were:

Inspection Phase

- Focus Group interviews with Indigenous (n=6) and non-Indigenous (n=6) parents
- One-on-one semi-structured interviews with current and former principals (n=2), Indigenous Support Personnel (n=2)

Exploration Phase

- One-on-one semi-structured interviews with Indigenous (n=10) and non-Indigenous (n=10) parents.

1.5 Significance of the Research

This study is important because it contributes to a limited body of research relating to boarding schools. The downturn in demand for boarding schools (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2006; National Catholic Education Commission, 2002, 2006) may be one of the reasons for the decline in interest in boarding schools as providers of education, yet this is contrasted with an on-going concern for rural education and educational access of young people living in rural and isolated communities (Alston & Kent, 2006); Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Hillman, 2007; Seabrook, 1994). Boarding schools continue to be an option for families living in these areas. Insights from this study have the potential to inform the practice of boarding schools in Australia, particularly those schools that provide educational access to students living in rural and remote areas, and for Indigenous families in particular. This study provides insights into the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in particular contexts construct understandings of education and quality schools, and the ways in which they engage in the boarding school choice process.

Furthermore, this study serves as particularly useful to those boarding schools which exist outside of metropolitan and large regional areas with regard to ways in which these schools engage with the market as a viable alternative to the larger regional and metropolitan boarding schools.

Invariably parents are responsible for the choice of school into which their child is enrolled. This study seeks to determine what influences these choices, which may enable a broadening of understanding with regard to how boarding schools meet the needs of parents and their children. Further, the study sheds some light on the various perceptions of parents in relation to the ways schools meet the needs of their children.

From a local perspective, this study informs the ways in which the research site school markets to the various feeder regions by highlighting the most effective strategies identified by parents of continuing and prospective students. The study also provides insight into (i) the extent to which the research site school meets the various needs of its boarding students and (ii) current practices of the residential care of students enrolled at the research site school.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter One: Introduction identifies and defines the research problem and provides an overview of the context of the study. In particular, the research site school is introduced and the various contextual elements relevant to the changing enrolment patterns of the research site school. The chapter also provides a summary of the structure of the study and its sequence.

Chapter Two: The Context of the Research positions the research problem by providing an overview of the contexts of influence of the study.

Chapter Three: Literature Review presents the synthesis of the literature relevant to this topic. The literature review gave rise to salient themes which contributed to an understanding of the ways in which parents engage in the boarding school choice process.

Chapter Four: The Research Design presents the design and methodology of the study. In particular this chapter presents a conceptual articulation of parental choice of school utilising symbolic interactionism.

Chapter Five: Non-Indigenous Findings presents the findings from the non-Indigenous participants arising from both focus group and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the data was framed according to the emergent themes.

Chapter Six: Indigenous Epistemologies is a discussion of the ways of knowing and understanding the world of Indigenous people. This chapter also articulates an Indigenous research methodology and situates the researcher's positionality as a non-Indigenous person/researcher.

Chapter Seven: Indigenous Findings presents the findings from the Indigenous participants arising from both focus group and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the data was framed according to the emergent themes.

Chapter Eight: Discussion of the Findings presents a discussion of the research findings that emerged from Chapters Five and Seven respectively. This discussion is framed by theoretical statements entitled 'contentions' which emerged from a third-order analysis of emergent themes.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions and Recommendations presents a review of the research findings. Conclusions and recommendations are offered.

CHAPTER 2 THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the research study which the ways in which rural and remote Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents choose a boarding school for their child. The parent participants of this study live in unique contexts that influence the ways in which they engage in the parental choice of school process. The following sections of this chapter illuminate the elements and areas of influence that shape the parent participants' constructions of education, notions of 'good' schools and their choice-making decisions. These sections are as follows:

- School choice in Australia
- Indigenous Australia
- Rural education
- Enrolment trends in Australian boarding schools.

2.2 School Choice in Australia

The issue of school choice as a political ideal is a feature of the educational landscape in Australia, as it is in other countries. However, genuine school choice does not exist in Australia in the same way that it exists in the United Kingdom and parts of the United States and elsewhere. Over the last thirty years in Australia, there have been increases in funding provisions for non-government schools. Thus, parents can 'choose' between fully-funded government school, a partially funded [non-government] Catholic or independent school, or unsubsidised home schooling (Buckingham, 2001b).

At the centre of the arguments around school choice in Australia is the distribution of school funding by state and federal governments. It is argued that increases in funding to the non-government school sectors have created an education market based on neo-liberal education policy. Such a policy is fundamented by a belief that the economy should be free to operate as an open market, free from regulation, and significantly decentralised (Campbell, Proctor, & Sherrington, 2009). This, it is argued, has commoditised education, peripheralised public education and embedded the potential for social class creaming by extending choice only to those who can afford it (Campbell et al., 2009).

The funding of Australian non-government schools is complex. Funding to the non-government school sector is made according the Average Government School Recurrent Cost (AGSRC) and is the average cost associated with the education of a student in the public sector. Non-government schools receive government funds according to the socioeconomic status (SES) of their school community. Each student is assigned to a census collection district and a district disadvantage index is established for individual schools, determined by the level of education, occupation and income profiles of the particular census collection district. The way in which a school is indexed determines the percentage of AGSRC they receive (Caldwell, 2010). Schools with high disadvantage indexes receive less government funding than those with lower indexes. The *Review of School Funding*, a major review by government of education funding has been undertaken in Australia and reached its conclusion in 2012. Governments and education stakeholders are analysing the implications of this review for their respective sectors with a view to having a finalised funding model in 2013.

From an economic theory perspective, introducing competition in education has the potential to raise standards by bringing extra pressure on performance, and by allowing individuals to exercise freedom of choice and control over their education choice decisions (Australian Catholic University, 2011). Indeed, evidence in Australia suggests that parents do exercise choice. With the exception of one capital city, more than 50 percent of parents send their children to non-government schools. Surveys completed in the last 10 years indicate that a large number of parents whose children are enrolled in government schools would choose a non-government school if they had the financial resources to do so (Australian Catholic University, 2011; Caldwell, 2010).

While this operation of the education market is evident in metropolitan and large regional areas where an array of government and non-government schools exists, this is less the case for rural and remote areas. Furthermore, choice of school is non-existent in many remote areas where there is often a single, government provision of education. In relation to secondary school choice, parents living in many rural and remote areas have very limited or no choice (Pearson, 2011). Indeed, in most remote locations, parents must either opt for Distance Education, home-schooling or boarding school. Thus, the school choice landscape is one shaped by geography and the permutations of school choice politics in Australia has very little relevance to those living in locations where school choice is non-existent.

In Queensland, the move of Year 7[7] into secondary school has precipitated a focus on the provision of education to those families living in geographically isolated areas. The report entitled *A Flying Start for Queensland Children*, acknowledges the lack of choice available to families living in isolated locations and the additional challenges faced by parents in the selection of secondary school for their children. The State government has suggested that it will review its funding arrangements for students living in rural and remote locations, and this may facilitate an increase in capacity for families to have some choice, albeit in a limited way and from a restricted array of education options (Queensland Government, 2012a).

2.2.1 School Choice and the Research Study

While the political mechanisms around school choice have relevance mainly for highly urbanised areas, the principles underpinning school choice are pertinent to this study. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous parent participants in this study are faced with important school choice decisions which are underscored by their relative geographical isolation. The various limitations of their local contexts are influential on parents' school choice making and help to shape their constructions of education, 'good' schools and their aspirations for their children.

The following section moves to an overview of Indigenous Australia in the context of the research study in order to bear out the historical, social and political influences on the provision of education to Indigenous people generally, and their exercise of school choice, in particular.

2.3 Indigenous Australia

The pre- and post-colonial history of Indigenous people in Australia is rich, diverse, dangerous and tragic. Indigenous people have inhabited Australia for more than 70,000 years and during this time established clan and tribal territories. These clans and territories were not socially interconnected. Rather, they represented their own cultural, spiritual and linguistic heritages which points to the diversity of Australian Indigenous culture.

At the time of European colonisation, the population of Indigenous people of Australia ranged from between 600,000 to one million (Clarke, 2002). However, not dissimilar to other countries colonised by Europeans, the Australian Indigenous people did not acquiesce to a

[7] Year 7 is the first year of secondary school in most Australian states. The Queensland government determined that Year 7 would be the first year of secondary school, commencing in 2015.

form of cultural ‘give and take’. Indeed, the Indigenous inhabitants sought to preserve their cultural heritage which led to an unstable relationship between the peoples:

> Each felt that the other race was uncouth and did not know how to behave properly or lawfully, and the original dispute over the invasion and unauthorised occupation by the British of Aboriginal lands quickly developed into a wider cultural conflict of truly tragic consequence in the history of Australia (Clarke, 2002, p. 19).

This resulted in the colonisers defining Indigenous people as primitive and devoid of any cultural heritage or value. This attitude and the claim of *terra nullius (“empty land”)* laid the foundation for the future experiences of disadvantage and disenfranchisement by Australian Indigenous people.

2.3.1 Missionaries, Missions, Reserves: The ‘saving and protecting’ of Indigenous People in Queensland.

The perceived primitiveness of the Australian Indigenous people also meant that they were among the ‘spiritual and cultural poor’ who were seen by non-Indigenous people as in need of Western spiritual and cultural enlightenment. Prior to the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld.)* a number of religious organisations founded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander missionaries, which were established in central locations and often well removed from the traditional lands of Indigenous people (State Library of Queensland, 2012). These missions were founded for multiple purposes: (i) to remove Indigenous people from larger settlements and towns; (ii) as a form of cheap labour; and (iii) proselytising and conversion to Christianity (Short, 2008; University of Queensland, 2012).

> The goal of the mission was to bring the gospel to the people, rescue the lost souls, and guide them back towards the ideal state. … Not realising what they were subjugating, the missionaries regarded this as a justifiable act. With no understanding of ‘native’ structures, they imposed remedies and reforms that they saw as universal. Indeed, because the missionaries intended the reforms to be well ordered, they were proud of their achievements (Nakata, 2007, p. 23)

With the enactment of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld.)*, government reserves were established whereby the totality of Indigenous people's lives were under the control of the State. Furthermore, those religious organisations that operated religious missions, were given authority under the Act to carry out not only their own work, but also that of the State (State Library of Queensland, 2012). This Act and its replacements, the *Aborigines Preservation and Protection Act* and the *Torres Strait Islander Act*, removed a number of rights from Indigenous people including, voting, free movement, the possession of alcohol, access to the lands of their birth, access to the justice system, and marriage. Indigenous people could be and were, by law, forcibly removed from their homes; had their children removed from their homes without proof of neglect; and were forced to work for minimal wages (University of Queensland, 2012). The principle underpinning the protectorate system was that Indigenous people, in reserved tracts of land, would establish agricultural settlements based on the English village model and desist from resisting the colonisers' claims to land ownership. However, this ideal did not come to fruition and with unregulated squatter settlement, Indigenous people were forced to the edges of White settlements to suffer physical and mental degradation. It was at this point that Indigenous Australians first received a form of government welfare (Short, 2008). The prevailing Darwinist mentality at the time justified the eradication of Indigenous people with reference to natural selection. Indeed, this eradication was a hallmark of colonial progress.

2.3.2 Biological Absorption, Removal and 'The Stolen Generations'

Indigenous people were classified into two biological groups: (i) 'Full-blood' was a reference to Indigenous people that had an unbroken line of Indigenous descent; and (ii) 'Half-castes' referred to Indigenous people of mixed descent. By the beginning of the 19th Century, it was widely regarded that 'full blood' Indigenous people were on the path to extinction and this matter would take care of itself. Of more pressing concern to government authorities was the increasing population of mixed descent Indigenous people. The problem of 'half-castes' was thought to be solved through the science of eugenics. This kind of thinking was supported by Australian governments, which was centred on 'breeding out the colour' of Indigenous people and was enshrined in the *Native Administration Act (1936).* The Act prohibited sexual relations between Aborigines and Europeans and required Indigenous people to seek permission before being able to marry. All children under the age of twenty-one were effectively under the control of the Protector (Short, 2008). Indeed those children who were

deemed to be of mixed descent were removed from their families to undergo cultural absorption in order that they could effectively contribute to society. This removal took place within missions and reserves through the establishment of a dormitory system. Indigenous children were also forcibly removed from their families through employment. Children as young as seven years of age were sent to reserves and settlements to work, and were often segregated in these locations. These children were subjected to physical and sexual abuse. In 1915, it was remarked by one official that over 90 percent of girls sent out to work on a particular mission returned pregnant by a white man (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). This process of child removal continued into the post-war era, where the principle justification for this action moved from eugenics to assimilation:

> …the Government is not going to allow white and near white children whether their parents are black or white to remain on the Settlements at the cost of the tax payer. You have to educate coloured people to make the sacrifice to have their children adopted and so give them the chance to enjoy the privileges of the white community [Cornelius O'Leary, Director of Native Affairs, speaking at a Superintendents' Conference in October 1960] (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

The process of colonisation, in particular the Stolen Generations, has and continues to have a significant effect on Indigenous Australians. The sum total of this process has resulted in the widespread experience of socio-economic disadvantage by Indigenous people. Indeed, Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group in the country evident in high rates of infant deaths and adult mortality, poor school retention, lower income, high rates of unemployment and welfare dependence, elevated levels of imprisonment relative to non-Indigenous Australians to name a mere few (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010). Despite the political, social and educational rights extended to Indigenous Australians as a result of the 1967 Referendum, the generational disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people would have long-spanning implications.

2.3.3 Implications for Education

In the last thirty-five years there has been a clear policy focus on Indigenous education at both the state and federal levels of government. The commissioning of numerous reports into the state of Indigenous education commenced in 1975 as a result of the Karmel Report in Australian Education. The Karmel Report was one of the most significant reviews of Australian education ever undertaken. The Karmel Committee concluded that, at a policy level, it was unable to address Indigenous education issues and subsequently recommended a separate review of same. As a result, the National Aboriginal Consultative Group was established in 1974 and commenced work on the first significant report into the education of Indigenous Australians (Schwab, 1995). From here, the findings from reports into Indigenous education over the last three decades show significant gaps in literacy and numeracy relative to non-Indigenous Australians. The most recent report – The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2011-2014 – endorsed by all state governments outlines both the policy principles for Indigenous education and strategies for addressing educational disadvantage. Specifically, the Plan outlines the priority areas of school readiness, parent and community engagement, school attendance, literacy and numeracy, quality leadership and teaching, and pathways to post-school options (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood and Youth Affairs, 2010).

The demographic and geographic profile of Indigenous Australia brings to light both the diversity of the Indigenous population and the policy and practical challenges of Indigenous education. In 2006, half of all Indigenous Australians were 21 years or younger. Children 15 years or younger comprised 38 percent of the total population (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). From a geographical perspective, 68 percent of Indigenous Australians live in regional and remote parts of Australia, with 28 percent of the total Indigenous population living in the state of Queensland. This geographical profile presents unique challenges for the education of Indigenous people given that regional and remote areas suffer the greatest degree of social disadvantage (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

2.3.4 The Indigenous Context: Situating the study

This examination of Indigenous Australia is important in that it provides a historical and contemporary basis for understanding the complexities of life as an Indigenous Australian, particularly in relation to the ways in which Indigenous parents choose schools for their

children. The Indigenous participants in this study are from either rural or remote communities in Queensland and all, to varying degrees, suffer the disadvantage which was wrought on them by colonisation (Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012). Insights into the Indigenous parents' constructions of education and their school choice decision-making are illuminated by an understanding of their historical, social and cultural contexts.

2.4 Rural Education in Australia

Conceptions of rural life in Australia are steeped in the traditional romanticised notion of the bush from which has emerged a deficit understanding of rural life and communities (Arnold, 2001, p. 6). Such conceptions have been reinforced through Australian art, poetry and prose. Indeed, the depiction of rural schools conjures images of dilapidation and disadvantage:

> It was built of bark and poles, and the floor was full of holes
> Where each leak in rainy weather made a pool;
> And the walls were mostly cracks lined with calico and sacks –
> There was little need for windows in the school…..
>
> And we learnt the world in scraps from ancient dingy maps
> Long discarded by the public-schools in town;
> And as nearly every book dated back to Captain Cook
> Our geography was somewhat upside-down
>
> (Goodwin & Lawson, 1990, p. 259)

Such understandings were further developed as a result of a predominant and prevailing metro-centrism (Falk, 2001). The outcome of this is not surprising given that the majority of Australians live in large metropolitan cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Such a deficit view of rural Australia is underscored by the on-going drought, declining commodity prices, the dismantling of industry, and evidence of the on-going trend of urban drift (Alston & Kent, 2006). Young people between the ages of 15-24 years (Kirstein & Bandranaike, 2004) identify particularly with this view. Understandings of rurality are reinforced through the positing of binary oppositions such as "centre and periphery", "progress and decline" (Moriarty, Danaher, & Danaher, 2003, p. 135). Furthermore, the ready association of rural with 'agriculture' augments the idea that the contribution of rural communities to Australian life centres on farming and primary production. As a result there is a predominating myth that peripheralises rural communities with regard to the nation's economy and broader future (Sher & Sher, 1994). The fact that such a view is a myth is apparent when exploring the data

which show that only 17% of people living in rural communities are actually farmers (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000).

Negative understandings of rural life in Australia also apply to the provision of education in these regions. Such understandings are derived from the preconception that metropolitan education is superior given the diversity of choice and the accessibility and availability of curricular and extra-curricular resources. Superiority is also defined through the perception that metropolitan schools achieve better academic outcomes, including the matriculation to tertiary education (King & Bond, 2000; Stevens, 1995). There is a perpetuation of a destructive pattern whereby families feel compelled to leave these communities in search of better opportunities for their family and children in particular. This pattern often results in the decline of population density and the subsequent reduction in the provision of key services (Preston, 2000). Additionally, there is a resultant decline in critical mass in rural areas, particularly evident in the level of education of residents. Thus, those who leave rural areas are better educated than those who stay (Bourke, 1997) and schooling is 'residualised by "middle class flight"' (Preston, 2000, p. 2).

Contributing to the disintegration of rural Australia is the tendency to associate rurality with agriculture which results in the rejection of other industries in these areas, including education (Moriarty et al., 2003). Consequently, this colours the way in which the community perceives the quality of the provision of education in rural areas (Macgarvey, 2005). It is often naively presumed that rural schools are hamstrung in crucial areas which are a direct result of the misaligned understanding of Australian rural life.

Although often over-stated, some of these negative views of rural education are not unfounded. It is apparent that the level of education in rural areas, particularly for those involved in the agricultural industry are less well educated, with fewer than 50 percent of people living in these areas having completed four years of secondary education. As a national comparison, over 70 percent of the labour force in Australia has completed the last four years of formal schooling (Black, Duff, Saggers, & Baines, 2000). Furthermore, the rate of participation in education, particularly at the secondary level, is also lower in the rural sector compared with metropolitan schools. This is clearly discernible in the data, which indicate that students living in rural and remote areas have lower achievements in reading, writing and numeracy when compared with their metropolitan counterparts (MCCETYA,

2006). The OECD's 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) [8] data indicate that rural and remote students are underperforming in the areas of science, mathematics and information communication technology (ICT) as compared with their peers in metropolitan areas (Haalebos, 2008). Moreover, the inequities for rural and remote Indigenous students are apparent in the data in the areas of literacy and numeracy. There is a persistent decline in achievement across years 3, 5 and 7 when controlling for demographics (MCCETYA, 2006). Further, the retention rate of Year 12 students is lower in rural and remote areas in comparison with students attending metropolitan schools (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000; Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers, & Runberger, 2004). A proportion of this difference is credited to the drought, resulting in parents withholding education for their children for financial reasons (Alston & Kent, 2006). Moreover, students from rural areas are vastly under-represented in post-compulsory education as a result of limited access to secondary education, financial disadvantage and the necessity to relocate to urban centres (Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2004). However, research would indicate that socioeconomic status is more predictive of educational disadvantage than rurality (Black et al., 2000). This research shows that low SES urban areas suffer the same types of disadvantage as their rural equivalents. In contrast, however, many rural youth perceive that metropolitan areas offer greater opportunity in terms of further education and stable employment (Alston, 2002). Ironically, the school curriculum in rural schools is geared towards encouraging young people to leave their home towns of origin (Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk, & Mulford, 2000). This further contributes to the social and human capital drainage of these communities.

The negativity surrounding education in rural areas has serious implications for the human and social capital in these communities. Education contributes to the development of knowledge and skills of people living in rural areas, and assists with the ways in which these places respond to rapid economic change, the likes of which heavily impact on rural and remote communities especially (Black et al., 2000). Schools also contribute to the social capital of small communities. Schools provide young people with access to the formal and informal social networks that give them access to resources and social opportunity (Johns et al., 2000). Indeed, research indicates that the level of social capital in rural communities is a reliable predictor of student retention rates, more so than financial and human capital

[8] P.I.S.A is an international evaluation of education systems by OECD drawn from data from testing of 15 year old students in participating countries/economies.

(Teachman, Paasch & Carver (1997) in Johns et al., 2000). More broadly, the school is often the focal point of a rural community. Schools are able to draw in and connect various other community organisations, which further contributes to the social capital in rural communities (Johns et al., 2000).

In addition to the student related issues, the challenge of attracting and retaining quality teaching staff to rural areas is an ever-increasing one (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000). Moreover, the effects of school leadership drain in rural communities cannot be underestimated. The research indicates that school leaders are important contributors to the maintenance of community linkages in rural towns (Johns et al., 2000). This staffing issue is not isolated to the teaching profession. Rural and remote areas face continuing difficulties in attracting professionals such as doctors, nurses, lawyers and so on. This paints rural areas as lacking in vibrancy and opportunity – a picture readily adopted by school leavers living in these communities (Black et al., 2000).

State and federal governments have introduced programs to redress these issues, particularly the educational access for students and the provision of quality education in rural areas. The Rural and Remote Education Access Program (RREAP) is a State government funded program for government and non-government rural schools (Queensland Government, 2011). Funding is directed to schools to support the provision of educational, cultural and social opportunities. Access to the funding is submission based. Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) is a Commonwealth funded programme targeting families living in geographically isolated areas. Families apply through Centrelink[9] for funds to assist with costs associated with educating school aged children. The eligibility for funding is met according to certain criteria, which include distance from the nearest appropriate state school, accessibility of transport and special education requirements. Boarding Allowance and Additional Boarding Allowance are provisions within the AIC program to assist parents with the costs associated with boarding school. Funding is not means tested, with the exception of Additional Boarding Allowance (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008a).

In addition to government funding programs, *The National Framework for Rural and Remote Education* (2001) was designed to establish a national framework for the development of

[9] Centrelink is the federal government social security department

agreed policies and support services for rural and remote education (MCCETYA, 2001). The framework detailed 'enablers' that are considered essential for the successful provision of meaningful education in rural areas. These 'enablers' included personnel, the provision of a relevant curriculum, equitable access to information and communication technologies (ICT), multiple modes of delivery, the establishment of effective community partnerships, and resourcing (MCCETYA, 2001, p. 6).

The Queensland government's *Rural and Remote Education Framework for Action (2006-2008)* sought to respond to the sustainability of education in rural and remote areas. The framework acknowledges that the prosperity of these communities is dependent on access to high quality education, and that this provision is necessary given that rural and remote students account for 24.8% of all students in Queensland (Queensland Government, 2006, p. 1). The framework's 'key drivers' are reflective of the MCEETYA national framework and include relevant and engaged curriculum, respecting cultural diversity, ICT and multimodal delivery, personnel and workforce capability and environments and resourcing (Queensland Government, 2006, p. 3).

Government and non-government sector schools have established incentive schemes to encourage quality teachers to establish their careers in rural areas. The Remote Areas Incentive Scheme (RAIS) offered by Education Queensland[10] provides eligible teachers with cash and leave incentives in an attempt to encourage teachers to remain in rural and remote communities. Catholic education authorities offer a similar scheme to teachers willing to teach in these communities. Such schemes are an acknowledgement of the unique challenges of education in rural and remote communities

The provision of quality education in rural locations is a key factor in the sustainability of rural areas. It is clear that there is a deficit view of rural education which continues to contribute to population leakage in these areas. This is particularly the case for young people between the ages of 15-24 years, where there is the prevailing view that larger regional and metropolitan areas provide greater access to education and training, and the provision in these areas is of superior quality. Such a perception is reinforced by educational data which indicate lower retention rates and underachievement when compared with metropolitan

[10] Education Queensland is the public education provider in the state of Queensland

schools. As a result, there has been further governmental attention, evidenced in the concerted policy development by both state and federal governments in the area of rural education.

While it is clear that the rural sector is receiving special governmental policy attention because of unique contextual circumstances, there is a dearth of empirical research in more nuanced areas of rural education. For instance, there is limited discussion in the literature which makes the distinction between day and boarding students, despite the fact that data are gathered across the three school sectors (Young, 1998). While some of the data sets may include boarding students, this data is not forthcoming. The explicit inclusion of boarding students and their families is important if a complete view is to be had of education in rural areas. Boarding students constitute an important component of rural school enrolment, particularly from the perspective that parents of these students engage in a different and often complex school choice process from parents of day students.

In addition, the role of rural parents generally in the school choice process is either absent from the literature, given cursory attention (King & Bond, 2000; Seabrook, 1994) or is treated as a corollary of the original impetus of the research (Baker, 1991). The experience of students, in terms of school transition, attitude and motivation, as well as school effectiveness is prominent, as are critiques of policy initiatives of the different levels of government (Alston & Kent, 2006; Arnold, 2001; Black et al., 2000; Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Funnell, 2008; Hillman, 2007; James et al., 1999; King & Bond, 2000; Kirstein & Bandranaike, 2004; Sher & Sher, 1994).

The place and influence of Indigenous people in rural education with regard to school selection is conspicuously unavailable, while curriculum, pedagogy, and ideology are favoured in the literature (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007; de Plevitz, 2007; Pedersen, Dudgeon, Watt, & Griffiths, 2006).

2.5 Enrolment Trends in Australian Boarding Schools

Australian boarding schools were established in an attempt to respond to the educational needs of people living in geographically remote areas. For the most part, enrolment in such schools was dominated by rural students where boarding school provided access to education, and secondary schooling in particular. The vast majority of Australian boarding schools have

either on-going or historical affiliation with religious groups, most notably Christian denominations which include Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian. Many of these schools have since been laicised but maintain the religious identity of the school (Australian Education Network, 2008).

Australian boarding schools exist mostly in or near metropolitan or large regional areas and cater for a range of educational needs. However, these schools are to be considered quasi-boarding schools or, rather, day schools with a boarding provision according to Weinberg's and Kalton's definitions (White, 2004). For the purposes of this study the term 'boarding school' will be used. Further, boarding schools can be divided into two distinct categories – elite and non-elite (Cree, 2000). Australian boarding schools that are considered elite have close institutional ties with the British Public School tradition in that these schools reproduce these traditions to varying degrees. The Kings School, Geelong Grammar, Scotch College and The Anglican Church Grammar School are such examples. Boarding schools classified as 'elite' consist of small boarding populations relative to the day school, with Geelong Grammar the exception. Non-elite boarding schools are variously located. For instance, 13 out of the 28 Queensland boarding schools listed with the Australian Boarding Schools Association are situated in rural or larger regional areas (Australian Boarding Schools Association, 2008). While these schools continue to provide for students from rural and isolated areas, there is a declining demand for boarding schools across sectors.
From the period 1997-2006, there has been a 15% decline in full-time boarding students across all non-government sectors (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2006). The decline in demand for boarding is most marked in the Catholic sector (National Catholic Education Commission, 1997). From the period of 1997 to 2010, there has been a 10% decrease in the number of Catholic boarding schools in Australia (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2006; National Catholic Education Commission, 1997, 2011). Moreover, there has been a 24% decline in enrolments in Australian Catholic boarding schools for the same time period (National Catholic Education Commission, 1997, 2011). Additionally, Australia has experienced changes in population demographics, with the most significant declines occurring in isolated rural areas especially those affected by drought (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; National Catholic Education Commission, 2011). Such shifts in population densities are suggestive of unfavourable conditions in the rural sector which have subsequent implications for employment and financial security. Furthermore, there is an evident gradual decline in the number of 'farm families' in Australia,

most notably in the northern regions of Queensland (Barr, 2004). It is these families who have traditionally considered boarding school as an option for their children. Families who choose to stay in rural localities with limited educational provision can do so with the ever-increasing access to fast and reliable technology, namely the Internet (Alston & Kent, 2006). This enables children in these families to avail themselves of initiatives such as virtual schooling and i-school (Internet-based schooling initiatives), which are rapidly taking the place of traditional forms of distance education (Education Queensland, 2008).

However, while the quantum of enrolments has been declining in Catholic boarding schools, there is increasing interest in the role boarding schools may play in the provision of education for Indigenous people living in rural and remote areas of Australia (National Catholic Education Commission, 2011). This demand has been fuelled in part by federal government initiatives which have aimed to support Indigenous education nationally. ABSTUDY is one such initiative which assists with feeding the demand for boarding schools. Although means tested, there are a number of financial provisions and entitlements which support the enrolment of Indigenous students at boarding schools. These entitlements include Away From Home Allowance, School Fees Allowance and the U16 Boarding Allowance (DEST, 2008). Furthermore, the Indigenous Education Programme (IEP) 2005-2008 has further strengthened the focus on Indigenous education by promoting increases in funding according to proscribed performance indicators which are founded upon MCEETYA priority areas (MCCETYA, 2005).

One of the major funding initiatives arising out of IEP is the Indigenous Boarding & Infrastructure Programme. The former Howard Coalition government allocated $50 million dollars to the boarding schools sector to enable infrastructure development or refurbishment that would build capacity into these schools to increase enrolment of Indigenous students. The funding was allocated to states and territories according to need, with Queensland receiving $23.2 million (DEST, 2008). Schools were required to apply to their local Block Grant Authority (BGA) to access the funds, with the compulsory provision that applicant schools were already catering for a minimum of 20 Indigenous students.

The increased access to boarding schools by Indigenous students has been given further impetus through the support of notable Indigenous leaders. Former Northern Territory Education minister, Marion Scrymgour and Indigenous leader Galarrwuy Yunupingu have

recently pledged their support for the provision of boarding facilities for Indigenous students (Lucchinelli, 2008).

Fundamental to this demand is the undergirding idea that young Indigenous people must operate in two worlds: the world of their Indigenous culture and heritage; and the world of Western civic life (Pearson, 2009b; Sarra, 2006). It also highlights that access to quality education through quality schools is essential for Indigenous people in the broader project of eliminating the experience and consequent effects of social disadvantage. On the Indigenous education landscape, there have been two recent key figures – Chris Sarra and Noel Pearson - who have been proponents of the notion that, through education, Indigenous people must preserve their culture and come to an understanding of what it means to successfully participant in an ostensibly 'white' Australian society.

Further, initiatives developed by the Cape York Institute for Policy & Leadership headed by Noel Pearson provide additional evidence for the broad political support of the provision of boarding education for Indigenous students. The Higher Expectations Program (HEP) developed by Pearson and the Institute identifies and supports academically capable Indigenous students from Queensland across the regions of the Cape, Yarrabah and Palm Island, to complete secondary school and make the transition to university. The program is financed by the Macquarie Group and selects boarding schools on the basis of academic performance and rates of tertiary offers. There are more than 50 students participating in the program in boarding schools along the eastern seaboard (Cape York Institute for Policy & Leadership, 2007). This initiative is borne out of Pearson's view that quality education cannot be provided in remote communities. He asserts that governments have tried and failed to offer a secondary school provision in these locations. Pearson posits that all Indigenous people that have succeeded in education and make key contributions to Indigenous issues were educated at boarding schools (Pearson, 2009c).

The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) is a non-profit organisation which aims to support the learning of over 2000 Indigenous students. The foundation has a partnership with the federal government and the corporate sector to provide $40 million dollars in funding for Indigenous education which will support the enrolment of Indigenous students in the best Australian boarding schools (Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, 2008). The AIEF and the Catherine Freeman Foundation (CFF) have established

a partnership which will see some of this funding dedicated to the educational support of Indigenous female students from Palm Island in Queensland boarding schools.

Enrolments in Australian boarding schools are declining, and this phenomenon is most notable in the Catholic sector. This decline may be attributable to the population shifts in rural areas which have traditionally been the feeder regions for boarding schools. Further, prolonged drought and decreasing commodity prices may reduce the financial capacity of families to fund the education of their children away from home. Indeed, advances in communication technology make distance education more viable. However, there is an emerging trend which indicates an increasing demand for boarding by Indigenous people living in rural and remote areas of Australia. In response to this, there are various government and non-government initiatives which may help to sustain this demand.

A review of the literature on Australian boarding schools highlights that it is an under-researched area in the Australian education context. This is particularly the case in relation to the role of parental choice of boarding school in rural and remote contexts. The present body of literature in relation to Australian boarding schools is sociological, focussing chiefly on the experience of students, their transition to boarding and the outcomes (both academic and affective) for students (Downs, 2003; Kashti, 1988; White, 2004). There are data available from the Catholic and Independent sectors in terms of enrolment patterns (Australian Boarding Schools Association, 2008; Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2006; National Catholic Education Commission, 1997, 2008), but there is an absence of empirical work which gives insight into the reasons for these patterns. Specifically, there is limited empirical literature in the area of parental choice of boarding school. These choices are often quite complex for parents and the ways in which schools respond is also relevant (Alston & Kent, 2006). Further exploration of the parental choice of boarding school will illuminate another dimension of the intricate nature of school choice in rural and remote contexts.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the research study in a context which is shaped by school choice, Indigenous history, rural education and enrolment trends in Australian boarding schools. It is considered that these are important elements of the study which give rise to a framework for

considering the ways in which rural and remote Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents choose a boarding school for their children. Hence the first research question:

How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?

CHAPTER 3 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

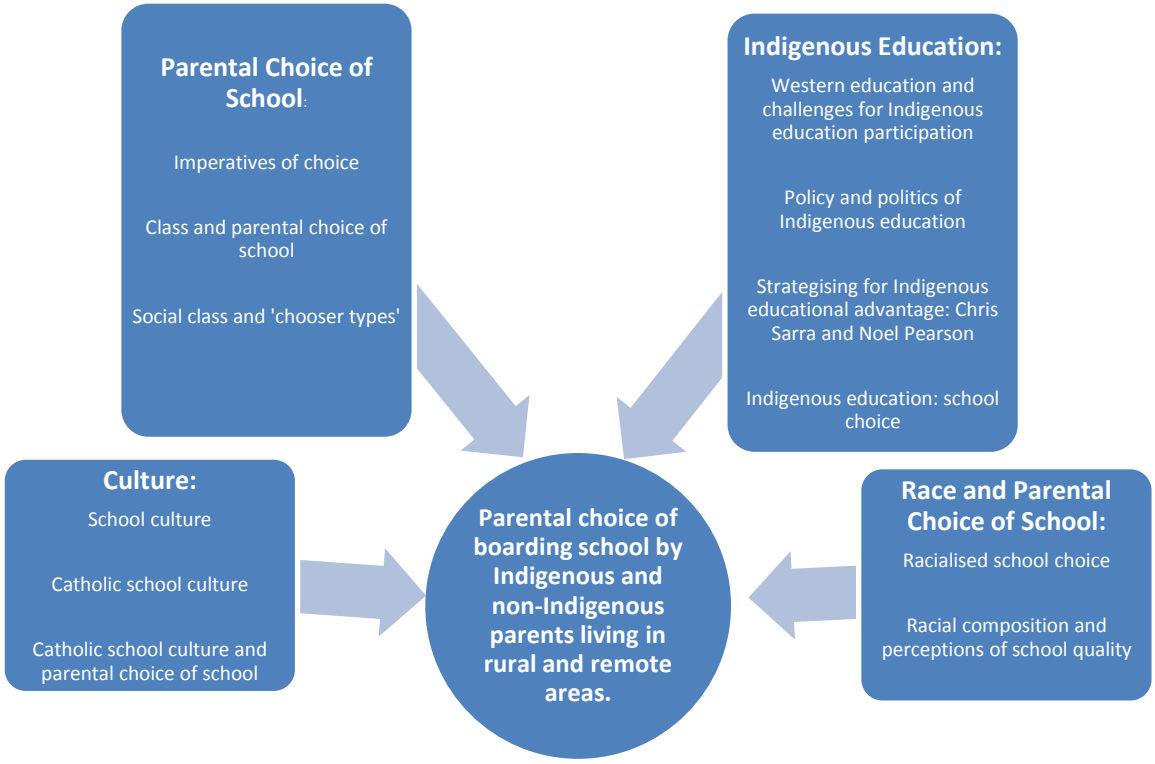
3.1 Introduction

For the purpose of this review four themes are explored in the literature: Indigenous education, parental choice of school, school culture, and race and parental choice. The exploration of these themes is relevant when considering that the purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children.

3.2 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children. Parental choice of school is a complex process that all parents engage in to differing degrees. There is a confluence of factors which parents consider and are influenced by during school choice decision-making processes (DEST, 2005). The evidence in relation to parental choice of school and the factors which form part of the process within the context of Australian parental choice of boarding school is limited and requires further investigation. This study contributes to this body of research. In particular, this research explores the choices made by subsets of parents not previously considered in the Australian literature. Thus this chapter focuses on the literature pertaining to parental choice of school and the areas which purportedly influence this choice, and are relevant to the research problem. Figure 3.1 provides a diagrammatic overview of the themes of the literature review.

Figure 3.1 Overview of the themes of the Literature Review



3.3 Indigenous Education

The issue of Indigenous education in Australia has been a seemingly intractable difficulty for educational policy makers, education systems, schools and teachers alike. The various measures of 'success' employed since the referendum of 1967 have borne out that Indigenous Australians are significantly disadvantaged when it comes to education in Australia. Across most areas of school life, and most notably in literacy and numeracy, Indigenous Australians are well behind their non-Indigenous counterparts, and how to redress this has been a focus of policy for over 30 years (Schwab, 1998).

While Australia considers itself a liberal democracy, where its citizens are afforded opportunities for capacity building that allow them to participate fully in civic life, many Indigenous students experience great disadvantage. Education has a major role in this capacity building. Schools are places where individuals develop their social and cultural capital. Social capital refers to the skills, knowledge, competencies and attributes developed within an individual which contribute to personal, economic and social well-being. The ways people think and act in relation to themselves and others can be referred to as cultural capital.

An individual's cultural capital determines the strength of their cultural identification and attachment (White & Wood, 2009). Indigenous Australians experience educational disadvantage and thus they are unable to participate fully in the civic life of Australia in the same way or degree as other Australians.

Western education and challenges for Indigenous education participation

The experience of and participation in education by Indigenous Australians speaks much about the nature of Western education and its role in the transmission of Western values. When seen from this perspective, the challenges faced by Indigenous people in relation to education are demystified. It is suggested Indigenous people are weak in their commitment to Western education because there is little relevance in it for their lives (Biddle, Hunter, & Schwab, 2004). There is a prevailing arrogance, underpinned by assimilationist principles, that suggests that Western systems of education offer the participant cultural capital, with the implication that the participant comes with a 'cultural account' in deficit. This is not true for any person, least of all Indigenous people, who have had a well-developed culture for over 70,000 years. However, Indigenous people, when engaging with Western education, are often forced with the decision to either preserve their own cultural heritage or trade it away for educational success (Sandersen & Allard, 2003). Thus Indigenous educational disadvantage is a complex story which has its origins in systemic denial of Indigenous cultural heritage which, in turn, has led to wide-spread disadvantage. Indeed, it has been suggested that educational failure by Indigenous people could be viewed as an act of 'political resistance' (Folds (1987) in Sandersen & Allard, 2003, p. 22).

The rhetoric surrounding Indigenous education failure is usually centred on the notion that Indigenous people react to, rather than actively participate in, Western education (Schwab, 1998). However, an alternative perspective posits that Indigenous people take what they need from Western education, they appropriate it and reject that which is no use to them. Therefore, what Indigenous people wish to take away from Western education is quite different to the institutional expectations (de Plevitz, 2007). This is one area of disjuncture. However, this divisive idea leads in most cases to Indigenous acquisition of failure in education as they attempt to participate in a foreign system of learning:

> They "fail" in the Western model because they suffer deficits as a result of a lack of "appropriate" cultural knowledge or experience or through organic damage suffered as a result of inadequate ante- or post-natal care, or perhaps they "fail" because they are simply culturally different and, as a result, powerless and unable to "achieve" in the unfamiliar educational system. The third approach suggests they fail because they are constructed or "acquired" failures in a rigid educational system that targets a predetermined set of competencies where Aboriginal students almost invariably fall short (Schwab, 1998, p. 7)

Policy and politics of Indigenous Education

Attempts to redress the broad disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians have been a policy area of every government since the 1967 Referendum. These measures can be divided into two approaches: symbolic reconciliation and practical reconciliation (Hunter & Schwab, 2003a). Symbolic reconciliation has focussed on issues such as deaths in custody, land rights and stolen generations. Conversely, practical reconciliation claims to seek to make improvements in the areas of disadvantage including education, health and housing. This notion of practical reconciliation was espoused by the Howard government who, at the time of taking government, promised to 'reaffirm[s] the central importance of practical measures leading to practical results that address the profound economic and social disadvantage which continues to be experienced by many Indigenous Australians' (Commonwealth of Australia, 1999, #3). Prima facie this appears to be a noble and practical cause. However, a critical error of practical reconciliation is its objective to obtain formal equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It has been noted that such a desire has assimilationist overtones (Hunter & Schwab, 2003a). Furthermore, the areas of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians are delicately connected and practical reconciliation measures do not adequately recognise these subtleties:

> The importance of relationships between cultural, social and economic domains also need to be recognised. For example, social alienation feeds into substance abuse, which leads to crime among Indigenous youth, which affects education attendance and hence employment… Australia's history of dispossession of Indigenous peoples (including the stolen generation phenomenon) means that addressing educational deficits is unlikely to be sufficient (Hunter & Schwab, 2003a, pp. 95-96).

Recent policy advice and initiative have focussed on bringing about change through a 'holistic, cross-portfolio and integrated response' (White & Wood, 2009, p. 6) which recognise the complex interconnectedness of the issues facing Indigenous Australians.

When considering the Indigenous education policy landscape, it becomes apparent that the contemporary challenges are very similar to the historical. The Karmel Report (1973) forged the principles of Indigenous education policy which remain relevant in current policy development. These principles included the notion of devolved responsibility, equality, diversity, public funding for private and public schools, community involvement, recurrent education (now referred to as lifelong learning) and the development of core skills and sense of community (Schwab, 1995). From the period 1973-1995, the major themes of Indigenous education policy included consultation, curriculum, educational staffing, responsibility and decision-making, support structures and instruction approaches, and future research. These and other themes are prominent in the most recent strategy for addressing Indigenous educational advantage known as 'closing the gap'.

An outcome of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) in 2009 was an educational strategy focused on closing the gap of educational disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This ambitious strategy seeks to halve the gap in reading, writing, numeracy and Year 12 attainment within 10 years (Queensland Government, 2009). The strategy acknowledges and plans to redress the areas of educational inequality which stem from low attendance, poor retention and a misapprehension of Indigenous conceptions of the nature and purpose of Western education. Specifically, the educational data indicate that there is a gap by Year 3 across reading, writing and numeracy, and this gap persists throughout schooling (White & Wood, 2009). This gap is closely aligned with student attendance rates, which are typically low for Indigenous students. According to the NAPLAN[11] data, there is a strong correlation between student attendance and achievement. The attendance rates for Indigenous students are significantly lower compared with non-Indigenous students. For example, in North Queensland in 2008, the attendance rate for Indigenous students was 79.7%, compared with 91.8% for non-Indigenous students. It is unsurprising therefore that retention rates are much lower for Indigenous students and, again

[11] NAPLAN - National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy

as a relevant example, North Queensland has the lowest retention rates of Indigenous students of anywhere in the entire state of Queensland (Queensland Government, 2009). Further, the low socio-economic status of Indigenous Australians sees them educationally approximately 2.5 years behind non-Indigenous students of the same age (Queensland Government, 2009). This has significant consequences for engagement in the learning process and, by implication, participation in higher and further education, and the labour market (Hunter & Schwab, 2003b). However, there is some cogent criticism of the latest strategy, where it is suggested that the focus of the strategy is on remedialism and a failure to recognise the issues that arise from the interconnection of equality and difference (Altman, 2009).

> Indeed, the logic underpinning the CTG framework is little different from the formal definition of the assimilation policy made in 1961 that expected all Aborigines and part-Aborigines [sic] to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community. This approach is a version of the modernisation paradigm that has failed to close gaps, even as it has delivered some beneficial outcomes, as measured by mainstream standard social indicators. This raises the question of whether Indigenous affairs has ever actually escaped the dominance of this paradigm (Altman, 2009, p. 14)

The data relating to Indigenous educational disadvantage become more marked when divided along geographic lines. Seventy percent of Indigenous people live in rural towns with a population of less than 10,000 or in remote areas (Gray & Beresford, 2008). Indigenous students living in rural and remote areas have lower retention rates, lower educational attainment and are faced with declining regional economies. Thus, this has implications for future employment. Indigenous people are faced with a highly competitive and declining jobs market in rural and regional communities, and are competing against people who have higher educational attainment (Hunter & Schwab, 2003a). This has further implications for the widening disconnection between education and employment for Indigenous people. Furthermore, the acknowledgement that Australian Indigenous people have the worst overall rate of socio-economic disadvantage (Gray & Beresford, 2008) only serves to heighten the emergent need of a meaningful response.

Strategizing for Indigenous educational advantage: Chris Sarra and Noel Pearson

Chris Sarra: Strong and Smart

Chris Sarra is recognised as one of the foremost Indigenous educators and academics in Australia. He has contributed to significant national and international initiatives directed towards addressing the experience of disadvantage by Indigenous people. The expression 'stronger and smarter' emerged from Sarra's time as principal at a Queensland primary school situated in an Indigenous community which was formerly an Aboriginal mission. Prior to Sarra's arrival at the school, there was chronic absenteeism and underachievement. His focus on 'strong' emphasised that young Indigenous people needed to have a strong and positive sense of their own Aboriginal identity (Sarra, 2005). In addition, the other focus on 'smart' is clearly articulated as quantifiable academic outcomes. Indeed, Sarra's aim was to 'generate outcomes that are comparable to other schools around Queensland' (Sarra, 2005, p. 6). Sarra eschews a principle that suggests that to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous people requires a "clos[ing] of the cultural curtain" (Sarra, 2006, p. 2):

> Surely by now we must understand the need to 'tear the cultural curtain open', peer through without fear and ignorance, and warmly embrace the Aboriginal identity of children as a fundamental part of the pursuit of better literacy and numeracy outcomes (Sarra, 2006, p.2).

It is clear that Sarra's philosophy of education of Indigenous people hinges on the understanding that their success is dependent upon the development of a strong sense of identity and academic achievement. He is clear that this dual process of cultural-intellectual development is essential if Indigenous people are going to "mix it in the wider society" (Sarra, 2006, p.1). Indeed, the pursuit of a strong sense of cultural identity is contingent on good educational outcomes, hence why the 'strong' comes before the 'smart': "What I'm saying is that we cannot isolate a child's cultural identity and pretend that it doesn't exist, because when we do, we stifle our capacity as educators to pursue and improve literacy and numeracy outcomes" (Sarra, 2007, p. 2).

Noel Pearson: Orbits

Noel Pearson is an Indigenous lawyer and activist, whose main concern of the last fifteen years has been on the social and economic disadvantage of Indigenous communities, particularly in the area of Cape York in Far North Queensland. Pearson has a clearly

articulated position on Indigenous education which emerges from an overarching philosophy that asserts that Indigenous communities can maintain cultural identity and be functional participants in Australia's economic and civic life. Central to this is Pearson's fundamental beliefs about education. He suggests a 'no excuses' approach to the educational advancement and achievement of Indigenous people, which is grounded in personal responsibility. Furthermore, Pearson suggests that educational progress is an antecedent for social transformation (Pearson, 2011).

Pearson posits that for there to be a reduction in educational disadvantage as experienced by Indigenous people, there needs to be a movement towards a "bi-cultural capacity" (Pearson, 2011, p. 56). Bi –cultural capacity refers to the preservation of Indigenous culture, while there is a concurrent focus on immersion in the wider culture. Furthermore, the quality of this bi-cultural capacity will be judged according to the extent to which a person can move between the two cultures. According to Pearson, it has been the hesitancy of Indigenous people to engage with Western culture which has yielded the current state of education disengagement and disadvantage:

> This understandable cultural hesitation has become an ideological resistance that has been counter-productive for our people, and this problem continued because we did not get our thinking straight and we did not confront the reality of our people now being irrevocably located within a multicultural world without walls (Pearson, 2011, p.57).

Interestingly, Pearson calls not for so-called culturally appropriate education, but for education to focus on cultural engagement. The former became the defence for poor outcomes, the development of loose educational programs and a shifting of attention away from intellectualism. Pearson suggests that this concept reinforced social class stagnation:

> But it [culturally appropriate education] did not just eschew Shakespeare in favour of popular culture; it also infected assumptions about the educational aspirations of lower-class children. It would be hard to imagine a more stunning instrument for enforcing lower-class confinement than the notion of socially relevant education (Pearson, 2011, p.58).

Cultural engagement in education points to what Pearson calls 'orbiting': the capacity for Indigenous children to operate between the world of their cultural heritage and the Western world, with a view to getting the best out of both. There is a concession here that there is a tension between the preservation of Indigenous cultures and access to high quality education (Pearson, 2009c, 2011). Essentially, this articulates a vision of individual social mobility through engagement with both the cultural world and the wider Western world. Pearson divides his education reform approach into three domains: Class, Club and Culture. The first refers to the development of the skills and knowledges and outcomes essential for full participation in the Western world. The Class domain inherently recognises that this is the key to the attenuation of social and economic disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people. The second domain, Club, refers to opportunities for Indigenous children to have access to those same co- and extra-curricular experiences extended to many children in mainstream Australia. Culture, the third domain, refers to the development of literacy in Indigenous culture so that the transmission, and in turn, the preservation of Indigenous culture can take place (Pearson, 2011).

While there are intersections of agreement between the approaches of Sarra and Pearson, there are some clear divergences. For Sarra, there is an inseparable relationship between esteem for Indigenous identity and educational outcomes. Furthermore, Sarra purports a system reform concept which has the educational system at all levels taking responsibility and being accountable for the educational success of Indigenous students (Davis & Grose, 2008). Pearson, on the other hand, focuses less on cultural pride and more on a wider reform agenda which includes the entire community, including parents taking responsibility for the educational enfranchisement of Indigenous children.

Parent & Local Community Engagement

Comprehensive analysis of data and the establishment of benchmarks are not the only considered strategies for addressing the gap in educational achievement by Indigenous students. The importance of the role of parents and the local communities in the engagement of young Indigenous people in the educational process are foregrounded in the policy documents and precursor studies (Biddle et al., 2004; Commonwealth of Australia, 2004, 2007, 2009; DEST, 2008; MCCETYA, 2005; Queensland Government, n.d; White & Wood, 2009). It is proposed that parent and community support for educational initiatives in

Indigenous communities increases positive attitudes which in turn have implications for school attendance and retention (engagement). The involvement of parents and the community endows the curriculum with significance, requires schools to be more responsive and accountable, and augments political assistance and support (Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington, & Richer, 1999). This is a major ideological shift, replacing previous thinking which saw Indigenous parents as incapable of supporting their children in a system of Western education. Previously, policy precluded any involvement by Indigenous parents in the education of their children; the inverse is now the case with the introduction of strategies such as the *Parents as First Teacher Education* (PFTE) initiative which is a school-based strategy in the early phase of learning. The PFTE aims to train parents in supporting children's literacy and numeracy skills, as well as encouraging children to engage with literacy and numeracy work outside the confines of the classroom (Queensland Government, 2009). The involvement of parents and the wider community has long been considered educationally advantageous; this is even more significant in the area of Indigenous education. The involvement of parents in the teaching and learning process not only lays the foundation for educational success, it also respects the autonomy of Indigenous people and breaks down the barrier of authority which is inherent in Western education (Schwab, 1998). Such an approach attempts to reinforce the on-going commitment of parents in the education of their children.

However, the degree to which parents engage with the schools and the education of their children is variable. Indeed, some proponents have argued for some significant measures to ensure parents make the necessary effort to increase their child's rate of attendance (Pearson, 2009a). So strong is the argument between increased attendance and academic success, certain regions in Queensland have enforced income quarantining to ensure parents meet their obligations (Cape York Institute for Policy & Leadership, 2008). While this is distantly connected to parental engagement in the educational process, such reforms do infer the importance of parents in the educational success of their children.

Indigenous education: School choice

An under-explored area of Indigenous parental participation in the educational process is school choice. A large proportion of Indigenous Australians are unable to exercise choice because of a lack of viable educational options, distance/remoteness, financial barriers, or a

combination of all of these. In remote Indigenous communities, there is no choice (Pearson, 2007) and this inevitably leaves parents in a position of despair if the local school does not meet the needs of their children. Furthermore, the increasing commodification of education may increasingly exclude Indigenous parents from school choice as a result of their presence in the lower income streams. This notion is premised on the idea that the response of the minority in education is influenced by their perception of their place in the labour market. In turn, this serves as a significant barrier to increasing attendance, retention and attainment of secondary school qualifications (Gray & Beresford, 2008).

However, this is not to suggest that in cases where Indigenous families do have school options, or where these options were made available to them, that they would not choose the best options for their children. Indeed, it has been asserted that those parents who experience disadvantage have high levels of educational aspiration for their children (Maile, 2004; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). Indeed, it is posited that parents who select higher rated schools do so on the basis that these schools offer an attachment to cultural codes which are essential for successful educational outcomes and that a parent's perception of their own disadvantage may positively influence their choosing behaviour (Bunar, 2010).

The barriers faced by Indigenous parents in exercising choice may be perceived more broadly by non-Indigenous people as disinterest or carelessness in relation to their child's education. However, such a view fails to recognise the psycho-cultural tasks undertaken by Indigenous parents as they try to reconcile the values, beliefs and practices of Western and Indigenous parenting (Sims, O'Connor, & Forrest, 2003). Indigenous parents employ a variety of strategies in negotiating this bridge, whereby they moderate and negotiate behaviours which are context-relevant. It is asserted that parents operate out of home cultural norms, as opposed to school cultural norms, and this behaviour is not consistent with mainstream attitudes in relation to parental participation in their child's education (Sims et al., 2003). This then reinforces the misperception that Indigenous parents are disengaged from their child's education. Often unrecognised are the various conflictions Indigenous parents have to overcome with regard to their child's school and educational generally:

> Aboriginal families face a number of conflicting pressures in attempting to establish a relationship with their children's school. A desire for children's success is tempered

> by apprehension generated from a history of oppression and parents' own negative schooling experiences (Sims et al., 2003, p. 87).

Notwithstanding these challenges, the evidence (Sims et al., 2003) suggests that Indigenous parents do value education as a way of gaining respect in the adult world. Moreover, Indigenous parents prioritise the happiness of their child as a desired outcome of participation in education and this may inform their choice of school where that choice exists (Coldron & Boulton, 1991). However, there is a great deal to be desired in relation to initiatives by education systems and schools to involve Indigenous parents in the education of their children. For the most part, schools and teachers drive the teacher-parent relationship agenda. Teachers take the responsibility of the learning and development of students and parents passively accept this situation. While this is clearly the case for those who assent to the white, middle class values which underpin Western education, those who do not are more deeply marginalised and disenfranchised from the school (Pushor & Murphy, 2004). Indeed, there is a strong deficit view of the involvement of parents in education which highlights that some parents are not interested in their child's education; it is challenging to get parents involved; schools generally see the parents they do not need to see; and that parents are limited in their capacity to contribute to their child's learning (Pushor & Murphy, 2004). While parents may be marginalised in a variety of ways from the school, Indigenous parents experience this marginalisation in much more significant ways: "Aboriginal parents are often storied as 'difficult' when they are advocates for their children or as 'apathetic' or 'uncooperative' by teachers and administrators when they do not become involved" (Pushor & Murphy, 2004, p. 226).

Despite these negative views surrounding the capacity of Indigenous parents to contribute to their children's learning, Indigenous parents understand that teacher quality is the most important factor in their child's experience of success at school (Burgess & Berwick, 2009). However, the prevailing Eurocentric model of education which emphasises white, middle class values poses a significant barrier for Indigenous students and their parents. Indeed, the evidence (NSW DET in Burgess & Berwick, 2009) suggests that in schools where the predominant population of students is low-SES and Indigenous, the lower the intellectual quality, teacher expectations and quality (p.3). Thus, as schooling becomes more individual-centric and competitive, these values become the norm of education and result in the

exclusion of those (i.e. Indigenous people) whose culture espouses different and opposing values. This then perpetuates the disadvantage experienced by these groups:

> Generally speaking, Aboriginal cultures and modes of operation, place the community and family above the individual and success is only helpful if it is to the benefit of all. Respondents made clear however, that they wanted their children to succeed, but that this sits inside a bigger picture of the future of their family, and their communities (Burgess & Berwick, 2009, p. 6).

Furthermore, Indigenous conceptions of teacher and school quality place emphasis on meaningful relationships between their children and teachers, as opposed to the delivery of curriculum and a focus on results. For Indigenous parents, quality teachers and schools are those that are able to create rapport with their children and make them feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to the school (Burgess & Berwick, 2009). Indigenous parents are interested in the education of their children and do want them to experience success. However, the literature suggests that there is a significant disjuncture between Indigenous educational aspiration and the dominant and privileged Eurocentric conceptions of quality schooling and educational success. Thus, the reinforcement of the first research question is:

How does rurality/remoteness influence [Indigenous] parental choice of boarding school?

3.4 Parental Choice of School

The process of selecting a school for a child may be considered one of the most important decisions in a parent's life, so much so that parents start considering school options well before enrolment age (DEST, 2007). With the growing emphasis on the importance of education for participation in the work force and meaningful civic life, the choice of school has gained much gravity for some and continues to be a process fraught with complexity.

The ways in which parents make the choice is an important consideration for schools from a market-model perspective, in that an understanding of parental choice allows schools to tailor a particular approach to the market. The growing commodification of education is evident in the slick campaigns employed by many schools, most easily discernible via a cursory survey

of the Internet. However, an understanding of parental choice of school provides insights which transcend market utility.

In approaching the issue of parental choice of school, it is helpful to distinguish two interrelated dimensions apparent in the literature. Firstly, the way in which parents exercise choice is examined, with a focus on the internal process and behaviours parents undertake in making their selection of school (Baker, 1991; DEST, 2007; Freund, 2001; Jackson & Bisset, 2005). Such implicit reasoning may derive from and be influenced by social class, geographical location, community context, previous educational experience, educational attainment or religious conviction. Secondly, the factors of school choice are explored. The literature in this area is primarily concerned with the influence on parental choice of the externalities of a particular school, which may include staffing, academic performance, discipline and facilities.

Imperatives of Choice

Schools are faced with increasing public accountability measures, mostly focused on the publication of academic results, literacy and numeracy benchmark statistics and so on. However, this information is but one aspect in the overall process of school choice undertaken by parents, which suggests that there is more than one characteristic of school effectiveness (Ewington, 1998; Weston, 1998). Parents engage in the school choice process through consultation of certain imperatives (McCarthy, 2004) of which academia is one characteristic. The process of parental school choice is the result of certain psychical constructions about good or quality schools which give rise to the application of certain imperatives. These include the value system of the parents, previous life experiences, the views of others, and the needs of the child (McCarthy, 2001), as well as the capacity for the school to provide children with particular positional and self goods (Freund, 2001). These imperatives assist parents in selecting and de-selecting schools, with a view to maintaining the educational potential of the family (McCarthy, 2001; Seiffert, 1993). This establishes that there are two broad imperatives of choice of school (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 2001, p. 321):

1. Instrumental-academic: parents choose a school on the basis of a school's capacity to offer their child quality education. This might be reflected in a school's academic record or reputation. The need for quality education by parents from an instrumental-

academic perspective is motivated by their desire for their children to be able to participate in civic and economic life beyond school (van Eyk, 2002). These so called advantages can be defined as positional goods: children, through their attendance at a selected school, are offered certain degrees of social capital which offer assurances for their post-school future. There is an economic rationalist, utility maximisation present in this aspect of the choice process which assists parents in their definitions of 'good' schools (Collins & Snell, 2000; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). It is often assumed that the instrumental-academic capacity of a school is an indicator of school quality (DEST, 2005). Indeed, there is some evidence that suggests that perceptions of school quality are closely correlated with a school's academic performance (Gibbons & Silva, 2011).

2. Intrinsic-personal/social: parents choose schools which offer their children non-curricular experiences, or opportunities to obtain self goods which, for all intents and purposes might be considered 'formative'. These experiences are focused on the inculcation of particular values, the development of life skills (such as independence) and these schools meet the emotional and personal needs of children. This can be summarised as a consideration of the special needs of the child by the parent where the emotional and psychological safety and or wellbeing of their child are important considerations in the choice process (Gibbons & Silva, 2011; McCarthy, 2004). The emotional and psychological safety needs of children are attended to by schools which offer pastoral care, cultures of support and safe havens from the threatening and de-stabilising elements of the world (Freund, 2001; McCarthy, 2004; Theobold, 2005).

From this perspective, the school is considered a social organisation which needs to reflect the organisational values of the family (Bagley et al., 2001; Independent Schools Queensland, 2011). Indeed, for most families, children provide parents with "psychic income or satisfaction" and thus there are incentives for parents to do the best by their children (Bast & Walberg, 2004, pp. 422-433). Furthermore, this focus on values and beliefs reflects a "communitarian, rather than 'informed chooser' impulse defined by an ethical concern for the projected values of the school" (Wilkins, 2011, p. 7).

Thus, the literature suggests that the process of selecting a school is a process with dual foci: (i) a focus on the preservation of certain dimensions of family life and parents consider

schools on the basis of the congruence of values between home and school (Independent Schools Queensland, 2011) with a view to their child obtaining certain self-goods; and (ii) the quality of education offered by a school be sufficient to offer positional goods for the purposes of social mobility and civic success (Bosetti, 2004). It is suggested that perceptions of school quality by parents is related to a school's academic record (Gibbons & Silva, 2011).

3.4.1 Class and Parental Choice of School

It has been established in the literature thus far that parents seek schools that reflect the values, beliefs and attitudes espoused in the home. These values may be products or reflections of certain class positions or aspiration for same. Furthermore, the education system itself may preference a particular class ideology – white, middle-class in Western democracies. Those who are adept at participating in the dominant culture have more success because they are judged against criteria which are produced from within that culture (Reay et al., 2008). This success adds to the social capital of these individuals, while those who are unable to access the dominant culture are denied any upward social mobility (Marks, 2005). All of this is based on a notion of class which is "based on securing, fixing and holding some people in space so that others can move" (Skeggs (1997) in Reay, 2004, p. 549). This view of class is Marxist in origin. From the Marxist perspective, social class is a relational concept whereby social groups are aligned against one another and are simultaneously related (Yates, 2000). In addition to the Marxist view, class can be considered from the work of Pierre Bourdieu as the product of certain social mechanisms, particularly the education system (Yates, 2000). Through school, people internalise the dominant culture which reinforces or reproduces social class (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001). From this view, schools are social armamentaria in the process of class consolidation.

Notions of Social Class in Australia

Contemporary notions of class have necessarily changed, and this is identifiable in modern Australia. This reconfiguration of class has been expedited by the changes in local and global economies. In particular, the shift from industrialised societies to globalised, knowledge-based economies (Yates, 2000). In Australia, the middle-class has transformed from what is termed the 'old middle class' to the 'new middle class' (Campbell, 2007, p. 1). This

transformation is an historical one, particularly discernible when viewed against the backdrop of education. Prior to the educational policy reforms of the 1960s and the concomitant economic changes during this time, the 'old' middle class, which consisted of farmers, builders, small business people and so on, did not depend on the formal education system for class maintenance or advancement. These families were able to confer the ownership of their businesses, properties and associated skills to their children. The exception to this exists with Protestant clergy, where formal secondary education was important in terms of conferring certain cultural goods (Campbell, 1993).

The 'new' middle classes however, rely heavily on formal education. Completion of secondary education and matriculation to university is essential in gaining employment in the 'white collar' industries which emerged in the post-war period (Campbell, 1993, 2007). These industries include retail, banking, corporate business and so on. For the 'new' middle class, conferring of real or cultural property is no longer wide-spread practice. Such goods are accessed via participation in education pathways. The post-war period also brought about changes to the ways in which the working-class approached education. Prior to this time there were various educational policies which allowed working-class children to leave school early or attend sporadically. The emergence of skilled blue collar occupations meant that young people needed to access education, often in the form of newly regulated apprenticeship programs, in order to secure employment. Therefore, the 'immediate post war period saw formal secondary education and its credentials sustain their value in the open labour market' (Campbell, 1993, p. 37). Moreover, in the last decade, there has been the introduction of the 'aspirational class' to the social class lexicon (Campbell, 2003). The 'aspirationals' are often termed as "ordinary Australians":

> Demographically and geographically: 'families' from the rapidly developing Western outer-suburbs. Socio-politically: individualistic, entrepreneurial, thrifty, responsible, non-ideological, and averse to intrusive government and bureaucracy. Socio-economically: characterised as an asset-owning class; building grand homes, investing in property and shares, and favouring private-sector health and education services (Robinson, 2005, p. 5)

Further adding to the complexity of social class analysis, in Australia particularly, is determining the method by which people are classified into class categories. The use of

Socio-Economic Status (SES) data is one method of classification. SES is most commonly determined by family income, parental occupation, and level of education of parents. Other indicators of SES may also include cultural artefacts in the family home, including artwork, musical instruments, classical literature and music (Perry, 2007). Thus it is considered, particularly by governments and educational authorities, that the lower the mean SES in communities, the higher the educational disadvantage. This method of classification is used to determine school funding models by the Australian federal government:

> Recurrent expenditure funding for non-government schools is based on the socioeconomic status (SES) of a school community. The SES funding model involves linking student residential addresses to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) national Census data to obtain a socioeconomic profile of the school community and measure its capacity to support the school (DEST, 2009).

Social Class and Attitudes to Education

Family attitudes to schooling are shaped by their class position. Their personal experiences which arise out of their class position influence a family's attitudes to education (Bodovski, 2010). The extent to which families resist or conform to the educational meritocracy helps determine their attitudes to education (Gorman, 1998). The level of resistance or conformity contributes to the degree to which education is valued. The level of resistance and conformity is dependent upon the experiences – positive and negative – of parents that occur because of their class position. Resistance to the merits of education indicates a "hidden injury of class" (Gorman, 1998, p. 11). These hidden injuries are the result of their inability to hold two of the key measure of success and self-worth in a capitalist society: educational credentials and status of occupation (Haviland, 2008).

The Australian 2020 Summit Final Report (2008) acknowledged the seeming class divide in Australian education. The report noted that the changes in funding to private schools had exacerbated disadvantage and did nothing to address the challenges of low socio-economic communities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008b). This report highlights at the national level, the realities of the relationship between class and educational advantage. Furthermore, evidence from the OECD (2004) analysis of the Programme for International Student

Assessment (2003) suggests that schools with a composition of students with higher SES have higher performing students, regardless of individual students' SES:

> In almost all countries, and for all students... [there is a] clear advantage in attending a school whose students are, on average, from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Regardless of their own socio-economic background, students attending schools in which the average socio-economic background is high tend to perform better when they are enrolled in a school with a below-average socio-economic intake. In the majority of OECD countries the effect of the average economic , social and cultural status of students in a school – in terms of performance variation across students – far outweighs the effects of the individual student's socio-economic background (OECD, 2004, p. 189)

Social Class and Choosing Schools

One of the dimensions of family life preserved in the school choice process may be related to the maintenance of particular social class positions. Some parents choose schools on the basis that this choice will ensure their child maintains their class status into adulthood (Bagley et al., 2001; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Bosetti, 2004; Collins & Snell, 2000; Freund, 2001; Jackson & Bisset, 2005; Morgan, Dunn, Carins, & Fraser, 1993; Reay & Ball, 1998). Furthermore, there is necessary differentiation to be made in the parental school choice processes between middle- and working-class families. This differentiation highlights the different valuing of education across social classes. There is an indication that working- and middle-class families view education as a means to different ends.

From a social class perspective, the school choice process is more complex than what the rational choice theory approach posits, which proposes parents seek out certain schools based on the costs, advantages and probability of civic success. In addition, parents are informed by a confluence of many factors, notably social class and the interpersonal networks within a particular class (Bosetti, 2004). Therefore the emphasis on particular factors of choice is dependent upon class position. For instance, it is suggested that middle-class families, who typically have higher educational attainment, face greater difficulty in selecting a school than do working-class families. The basis of this is that the benefits of attaining educational

qualifications are greater and contingent on maintaining this position in the class structure (Beavis, 2004; Bosetti, 2004; Daniels, 2007).

The selection of schools is a high-stakes process: the right selection will result in the maintenance of class position; the wrong selection may result in downward social mobility, or social immobilisation (Orfield, 2001). For the middle-class, choice of school is a part of a broader process of socialisation which emphasises achievement and social decency (Reay & Ball, 1998). These families will employ certain strategies to maximise their choice options. These are described as "voice": they have the capacity to influence decisions at the school level; "voting with the feet": they have the financial capacity to move to areas in order to access the best schools; "exit": middle-class families have the resources to exit certain schools in order to maximise the educational advantage to their child; and they exercise "self-exclusion": they can opt to move out of certain schools or school systems, namely private schools (Reay, 2004, p. 543). Employment of these strategies is dependent on their level of economic, cultural and educational capital.

Middle-class parents will seek confirmation from other middle-class parents that their choice has been correct and that their children will be among others of the same class (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Therefore, there is an element of social comparison related to school choice which is placed over and above the quality of the offerings of particular schools. This idea is further highlighted in studies which indicate the reasons parents de-selected government-run schools during the choice process (Beavis, 2004; Bosetti, 2004; English, 2004; Independent Schools Queensland, 2007; Kelley & Evans, 2004). There are clear implications for social capital and mobility in selecting a non-government school. Thus, selecting a particular school can insulate a child against class regression or ensure their class position is assured into the future. This phenomenon is closely related to income. The evidence (Crozier et al., 2008; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Maddaus, 1990) suggests that the selection of school is closely correlated with income. As income rises, the propensity to select non-government schools rises. Middle-class parents select and deselect schools on the basis that certain schools have a critical mass of other middle- class students ("those like us") and are most likely to nurture their concept of good adulthood and citizenship. Noticeable in the literature is that when SES is controlled, the apparent academic advantage of attendance at so-called private schools diminishes (Perry, 2007). This reinforces the notion that middle-class parents are engaging in the process of child-matching (Ball, Bowe, & Gerwitz, 1996), which may or may not include

academic concerns, but certainly points toward a desire to select schools based on their student composition. Conversely, children from working-class families require rudimentary education in order that social position is maintained. Thus the way in which people from certain social classes select schools for their children highlights a salient feature of the consumption of education:

> The mode of consumption perspective rests on the notion of a 'logic of consumption' in which consumers consume in ways that connect to social relationships, the key being the symbolism attached to the object (Bowe, Ball, & Gerwitz, 1994, p. 44)

This suggests that parents select schools that mirror their own class position or aspirations, which is not necessarily limited to the middle-class. Thus the notion of a 'good' school may be related to a parent's place in the social class hierarchy (Collins & Snell, 2000). In turn, this affects the factors which influence a parent's choice of school. In Reay & Ball's (1998) study in the United Kingdom, it was found that working-class families considered destination of children's friends and locality as important factors in the choice process. For these families, the immediate happiness of their children was paramount. Middle-class families, though, cited internal characteristics of the school, social demography and educational policy as key determinants of school choice (p.432). Middle-class families were more future-oriented, with a view to the long-term happiness of their children. Additionally, highly educated parents select schools based on ideological reasons, and low educated parents exercise pragmatism in their selection of school (Denessen, Driessena, & Sleegers, 2005). For these highly educated parents, the selection of private/elite schools ensures the transmission of certain advantages, not least the academic advantages, which appear to be correlated to the social status of the student body (Cookson, 1991; Marks, 2005).

Indeed, middle and upper-class families demonstrate a firm commitment to a meritocratic ideology, which is closely linked to their own experiences of schooling and their participation in the culture of professionalism. However, middle-class parents with academically weaker children select elite private schools because of the non-meritocratic advantages passed on to their children because of attendance (Cookson, 1991). These students are able to maintain their social status and are insulated against poor academic results. The evidence (Cookson, 1991) suggests that academically weaker students attending private schools are more likely to matriculate to university than the equivalent student in the public school sector. Those

families who select private schools have a perception that these schools are better; a judgement made based on the impression that these schools offer better discipline, smaller class sizes, more qualified teachers and greater individual attention (Beavis, 2004). The subtext of the anecdotal evidence in studies of social class and school selection suggest that middle-class parents deselect certain schools on the basis that their child is too 'special' or 'gifted'. There is a middle-class conception of the child as a 'little innocent' who requires insulation from disadvantageous influences (Reay & Ball, 1998).

In addition to the social status of school cohorts, middle-class parents more readily cite values, ethos and culture as important criteria in the choice process (Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Maddaus, 1990; Schneider, Marschall, Teske, & Roch, 1998; West, 1992). Middle-class parents engage with their extensive social networks in order that they might come to know about the various aspects of the school under consideration, which includes gaining a perspective of the under life of a school (Ball & Vincent, 1998). This emphasis relates to social class habitus, and in this case middle-class habitus. These parents understand that social mobility or maintenance is dependent on their children being educated in specifically defined school environments. Indeed, it is asserted that school type has a direct statistical effect on aspiration and children in more prestigious schools have higher educational aspirations (Ahmavaara & Houston, 2007).

Middle-class parents define the quality of a school through the lens of class, where they seek out students who are compatible to their particular class position (West, David, Hailes, & Ribbens, 1995). Middle-class parents include discipline and an evident work ethos within these school choice criteria (West, 1992) and also cite their external observations ('I didn't like what I saw') as a justification for deselecting certain schools. All of this is carefully designed to maintain social position (Gorman, 1998). Therefore there are discernible differences between classes with regard to the creation of education-centred family projects (Connell, 2003). These "projects" refer to the ways in which families think and act, which links their current reality with an imagined (better) future:

> Markets work only to the extent that people operate them. Markets therefore work consistently, only to the extent that they intersect with projects – that is, coherent and persisting patterns of action which link the present with some imagined future...When

> shared in a family, the parents hope that the child will pick up the parents' intention, or at least enough of it to produce an educational effect (Connell, 2003, p. 239)

For the working-class, education may feature in their family project, but success in education is not closely tied to personal success and advancement. For these families, attaining the necessary minimum of education is important. Conversely, middle-class families see an inextricable link between advancement through education and personal and civic success (Connell, 2003). This becomes more evident with an analysis of subject choice in schools according to class. Vocational subjects are populated by working-class students; the more academic subjects are selected by middle-class students. This suggests that students (and their families) consciously or otherwise select subjects which are consistent with their class position (Connell, 2003). Furthermore, results from the *Program for International Student Assessment* (P.I.S.A) test suggest that there are definite differences in the academic abilities of students from different classes. These results show that a student's achievement is related to class position, with those from the middle-class achieving higher mean scores. It was found that higher material (wealth and educational resources) and cultural (classic literature, artwork, books and poetry) resources in the home was closely linked with higher student achievement (Marks, 2005).

Social Class and Engagement with the Education Market

It is also argued that engagement in the choice process is also dependent upon class position. The choice process requires parents to utilise a number of resources to ensure that their selection is appropriate. Middle-class families are able to engage in this process more extensively (Goldring & Phillips, 2008). This is largely due to the level of their economic, educational and social capital. Thus, middle-class families have fewer constraints when considering a school for their children. Most notably, middle-class families have incomes which allow them to frame a broad range of options. Furthermore, middle-class families, because of generally higher education, have access to stable social networks. Conversely, working-class families do not engage in this aspect of the choice process because they do not have access to cultural capital (Bowe et al., 1994; Connell, 2003; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Maddaus, 1990; Schneider, Schiller, & Coleman, 1996). Conversely, middle-class families, because of generally higher educational attainment, are more adept at engaging in the choice process and in raising questions about a school's policy and procedure (Schneider et al.,

1996). They are also more adept at engaging with the formal networks. While this may make the middle-classes adroit *selectors*, they are also more able to prodigiously deselect certain schools.

The empirical evidence (Goldring & Phillips, 2008) suggests that highly educated middle-class are more likely to select private schools, which then increases the likelihood of "social class creaming" (Goldring & Phillips, 2008, p. 210). This leads to greater class stratification between schools, and middle-class flight. This in turn creates schools of 'advantage' and 'disadvantage', connoting desirability and undesirability. While this outcome may be the experience in the public school sector, those schools in smaller educational markets will also be affected. Schools that do not have the middle-class market are demonised because of the class composition of students. At this point the choice of school is based upon resources and preference, as opposed to ability and effort (Reay, 2004). Where middle-class students find themselves in undesirable schools, they have the resources available to move to schools with a better 'reputation'. This in turn results in a decline in social capital in these schools and has the concomitant effect of social immobilisation of those students who remain (Reay, 2004). As enrolments decline, so too does the capacity of schools to offer subjects which would otherwise stabilise their middle-class enrolments. This further adds to the recipe of social disadvantage (Gulson, 2007).

Working-class parents are not utility maximisers. They may not have the formal education that allows them to negotiate education markets and to garner the important information. They do not have the skills that would allow them an adequate 'voice' in their child's school. These families also emphasise as important different aspects of education. Moreover, core working-class values are in opposition to those of the competitive education market: "The ethic of a fair go, still strong in Australian working-class life, means not pushing oneself forward as an individual" (Connell, 2003, p. 248) Because the working-class operate outside the culture of power (the seat of the middle-classes) they view education from the perspective that it will equip their children with the tools to enable them to operate in larger society (Schneider et al., 1998). There is little evidence to suggest that working-class families ambitiously seek out schools that will ensure social mobility for their children. During the choice process, there is an egalitarianism apparent within the family dynamic, whereby the child and parent work together to make the best choice. This is in stark opposition to the

process in middle-class families, where parents seek out schools that can be seed beds of social reproduction (Reay & Ball, 1998).

3.4.2 Social Class and 'Chooser Types'

The function of social class in the school choice process gives rise to particular chooser types. These choosers are considered ideal-types and are identifiable across class and race groupings (Ball et al., 1996). These 'choosers' emerge out of the case-studies by Ball et. al (1996) which drew on data from interviews across three Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in the UK. The study analysed how parents selected and deselected schools across class categories. An analysis of these ideal-types illuminates the emphases of parents during the process of school choice.

The first group of parents can be termed as privileged/ skilled choosers (Ball et al., 1996). This group includes those parents who will most likely actively engage in choice of school. These choosers have the social, economic and educational capital that allows them to engage fully in the choice process. They are capable of negotiating the polysemy of educational material and systems. As a result, these choosers avail themselves of a number of different sources of information which makes their choice very involved and complex (Ball & Vincent, 1998). This complexity is further consolidated because of their engagement in the choice process on the basis that they are "child matching" (Ball et al., 1996, p. 94). That is, they are seeking schools which best suit the needs, interests and sensibilities of their child. This *child matching* is approached from two different, but often interrelated perspectives (Bagley et al., 2001). One of these perspectives has an objective focus, whereby academic quality and the likelihood of success feature prominently in the choice process. However, this is not to suggest that academic results are a core criterion which will singularise a choice. Indeed, the evidence (Bagley et al., 2001; Bosetti, 2004; Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Weston, 1998) indicates that academic achievement of students, particularly those indicated via published league tables, do not factor strongly in the choice process.

The other perspective of child matching is defined in subjectivity. From this perspective, parents emphasise the intrinsic/personal (Bagley et al., 2001) elements of a school, whereby the happiness and security of the child will be assured. It is clear that these privileged/skilled

choosers establish a number of different criteria upon which they make their selection and, in some cases, deselection. These families usually possess levels of wealth that give them flexibility of choice. The privileged/skilled choosers are also influenced by what could be termed the *affective* domain of school choice. That is, these families take seriously the climate, 'feel' and/or ethos of a school in the decision-making process. The various aspects of the school including teacher/student relationships, the presentation of physical facilities, and student behaviour are elements considered by the privileged/skilled chooser. Essentially, this speaks to the importance of school culture in the process of school choice-making (Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002). In addition, this also points to the strength of the emotional and symbolic considerations by parents in the choice process (Oplatka, 2007). This process is aimed at isolating schools that reflect a certain family habitus: "For some parents there is an educational and reproductive calculus involved here related to maximising their child's objective valued certificates" (Ball et al., 1996, p. 101). Indeed, it is suggested that parents with high levels of education place a concomitant high value on education, and thus they seek out schools with higher levels of social and intellectual capital (Taylor Haynes, Phillips, & Goldring).

Another category of parent is the semi-skilled chooser (Ball et al., 1996). These parents have a desire to engage with the educational market but lack the cultural capital to do so effectively. These parents do not have the same networks with which to engage during the choice process as the privileged choosers. For these choosers, the choice process is less complex. They do not seek any genuine class or cultural reproduction for their children and therefore schools are simply reduced to those that are 'good' and those that are not so good. Their information bases are limited and so the criteria they develop are not extensive. There is a reliance on what can be termed 'hot knowledge' (Ball & Vincent, 1998) as sources of information about a school: gossip, second-hand information and the media. The more school information these parents have to confront, the more difficult the choice becomes. These parents do not have the necessary capacities to negotiate and decode the various messages they receive from the information (Ball et al., 1996).

The final grouping of parents are termed as the 'disconnected choosers' (Ball et al., 1996). This group of parents are usually faced with a variety of constraints (Seiffert, 1993) which immediately limits their choice. This is in contrast to the other 'choosers' who consider a number of schools in the choice process. Their cultural or education capital severely limits

their ability or willingness to engage in the choice process to the same degree as the other 'choosers'. These parents draw on limited networks of information which include children of friends, relatives and from their own personal experiences of certain schools. The disconnected chooser views the externalities of a school as an effective way of evaluating the school under consideration. Teachers, curriculum and pedagogy are defining characteristics for these parents (Ball et al., 1996).

However, this is not to suggest that this group of 'choosers' are less concerned with what is best for their children. Indeed, this is very important, but there is a difference in the way in which these parents prioritise schools. The happiness of their children is very important, expressed in terms of social connection and engagement, and links into friendship groups (Reay & Ball, 1998). This 'happiness' might be perceived as a need to ensure the personal security of the child (Coldron & Boulton, 1991).

Engaging in the school choice process requires parents to access relevant information. School reputation and the 'grapevine' describe the ways in which parents seek out information which will assist them in making their final choice. Information about the schools is gleaned from quasi-sources and variously includes positive and negative information predominantly in relation to academic quality, student behaviour and discipline (Baker, 1991; DEST, 2007; English, 2006; Freund, 2001; Hunter, 1991; Independent Schools Queensland, 2007; Jackson & Bisset, 2005). Furthermore, the 'grapevine' can function through vicarious experience, whereby parents inform their understandings through the experiences of others (Bast & Walberg, 2004). Sources of information can include the family, networks of friends, other children and their parents as frames of reference (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Parents make decisions about choice of school based upon the word-of-mouth information (Baker, 1991; DEST, 2007; Goh, 2007; Groundwater-Smith, 2001). This is described as "hot knowledge" (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p. 377) which is to be distinguished from the "cold knowledge" (p.377) which denotes the promotional information distributed by the school. The notion of 'hot knowledge' is an effective tool for parents when considering a school because its under-life (behaviour and conduct of students, use of prohibited substances and so on) is uncovered and provides an alternative source of information to that which is officially presented by the school. This aspect of a school's life is important to parents for a number of reasons. For some parents behaviour and conduct of students is an indication of the quality of the school. For those parents who are seeking a school with social cultural

reproductive potential, student behaviour and the extent to which a school manages this behaviour is a powerful indicator (Bagley et al., 2001; Baker, 1991; English, 2006; Independent Schools Queensland, 2007). While the 'grapevine' is a quasi source of information, it enables parents to circumvent the often complex and confusing array of information presented by the school, which sometimes obscures the reality of day-to-day operations.

However, it is suggested that the extent to which parents rely on this knowledge varies across social classes. Middle-class parents may seek out the 'grapevine' as an additional source of information. These parents generally have gleaned a number of sources during the choice process. Middle-class parents approach the 'grapevine' with a view to confirm that their choice is appropriate. Furthermore, it is suggested that the information sought from these social networks is less about a school's academic credibility and more about whether or not schools were 'good' or 'bad' (Holme, 2002).Working-class families prioritise their child's affective response to certain schools over the grapevine (Ball & Vincent, 1998), but still access it as a source of information which is more easily negotiated than that which is presented by the school (Ball et al., 1996).

It is clear that there are a number of rationalities employed by parents in making their selection of school and these are exercised at particular stages of the school choice process. There is no one distinguishing factor upon which parents make their decision, but rather a linear process which parents undertake and negotiate in making the selection of school for their child. Furthermore, the role of the 'grapevine' and social networks in parents' construction of 'quality' schools is not to be underestimated (Holme, 2002). Indeed, it these interactions which precipitate definitions of 'good' and 'bad' schools.

There is limited empirical research in the area of parental choice of school in Australia. Much of the literature in this area is drawn from the United Kingdom, the United States and selected areas of Europe. Furthermore, the choices made by parents living in rural and remote areas is also confined to small, qualitative analyses (McCarthy, 2004) or survey instruments designed by education authorities (Independent Schools Queensland, 2007). Furthermore, the seminal studies (Bagley et al., 2001; Ball et al., 1996; Ball & Vincent, 1998) tend towards a rationalist approach to the parental school choice process, focussing on the factors and linearity of choice, rather than the psychic motivators and internal processes and

constructions undertaken by parents in the choice process. Holme's (2002) study of upper white-middle class parents in the United States is one among few examples of research into the ways in which parents construct notions of 'good' and 'bad' schools.

Moreover, the influence of social class on the parental choice of school process is underexplored in the Australian literature. The Australian literature tends to focus on educational outcomes across class lines (Buckingham, 2001a; Kelley, 2004; NSW Department of Education and Training, 2005; Perry, 2007) as well as educational aspiration (Connell, 2003), and the historical relationship of class to education (Campbell, 1993, 2003, 2007). There is a lacuna in the literature with regard to Australian social class and parental choice of school. Furthermore, the conceptions of class which originate in the UK particularly are not immediately compatible with Australian notions of class. For instance, the United Kingdom has a historical tradition of class distinction, where the degree of social hegemony secured is dependent on one's class position. The demarcations between the elite, middle and working classes are much more clearly defined than in Australia. Thus, the discussions of the relationship between parental choices of school internationally need to be considered in this light.

In addition, the school choice process undertaken by Indigenous parents is left relatively unexplored. This is an important area of the research in determining the extent to which school choice is affected along racial lines. Further analysis of the choice-making behaviours of Indigenous and non-Indigenous families, and the influence of each group's choice-making on one another is necessary in order that a more nuanced understanding of school choice in Australia, and particularly in the rural and remote sectors, is achieved. Hence, the second research question:

How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of boarding school for their child?

3.5 Culture

The concept of culture is one which is open to interpretation and, as a result, there exist a number of definitions, many of which are highly contestable (Cavanagh, 2004; Geertz, 1993). Indeed, there is much discussion about the essence of organisations expressed variably as

culture, climate and ethos (Glover & Coleman, 2005). However, for the purposes of this study, the term 'culture' is the overarching concept which includes the constructs of ethos and climate (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008).

Common to many of the definitions of culture are the claims that it relates to people, and influence the ways people think, feel and act towards one another and the environment around them (Cavanagh, 2004; O'Donnell, 2001; Schein, 1990; Woods, 1983). Culture provides people with a framework from within which they live their lives. This framework is based on the key dimensions of culture which include core beliefs, values and basic assumptions, all of which animate an organisation, guide conduct, establish norms of behaviour and guide members on how to deal with complex problems and propose workable solutions (Schein, 1990). The culture of an organisation is articulated through its rituals, stories, local colloquialisms and jargon, and the various human and physical arrangements of the organisation itself (van der Westhuizen, Oosthuizen, & Wolhuter, 2008). Culture is unity of style, meaning and value (Geertz, 1993). Further consideration of the key dimensions of culture is necessary here.

The assumptions and beliefs of an organisation which are preconscious and non-negotiable, and which help define an organisation's understanding of itself can be understood as *basic assumptions* (Schein, 1990). The basic assumptions are often taken for granted understandings of the reality of an organisation, implicit in the way the organisation and its members operate on a daily basis. These assumptions might be considered as a set of meanings which have been communicated and inherited over time (Geertz, 1993). *Values* are the intangible features of an organisation and are considered as the cornerstone of culture (O'Donnell, 2001). The values of an organisation consist of core beliefs and principles which provide meaning for members of the organisation and establish norms of behaviour and appropriate conduct (Sergiovanni, 2000). These values are congruent with the basic assumptions of the organisation and assist in establishing organisational identity and directing mission (Schein, 1990). The values of the organisation establish *norms* of behaviour, set standards and limitations, all of which are evident in the ways in which members operate within the organisation (Cavanagh, 2004). Norms stabilise an organisation by providing members with a sense of predictability with regard to the organisational expectations (Deal & Peterson, 1999) and establish 'patterning' (Schein, 1990, p. 25) where behaviour is purposive rather than random. This behaviour is meaningful and is an expression of the values of the

organisation. Such behaviour reflects the values and basic assumptions of the organisation often articulated symbolically, ritually, physically, artistically, and relationally (O'Donnell, 2001; Schein, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2000). These norms of behaviour can be included under the broader concept of *artifacts*, which include all visible or tangible organisation processes, procedures and other behaviours (Schein, 1990; van der Westhuizen et al., 2008). Artifacts could be considered as the both the evidence and the outcomes of a particular culture; the artifacts are the aspects of a culture encountered by people on a daily basis.

Culture is an important concept within organisations because it creates cohesion among its members around a particularised identity. However, cultures are not static entities, but are grounded in the world which is ever-changing. Cultures must adapt to this change in order to provide meaning to the members of an organisation (O'Donnell, 2001). This can be further understood by the term 'habitus', which refers to the ingrained disposition to think, act and feel in very particular ways (Glover & Coleman, 2005). This is a challenging notion given that much of any given organisational culture operates tacitly and is not always explicitly obvious. Thus, the basic assumptions of an organisation may fall off the radar of awareness of its members, but for the most part operate daily to shape the collective understandings of the organisation's cultural identity. Therefore, it becomes evident that the success or lack thereof of an organisation is very much dependent on the strength of its culture, and its capacity to be evident to the members of the organisation.

3.5.1 School Culture

Schools are organisations centred on the enterprise of education. Yet there is a distinctive and unique culture operating within individual schools, and this points to the complexities of discussing school culture as a concept in and of itself, because school cultures are unique and their ways of functioning are idiosyncratic (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2007). The identity of a school is defined in its culture. At the centre of this culture is the schools stated mission and purpose, expressions of the intangible forces which shape particular schools in peculiar ways (Deal & Peterson, 1999). However, it is the tangible features of a school's culture, the everyday experiences, norms of behaviour and person-to-person relationships which articulate "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 4). Schools with healthy school cultures are those that successfully cohere the mission, aims and objectives of the organisation, thus creating *demand quality* among staff (O'Donnell, 2001; Schein, 1990).

Such schools show evidence of cohesion to beliefs and values, thus creating commonality of purpose directed towards improvements in students' learning (Cavanagh, 2004).

An exploration of the Habermasian ideas of Lifeworld and Systemsworld are a good starting point for consideration of the various dimensions of school culture (Sergiovanni, 2000). The notion of the lifeworld of a school expresses the culture, meaning-making elements of the school and the core values which give purpose and become the source and summit of life within the community (Sergiovanni, 2000). In contrast, the Systemsworld is

> A world of instrumentalities, of efficient means designed to achieve ends. The systemsworld provides the foundation for the development of management and of organizational and financial capital, which further enriches the systemsworld (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 5).

The efficacy of a school's culture can be determined by the extent to which the lifeworld drives the systemsworld. That is, the values, beliefs, ideals and norms are at the basis of policy, administrative decision-making, budgeting and all other aspects of material reproduction within the school. This is best expressed in the idea of 'form following function' (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 6). The systemsworld must be an expression of the lifeworld if school culture is to be authentic.

As is the case with organisational culture, school cultures consist of various dimensions or elements which contribute and define the culture of a school (Schein, 1990; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). Indeed, there is comfortable synthesis between some aspects of organisational management theory and the study of school culture. At the basis of the school's culture are the basic assumptions – the core beliefs and values which underpin the school. This may be expressed variously as 'foundations', 'charism' or philosophical tradition which shapes the various aspects of the school's functions. The people within the school organisation both define and are defined by the prevailing culture. Indeed, teachers and students are conjoined in their participation in the culture of the school, namely the enterprise of learning. Therefore, the way in which teachers and students approach learning indicates much about the culture of the school (Cavanagh, 2004; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Macneil et al., 2007; Pritchard, Morrow, & Marshall, 2005; van der Westhuizen et al., 2008). Schools with positive school culture are identifiable through their provision of cognitively challenging curriculum where students are

able to construct and utilise knowledge (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). Indeed, healthy school cultures contribute much to the academic achievement of students, owing much to the established basic assumptions and values which normalise particular attitudes and behaviours relating to academe (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Pritchard et al., 2005). Moreover, positive school cultures are deeply pervasive, impacting on all aspects of school life and are not merely limited to academic achievement. These schools are characterised by the high degree of respect between staff and students; the sense of connectedness and belonging among its membership; collaborative learning and working environments; goal orientation; power equalisation whereby all members of the community have a sense of being able to contribute meaningfully, positional power notwithstanding (Macneil et al., 2007; Pritchard et al., 2005; Schochet, Smyth, & Homel, 2007; Yates & Holt, 2006).

School culture can be conceptualised in a number of different ways, which further illustrates the idiosyncratic and complex nature of same. It has been asserted that school culture is a discriminating factor between effective and ineffective schools (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). Thus, school culture has analytic significance, in that it allows deep insight into the reality of school life (Hargreaves, 1995). In an attempt to better understand culture and its impact on the way in which a school community functions, a number of different typologies have been proposed. These typologies seek to establish 'ideal types' in order that school culture might be interpreted, hypotheses proposed and empirical research conducted (Hargreaves, 1995).

Hargreaves (1995) proposes two typologies of school culture which are both based on the supposition that school cultures consist of two distinct and interrelated domains. Instrumental-social control – the controls put in place by the school hierarchies which ensures students and teachers work together productively with a focus on teaching and learning; and expressive-social cohesion – which describes the maintenance of social relationships within the school with a focus on creating satisfaction and sociability (p.26). The degree to which these two domains intersect will determine the nature of a school's culture. For instance, a *formal school* has high instrumental-social control, and low expressive-social cohesion. Such schools place great emphasis on orderliness, high expectations and traditional values. Conversely, a *welfarist school*, with its emphasis on pastoral care, staff relationships, democracy and low work pressure, has low instrumental-social control and high expressive-social cohesion. Schools which emphasise high social control and high social cohesion are

termed *hothouse schools*. These schools are characterised by high expectations with regard to participation in all aspects of school life. Finally, *survivalist schools* are those that have low instrumental-social control and expressive-social cohesion. Delinquency, truancy, teacher isolation, low expectations for student work in exchange for some degree of student conformity are the discernible characteristics of the survivalist school. (Dumay, 2009; Hargreaves, 1995).

It could be surmised that effective schools are those that establish a balance between the two domains. The second typology consists of five underlying social structures: political, micropolitical, maintenance, development and service. The *political* structure refers to the formal distribution of power within the school, and which personnel have authority and status. *Micropolitical* structure concerns the informal networks of people who influence the various aspects of school life. *Maintenance* structure pertains to the mechanisms within the school which provide stability; while development structures point to the capacities for change within the school. Finally, the *service* structures have to do with the social relationships between staff, students, parents and governing bodies (Hargreaves, 1995, p.31). The way in which a school is organised according to these structures will define the nature of its culture as either traditional (high instrumental-social control) or collegial (balance between instrumental-social control and expressive-social cohesion) (Hargreaves, 1995). While these typologies are theoretical, there is empirical evidence to suggest that a balance between the two domains is an indicator of an effective school, particularly from the perspective of students (Fairman & Clarke (1982) in Macneil et al., 2007; Pritchard et al., 2005; Schochet et al., 2007; van der Westhuizen et al., 2008).

3.5.2 Catholic School Culture

Catholic schools share with other school organisations many of the characteristics of culture. However, Catholic schools lay claim to a culture which is different from these schools and peculiar to Catholic education. This peculiarity is expressed through the assertion that the Catholic school's purpose is to proclaim the kingdom of God through a culture based upon the values espoused by Jesus which are articulated in the gospels (McLaughlin, 2000a). Catholic schools purport to own a culture which is geared towards the development of the human person, and which is inclusive of both the cognitive/intellectual and religious/spiritual domains (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1965). Catholic schools claim an identity

with a defined philosophical base which includes anthropology, cosmology, ontology and epistemology (Treston, 2001). Subsequently, Catholic schools strive to promote a particular view of the human person and human life; to nurture the desire for an integrated life; to cultivate the formation of the religious and moral self (McLaughlin, 2000b). However, this is not to imply that Catholic schools are cloistered communities, intent on barricading against the modern world. Indeed, the Catholic school fulfils the same civic function as other schools "configured in the perspective of the Catholic faith" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 16)

It is evident, then, that the culture of the Catholic school has Jesus Christ as the centre or heart of the school, from which emanate a number of defining dimensions which articulate and reinforce the culture (Treston, 1992). These dimensions consist of core beliefs and values; symbols; rituals; stories and myths (Flynn, 1993). All of these aspects interact to point to the special character of Catholic schools (Flynn & Mok, 2002). Thus, one of the core purposes of the Catholic school is to lead students through a process of discovery of the truth and to cultivate a disposition to life in light of the Gospel (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). It is asserted that this will be achieved where the school is an authentic, inclusive community with a strong ecclesial and cultural identity (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998). There is empirical evidence that suggests that the degree to which a school experiences success is closely correlated with a strong sense of community (Byrk, Lee & Holland (1993) in Sergiovanni, 2000).

It is understood that cultures are not static entities (O'Donnell, 2001). All cultures are subject to change augmented by developments in the external environment. While contemporary Catholic school cultures are open to the world and its influence, this has not always been the case historically:

> And so, in the spirit of the Divine Master, We have directed a helpful word, now of admonition, now of exhortation, now of direction, to youths and to their educators, to fathers and mothers, on various points of Christian education, with that solicitude which becomes the common Father of all the Faithful, with an insistence in season and out of season, demanded by our pastoral office and inculcated by the Apostle: "Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine." Such insistence is called for in these our times, when, alas, there is so great and

> deplorable an absence of clear and sound principles, even regarding problems the most fundamental (Pope Pius XI, 1929).

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Church approached the world with a fortress mentality, and this approach included the education of Catholic youth. The Catholic school was considered to be the cradle of the future Church, to be achieved through isolationism and defensiveness towards the world (Chambers, Grajczonek, & Ryan, 2006; McLaughlin, 2005; Morris, 1998). Catholic school culture was thus characterised by religious formalism in an attempt to preserve the Catholic faith. The Church of the post-Second Vatican Council era recognised the increasing cultural and religious plurality of the world and the role of the Catholic school in integrating faith and culture which was inclusive and illuminated by the gospel (Welbourne, 2001). However, the dialectic of contemporary Catholic schooling is the increasing plurality of their school populations. Catholic schools account for over 20% of all students enrolled in Australian schools; where 25% of those enrolled in Catholic schools are non-Catholic (National Catholic Education Commission, 2008). This has implications for the nature of Catholic school culture, particularly with regard to the ways in which Catholic schools maintain their distinctive religious disposition and mission (Belmonte & Cranston, 2007; Belmonte, Cranston, & Limerick, 2006). Furthermore, more than 50% of Catholic school-age children do not attend Catholic schools, which further adds to the decline of religious capital in Catholic schools (McLaughlin, 2005). Schools operate as a means of socialisation, and this process of socialisation is important in the intergenerational transmission of culture (Morris, 1998). Thus, the increasing number of non-Catholic enrolments in Catholic schools underscores the complexities of contemporary Catholic schooling, particularly in their on-going claim as a ‘faith community’ (Benjamin, 2010; Francis, 1990).

In addition to the changing demographics of Catholic school populations, there is also an emerging pattern of differential religious belief among many youth. Indeed, young people aged between 15-19 years represent 6% of Catholic church attendees in Australia (National Church Life Survey, 2008). However, this is not to suggest that there is an outright rejection of religion by young people. While there may be discontent about various Catholic doctrine, young people do not reject the idea of the transcendental but are increasingly suspicious of organised, formal and traditional approaches to religious belief and practice (Belmonte et al., 2006; McLaughlin, 2005; van Eyk, 2002). It is suggested that this is the result of a lack of

connection with the culture and language of the church: 'I just sit there and I don't understand what the guy is talking about', and a male reiterated that church is 'just not exciting towards my age' (Cook & Hughes, 2006). Therefore, the meaningfulness and relevance of the distinctive religious dimension of Catholic school culture is being reconsidered. Indeed, the nature of Catholic school culture is no longer as clear and unambiguous as was once the case.

In addition to the increasing plurality of belief and practice among students enrolled in Catholic schools, the personal values and beliefs of teachers in Catholic schools is yet a further dimension which points towards the changing nature and purpose of Catholic schools. Teaching in Catholics schools is understood as a vocation and ministry directed towards the evangelisation and formation of students: "School staff who truly live their faith will be agents of a new evangelization in creating a positive climate for the Christian faith to grow and in spiritually nourishing the students entrusted to their care" (Pope John Paul II, 2001). Catholic Education offices, as employing authorities, have specific employment guidelines which emphasise that prospective employees in Catholic schools be supportive of its educational aims. Effective teachers are accordingly those who "are active practising Catholics, committed to their parish community and loyal to the Church and her teaching" (Pope John Paul II, 2001). However, the employment of teachers who are Catholic is an increasingly difficult task for Catholic schools evidenced by the decreasing religiosity of Australians generally (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Therefore, the Catholic school faces the challenge of employing staff who understand that their work is a vocation which

> ...includes the work of on-going social development: to form men and women who will be ready to take their place in society, preparing them in such a way that they will make the kind of social commitment which will enable them to work for the improvement of social structures, making these structures more conformed to the principles of the Gospel (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, para. 19).

There is, therefore, an evident tension that arises from the contention that the teacher in the Catholic schools has "prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, para. 19), that the role of the teacher is critical in maintaining a distinctive Catholic culture (Morris, 1998), and the reality that the religious values and beliefs of these very same teachers are conditional and experiential rather than a reproduction of the doctrines of the official Church (McLaughlin, 2005).

The challenge for Catholic schools in the modern world concerns its place in an ever-increasing secular world and the concomitant decline in religious adherence, coupled with the increasing demand for its services by non-Catholic students and their families. While Catholic school rhetoric claims a distinctive culture, foundational upon the notion of 'faith community', the reality of this as a living culture is decidedly opaque.

3.5.3 Catholic school culture and parental choice of school

The influence of school culture on the parental choice of school process is evident in the literature where it is understood that culture refers to the basic assumptions, values and beliefs of an organisation, expressed both tangibly and intangibly (Geertz, 1993; O'Donnell, 2001). Therefore, when parents consider the quality of resources, teachers or the values espoused in the curriculum, they are making decisions based upon the culture of the school. However, there are particular constraints faced by parents in the choice process, particularly if they are considering Catholic education. One of the major constraints is financial (Williams, Hancher & Hutner (1983) in Maddaus, 1990). Catholic schools offer places to students on a fee-paying basis. Therefore, while parents may find that the espoused values of the Catholic school are congruent with their own, they may be excluded from this choice because of the fee commitment.

The implications of this are two-fold: firstly, this highlights the extent to which Catholic schools live up to their stated mission and purpose in the modern world in light of increasing funding demands and accountabilities at national, state and local levels; and secondly, whether these demands are resulting in Catholic schools being advertently classist in their selection of students, justified by financial expediency. These are important considerations for the analysis of the parental choice of Catholic schools because, it would seem, the process is exclusive to a selected demographic (Freund, 2001), namely the educated middle-class (McLaughlin, 2005). There is clear discord between the emerging Catholic school and its foundational intention to reach out to the 'new poor' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, para. 15) and scrutinise unjust social structures (McLaughlin, 2000a). However, the evidence (Evans & Schwab, 1995; Ilg & Massucci, 2003; Neal, 1997; Opdenakker & Van

Damme, 2006) suggests that it is these groups of people, mostly minority groups, are where Catholic schools are most effective.

One of the phases of the parental school choice process is the establishment of personalised criteria that allow for distinction between options. The term *criteria* is understood to refer to the various aspects parents cite in order that they may distinguish between schools (Seiffert, 1993). The literature indicates that the criteria consist of a number of features of school culture which are broadly outlined below.

Parents consider the quality of education in a school as an important factor. However, this idea of quality is to be distinguished from examination results and other school data published for the purposes of public accountability (Aitchison, 2002; Baker, 1991; Daniels, 2007; Groundwater-Smith, 2001; Independent Schools Queensland, 2007; Jackson & Bisset, 2005; Weston, 1998). Quality of education refers to the ability of the school to prepare the child for later life and future participation in the workforce. Parents who select Catholic schools cite employment and civic preparedness as important (Flynn, 1993). Ultimately, parents seek out schools that meet the individual needs of their child. Further, the degree of choice within the curriculum and the qualifications of teachers are also indicative of quality. This is closely related with the school's capacity to fulfil the potential of each child. Parents seek enrolment for their children in Catholic schools on the basis that their children will participate in a 'functional community' (Coleman, 1988, p. 6). This defines the Catholic school as an agent of the state, but also an extension of the family. This suggests that the decision to select a Catholic school might be morally motivated, while the religiosity of the school is increasingly less important to parents (Dronkers, 1995).

Parents select religious schools because of an evident educational conservatism which is synonymous with quality education. Catholic schools have clearly defined values and beliefs, and parents select Catholic schools because the culture of these schools espouse and nurture values which are closely related to those of home, and contribute to their children becoming productive adults (Dronkers, 1995; Maddaus, 1990). That is, the Catholic school provides a degree of social capital (Coleman, 1988). This assertion seems to be supported in Flynn's (1993) longitudinal study- the most major and recent study of its kind including parental choice of Catholic school. The data suggest that parents select Catholic schools on the basis that these schools provide better quality teachers and a better standard of education. The

religious nature of the Catholic school is considered as the least important factor. These data are confirmed in a more recent small-scale study (Kennedy, Dorman, & Mulhollland, 2011) that teacher quality, safety, teacher-student relationships, level of care and concern and student-student relationships were the top considerations of parents. Religious reasons were considered to a moderate degree. Interestingly, being Catholic in a Catholic school is not a strong determinant of success (Evans & Schwab, 1995). This further consolidates previous assertions that the Catholic school is becoming increasingly pluralistic and hence, more attractive to a variety of non-Catholic clientele.

Another important factor cited by parents in their choice of school included the security and happiness of the child. These aspects are variously defined to include discipline which is considered to promote security and happiness by protecting students' vulnerabilities (Coldron & Boulton, 1991). Some of the literature posits that indiscipline is used as a way to deselect particular schools (Bagley et al., 2001; DEST, 2005; Goh, 2007). Student behaviour in a school is a measure used by parents to determine the extent to which the school's values are congruent with those of the family (English, 2006; Independent Schools Queensland, 2007). It can therefore be inferred that the conduct of students communicated something of the culture, if not the sub-culture of these schools. The contribution of students to the culture of schools, including Catholic schools, is evident in the literature (Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Mok & Flynn, 1998; Woods, 1983) and thus students, as a dimension of school culture, influence parental choice of school. There is a perception that Catholic schools as so-called 'private schools' promote discipline and are in a position to be more selective in the enrolment process (Evans & Schwab, 1995). This reinforces an understanding of Catholic schools as places characterised by safety and security (Maddaus, 1990).

Some parents select schools based on 'people factors' rather than 'material factors' (Sultmann, Thurgood, & Rasmussen, 2003). The idea of *ethos* as a dimension of the culture of the school is a strong factor of choice for parents considering enrolment in Catholic schools particularly. Such parents can be considered to be making choices out of a desire for their child to obtain self-goods. These self-goods include the inculcation of specific values and it is these values which distinguish one school from the other (Freund, 2001). As a corollary of this, the ways in which the school espouses these values is considered to be characterised by the approachability of staff, the observable conduct of students, community connectedness and interpersonal relationships (Sultmann et al., 2003). Furthermore, the idea

of *ethos* is exemplified in pastoral care programs, behaviour management of students, and the degree to which schools took an interest in students as people (DEST, 2005). Parents consider school selection based upon the congruence between the espoused values of the organisation and those of the home. For parents selecting Catholic schools, the emphasis is on the school as an agent of the family, which is distinct from education offered in other sectors where these schools function solely as agents of the state (Coleman, 1988). Notably, however, the role of religious values and teachings were not strongly emphasised by parents (Freund, 2001; Sultmann et al., 2003). This suggests that parents sift a school's culture, and in this case the Catholic school culture, in search of values which reflect their own, without placing strong emphasis on the religious dimension of this school culture. Thus, parents select Catholic schools because of the strength of the social organisation of the school, readily referred to as 'community' in Catholic school lexicon (Bagley et al., 2001).

Finally, the physical and operational characteristics of a school also feature in the parental school choice process (Bagley et al., 2001; Beavis, 2004; English, 2004; Geertz, 1993; Goh, 2007; Groundwater-Smith, 2001). These features of the school's culture are considered artifacts (Geertz, 1993). Parents do consider a school's offering in terms of facilities, class sizes, extra-curricular programs and access to other resources, like information communication technology (ICT). However, this is not as strong a factor as those previously identified. Importantly, what parents consider as vital is that the stated values of the school are conspicuous in its day-to-day operation (DEST, 2005). However, this is not to delimit the communicative power of the infrastructural characteristics of a school. The expressive symbols of Catholic schools (crosses, statues, murals and so on) are important mediums of communication (Flynn & Mok, 2002). Indeed, the tangible aspects of a school's culture can influence important aspects of student behaviour and attitude towards learning (Pritchard et al., 2005; van der Westhuizen et al., 2008) This clearly speaks to the importance of culture in the process of parental choice of school and points to the importance of continuing to build on the literature in this area. Therefore, the fourth research question is appropriate to facilitate this:

How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?

3.6 Race and Parental Choice of School

The notion of 'race' is a further dimension of school choice. This element of the literature on school choice is relevant to this study because of its exploration of the ways Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents choose a boarding school for their child. The research site school of this study consist of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

The importance of race in education has been clearly highlighted in the education history of the United Kingdom with so called 'dispersal' policies of the 1950s and 1960s. These policies intended the dilution of ethnic minority groups through forced enrolment in selected schools (Bagley, 1996). Similar policies adopted in the United States, known as 'bussing' moved ethnic students away from schools dense with minority group enrolments. Such policies were part of a larger project of desegregation (McDonald, 1997). In Australia, the education of Indigenous peoples was built on the policies of assimilation and integration (Dunn, 2001), with the objective of maintaining a particular conception of monoculturalism. However, these policies have not all achieved their intended objectives. Studies in various areas across the UK and US demonstrate a continuing leakage of White residents and White students out of areas and schools with large multiethnic populations (Bagley, 1996; Brama, 2005; McDonald, 1997; Orfield, 2001; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). In an attempt to redress this issue, the United States instituted choice programs which saw the establishment of charter and magnet schools, as well as the offer of educational vouchers which would broaden school choice for all families (Saporito & Lareau, 1999).

This phenomenon of out-migration of White people from selected areas and schools is firmly grounded in notions of race and racism. Racism can be defined as the exclusion of a subordinate group from the benefits (social, political, cultural and educational) of power (Dunn, 2001). Race is important because "people have internalised racist ideas about what skin colour tells about the value and worth of a person or a group of people" (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1071). Schools do not exist in a vacuum but, rather, are reflections of wider social, political and cultural influences. Thus, schools are not in any way insulated against the impact of racist ideologies and can often reflect and reinforce these very ideologies. The ways in which schools enrol students, design and deliver curriculum and value culture can be strongly racialised even though many of these processes may be intended as racially neutral or culturally sensitive (Haviland, 2008; Stevens, 2007). As a result, the dominant (White) group's powers is reinforced and the subordinate (minority) group is silenced, which

effectively contributes to "maintaining the societal taboos around racism" (Gordon in Graham & Robinson, 2004, p. 655).

Racialised School Choice

The ways in which parents make choices about where they want their children to be raised and attend school can also be influenced by notions of race. It is suggested that White people depart residential areas when the population demographic begins to be dominated by minority ethnic groups, most notably Black people. The level at which White people decide to leave such areas is termed the 'tipping point' (Brama, 2005). The out-migration of White people from these areas is a form of social control, whereby White families seek to manoeuvre away from perceived social and economic disadvantage. The relationship between ethnicity and disadvantage is the product of the perceived failure of minority groups to conform to the dominant culture (de Plevitz, 2007; Gillborn, 2004). This racialisation is a socialisation process whereby the ethnic minorities are marginalised and *whiteness* is centred and privileged (Raby, 2004). This is compounded by the reality that minority ethnic groups are often economically disadvantaged (Powell, 2000). As a result, the combinations of class and race become cogent social markers. In Australia, aboriginality may connote disadvantage, which is reinforced in social and educational data. For instance, reviews of Indigenous education have found that Indigenous students have absenteeism rates twice that of non-Indigenous students (de Plevitz, 2007) and the retention rates to Year 12 of Indigenous students (43%) is substantially less than non-Indigenous students (76%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Thus, schools with large populations of Indigenous students are positioned as (statistically) disadvantaged. The literature indicates that the acquisition of positional goods is a priority for some parents, particularly the White middle-class. When selecting a school for their child, factors such as the racial composition of a school may be a point of consideration during the choice process (Freund, 2001).

Schooling may be considered a part of the process of a child's socialisation into particular class values in an attempt at social reproduction and assurance of social mobility. If so, then it is feasible that race, ethnicity and school population demographics may factor as important determinants in the parental school choice process (Schaverien, 2004; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008; Theobold, 2005). The importance of race and ethnicity as a factor in the choice process predominates among the White middle-class. The evidence (Saporito & Lareau, 1999)

suggests that the school selection process is heavily influenced by race, most strongly for White families but not as strongly for Black families. The data indicate that White families will deselect predominantly Black schools, even if these are affluent and have a track record for academic success (Saporito & Lareau, 1999). Thus the parental choice process is differentiated across cultural groups, which sees White families make primary judgements against preeminent criteria, which will automatically eliminate certain schools (Hsieh & Shen, 2000). Academic excellence or lack thereof does not factor into the initial stages of consideration (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Conversely, Black families do not engage in this process, nor do these families consider race as significant in the selection or deselection of school (Saporito & Lareau, 1999). It has been found that Black families in the United States look to school to offer their children an experience of racial and cultural diversity (Saporito & Lareau, 1999)

This racialised deselection phenomenon is commonly termed 'white flight' whereby there is a notable white, middle-class drain from multi-ethnic schools (Bagley et al., 2001; Denessen et al., 2005; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). This movement of the White, middle-class is made possible because of access to material resources that allow for the selection and deselection of particular schools. That is, middle-class families have fewer constraints in the choice process. It is asserted that White students are able to maintain their status by avoiding schools that have a multiracial composition (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Attendance at multi-racial schools may denote social immobilisation. Indeed, the evidence (Bagley, 1996) indicates that some parents consider the inability of schools to entice White students is largely due to the multi-ethnicity of certain specific school populations, and that parental preference of school for White families is closely related to ethnicity and race.

The notion of 'white flight' is one which arose out of research on residential areas, predominantly in the United States (Brama, 2005). In these studies it was shown that White families were the most desirable neighbours and non-White families needed to be avoided. Where there were large concentrations of immigrants and black families, there was a tendency for voluntary segregation whereby White families would leave certain residential areas in preference for predominantly White suburbia (Brama, 2005). It was shown that this out-migration of White families was the result when certain thresholds of Black and ethnic families were breached.

This research has broadened to include an analysis of the 'white flight' phenomenon in the parental school choice process. A corollary of the "white flight" hypothesis is the idea of 'white avoidance' whereby certain schools are deselected in the choice process based upon race. Thus the 'flight' may be away *from* certain schools as opposed to *towards* mono-ethnic schools (Bagley, 1996; Bagley et al., 2001). Some of the evidence (Karsten, Ledoux, Roeleveld, Felix, & Elshof, 2003) suggests that those schools deemed most unsuitable by parents are those that are predominantly non-White. However, these racialised choices may not be at the forefront of parent's awareness during the choice process. This *perspective suppression* is the result of inherent and tacit beliefs about culture and race which are so deeply held that the influence of which remains delitescent (Bagley, 1996). There is little evidence in the literature for the 'white flight' phenomena in Australia (Connell, 2003; Gulson, 2007). However, the emerging empirical evidence (Gulson, 2006) suggests that non-Indigenous Australian parents make school choices along racial lines. The ambition (concerted school choice-making) of the White middle-classes is raced, which is evidenced in the movement of White students away from multiethnic schools. The decline in enrolments in the schools of this study was due to a 'race narrowing' (Gulson, 2006, p. 268), whereby parents moved away or deselected certain schools based upon a number of reasons, one of which was the large enrolment of Aboriginal and ethnic students (Ho, 2011). This in turn resulted in a negative school reputation which is fused to negative ideas about Aboriginality:

> Green Road was held in pretty poor regard. People saw it as being a largely Aboriginal school... and looked for other alternatives. So, apart from those that had little choice, or weren't all that concerned about what happened... the aspirational group within the community looked for alternatives other than Green Road [Mr. Lewis, South Sydney District Office] (Gulson, 2006, p. 269).

While there is little empirical evidence in the area of parental choice of school and Indigenous composition of school enrolment, there is literature which points to a well established prejudice against Indigenous people by non-Indigenous Australians (Pedersen et al., 2006). Among some non-Indigenous Australians, there is a perception that Indigenous people receive special treatment across a number of social spheres, including education. This misconception stems from a misunderstanding of government funding arrangements for Indigenous students. It also fails to acknowledge that similarly disadvantaged non-Indigenous

students receive likewise assistance (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008a; Pedersen et al., 2006).

The tendency of White families to avoid multiethnic schools is based upon a perception that students from racially diverse schools are less successful than those who claim a more culturally homogenous student population. That is, parents use the racial mix of a school as a proxy for the quality of the school (Ladd & Fiske, 2001). While this may be intuitively contestable, there is evidence to suggest that schools with a large proportion of minority ethnic groups are not as academically successful as their more culturally homogenous counterparts (Karsten et al., 2003; Ladd & Fiske, 2001). One of the reasons suggested for this is that multiethnic schools are often dealing with basic student routines, students' access to materials, discipline, attendance and other student pastoral matters (Thrupp, 1998). For parents, homogenous schools, particularly those that have a track record of success, are able to attract more qualified and experienced teachers. In addition, such schools offer greater social and cultural capital due to the diverse professional fields of the parent body and their willingness to contribute to the school community (Ladd & Fiske, 2001).

Racial Composition and Perceptions of School Quality

The implications of this phenomenon is the stratification of schools based on race, and the ideas of 'good' or 'effective' schools are closely related with the ethnicity of the school population. Consequently, schools with a predominantly White population are accorded higher educational status, consolidating a reputation which may or may not reflect the reality (Theobold, 2005). Such a result may come at the expense of the population of minority cultures in the school through the foregrounding of the concept of 'other'. Consequently, these minority groups may associate their own cultural heritage with disadvantage, and may undertake a process of cultural affiliation with the dominant group in an attempt at attaining social advantage (George, 2007). Conversely, multi-ethnic schools are accorded inferior educational status which in turn gives way to the emergence of school identities defined by disadvantage (Ho, 2011; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Therefore, diminishing White populations in schools may be considered a negative social condition. White parents will eliminate schools based on race, because multi-ethnicity connotes disadvantage and inequality, which serve as barriers to their desire to maintain their child's social position and advantage.

> Although definitions of inequality vary and are often implicit in educational research (Foster et al., 1996), the focus on levels of attainment in education reflects a more general shift from "equality of access" to more radical models of "equality of outcome" in which the dominant White group is considered the reference group (Stevens, 2007, p. 155)

This focus on 'outcomes' marginalises multi-ethnic/race schools because of a prevailing White, middle-class perception that such schools are deficit with regard to quality education, resourcing, and academic standards. As a result, parents actively avoid these schools in an attempt to protract their child's position in the class hierarchy (Bagley, 1996; Brama, 2005; George, 2007; Haviland, 2008; McDonald, 1997; Orfield, 2001; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008; Theobold, 2005). Thus, schools of increasing multi-ethnicity are conceived as less successful, inferior, insecure, and socially immobilising (Bagley, 1996; Renzulli & Evans, 2005).

The interrelationship between education, social mobility and capital leads more highly educated parents to be more sensitive to the racial and ethnic compositions of particular schools (Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). In determining a school for their child, parents apply certain imperatives (values, beliefs, understandings, experience), that determine the schooling options available. The evidence purports that the primary imperative is race (Saporito & Lareau, 1999) which may be veiled by claims that the most appropriate schools are those that closely reflect home (Karsten et al., 2003).

However, there is evidence (Maile, 2004; Spera et al., 2009) to suggest that disadvantaged non-White families seek out schools that afford their children the opportunity to acquire skills required to insure against civic disengagement or failure (i.e. unemployment). It is asserted that these groups of parents can have strong aspirations for their children because they recognise education as a vehicle for upward social mobility. Indeed, compared with White parents in the same SES grouping, evidence suggests the non-White parents have stronger educational aspirations for their children (Spera et al., 2009). It is posited that this group of parents have particular educational expectations (attitudes) which lead to what is termed as "concerted cultivation" (Bodovski, 2010, p. 140). Concerted cultivation refers to actions or strategies undertaken by parents to shape their child's success at school. It is suggested that

low-SES families socialise their children according to the opportunities available to them (Bodovski, 2010). These assertions about the strategies of the traditionally disadvantaged in the school choice process bring into to question the nature and function of 'chooser types' (previously discussed) according to social class strata. The evidence suggests that the race and social class intersection of school choice are much more complex than the school chooser typologies (Ball et al., 1996) asserted elsewhere in the literature.

While the current body of research in the area of race and parental choice is useful in delineating some of the relevant issues, the applicability of this research in the Australian context requires further scrutiny. There is limited Australian empirical research into the influence of race on parental choice of school. Moreover, the literature in the area of race and school choice is limited to the US, UK and Europe. With the exception of Gulson (2006), de Plevitz (2007), Ho (2011) and Dunn (2001), where there are some discussions of education and race, there is little empirical research in the area of school choice according to the racial composition of schools. Gulson's (2006) and Ho's (2011) research makes the implication that there may be selectivity among White families, but this is not supported with empirical data. Gulson's and Ho's works are two of few pieces of research to broach the issue of 'white flight' in Australia, but this research is limited to Sydney and surrounds. There is limited research on the relationship between the Indigenous composition of school populations and school choice, despite the presence of a relationship established in the research from the United Kingdom, United States, Europe and New Zealand. Hence the fifth research question: **How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?**

3.7 Conceptual Framework

The following themes illuminate the purpose of this research and formed the framework for the consideration of the literature:

- Indigenous education
- Parental Choice of School
- School Culture
- Race and Parental Choice of School

A diagrammatic overview of the conceptual framework that directed the review of literature is included in Figure 3.1. This heuristic framework highlights the stages of the parental choice process which emerge from the body of literature. The framework highlights that the parental choice process is influenced by broad contextual factors such as demography, geography, government policy and educational trends. The diagram then goes on to outline the process of parental choice which begins with the family, namely the parents, and the first stage of the process labelled as *school framing*. This suggests that at this stage of the process, parents are short-listing certain schools and these decisions are shaped by the values and attitudes of the family, their class position, the constraints they impose themselves and those that are out of their control (i.e. finances), the extent to which their child will feel secure and the culture (sometimes expressed as 'the feel') of the school (Bagley et al., 2001; McCarthy, 2001; Seiffert, 1993). At this stage of the process, parents are also deselecting certain schools.

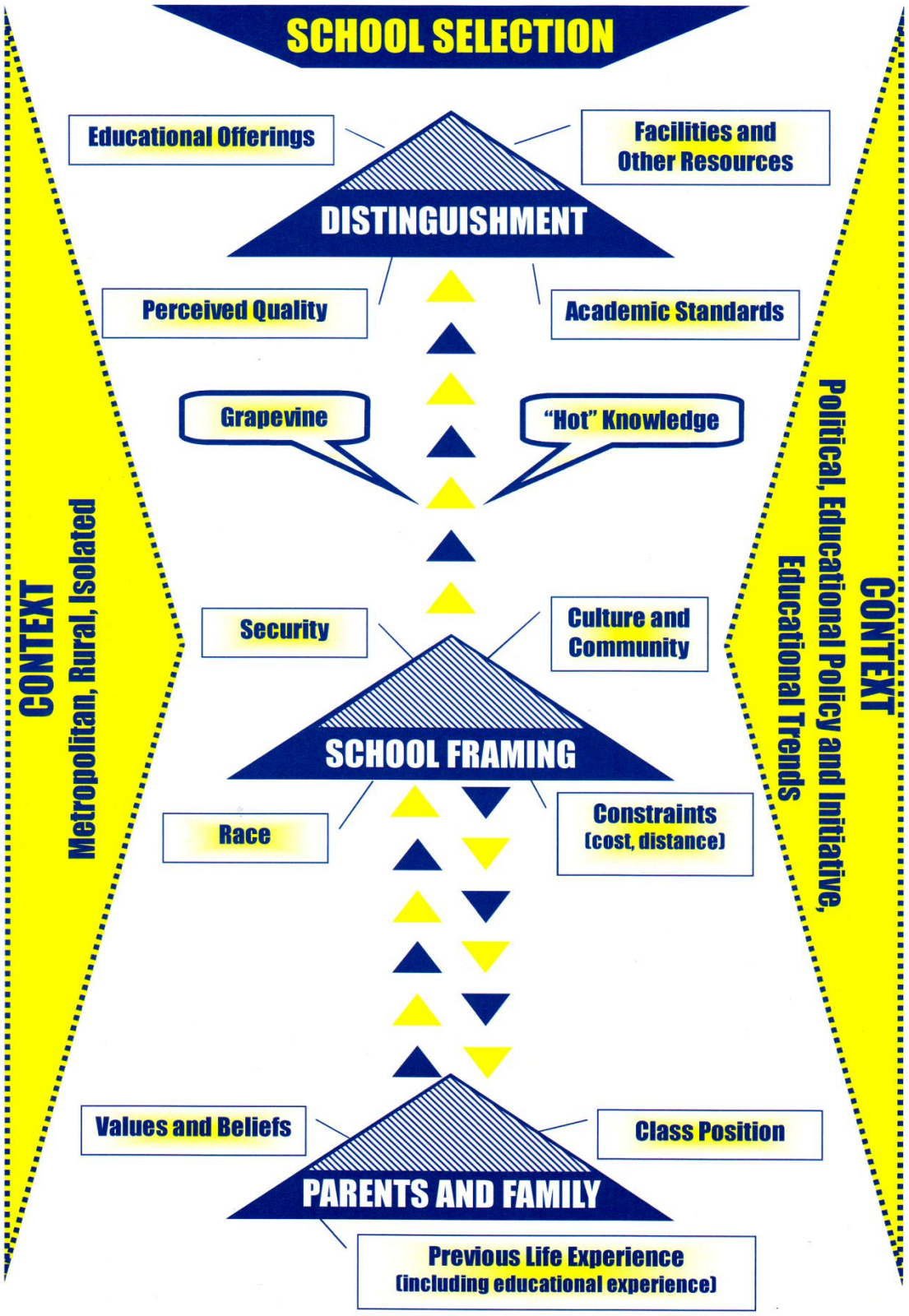
The framework then indicates that once parents have framed their choices, they seek to distinguish between their choices by engaging with the *Grapevine* and accessing *hot knowledge* (Ball & Vincent, 1998). The *Grapevine* is the harbinger of hot knowledge: these terms express the informal networks of information that parents access in the process of distinguishing between and confirming their selection of school. *Hot knowledge* describes the information which is not officially presented by the school and gives some insight into the subculture of schools. Parents are seeking information about academic quality, discipline and student behaviour (Bagley et al., 2001; Baker, 1991). In addition, some parents are seeking confirmation that their choice is appropriate and sufficiently concomitant with those who form part of their social networks. This is most often the case with middle-class parents who seek culturally reproductive schools (Ball & Vincent, 1998).

The final stage in the process is termed *Distinguishment*. At this stage, the literature suggests parents are making fine-tuned decisions based on the externalities of the school under consideration, such as facilities and resources. Parents will also consider the academic quality of the school and the breadth of curriculum offerings. It is from here that parents make their final selection of school.

3.7.1 The conceptual framework in the context of this study

The conceptual framework, which is a conceptual view of the literature on parental choice of school, must be considered in light of the purpose of this study: to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents select a boarding school for their child, in order to illuminate the reasons for changing enrolment patterns at the research site school. As a result, this framework will be scrutinised, refuted and refined where appropriate in light of the findings that emerge from the data. This is particularly necessary given the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in this study which may challenge the White, Western view of school choice represented in Figure 3.1, and lead to a reconceptualization of same.

Figure 3.2 Conceptual Diagram



3.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the literature which illuminated the complex elements which shape the ways in which rural and remote Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents choose a boarding school for their children. Specifically, the literature review was framed according to the four themes of Indigenous education, parental choice of school, culture and, race and parental choice of school.

The first section of the literature review, Indigenous Education, is an important area of the literature given that this study considered the ways in which Indigenous parents make boarding school choices for their children. The evident educational disadvantages experienced by Indigenous children uniquely positions Indigenous people in the school choice landscape. The second section considered the area of parental choice of school, and focused on the rationalities employed by parents in the school choice process and also suggested the influence of social class in the selection of school. The third section analysed the notion of school culture and Catholic school culture, in particular. This is a necessary area for consideration given that the research site for the study is a Catholic school. Catholic schools lay claim to a unique school culture and the significance of this school culture needs to be explored in the context of parental choice of boarding school. The final section of the literature review considered the influence of race on parental choice of school. Given the changing enrolment patterns of the research site school and its racially heterogeneous student composition, a consideration of the ways in which constructions of race shapes the ways in which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous choose a boarding school was pertinent.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, elaborates and justifies the design of the thesis.

CHAPTER 4 DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to delineate and justify the research design selected to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children. The research questions which focus the research are:

1. How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?
2. How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of boarding school for their child?
3. How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?
4. How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

4.2 Theoretical Framework

This research adopts an interpretive research paradigm to explore the reasons for the changing enrolment patterns at a Catholic boarding school by examining the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in the school choice process. The interpretive paradigm is based on the principle that humans use constructs which include culture, social context and language to formulate a world view which is defined in and through social interaction (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002). Thus, from this perspective, knowledge is constructed through interaction with other human beings (O'Donoghue, 2007). The central concepts of intepretivist research are *intersubjectivity*, *motives* and *reason* (Candy, 1989). *Intersubjectivity* denotes the consented-to-norms of belief and action which define what is 'true' in a particular social situation. *Motives* refer to the circumstances which give rise to other new circumstances; and *reasons* refer to the unfulfilled expectations which influence future behaviours. Herein lays the purpose of interpretive research: to analyse actions which are socially meaningful through the observation of people in their given social contexts in an

attempt to come to an understanding of how the researched come to arrive at and preserve meaning in their social context (Neuman, 2006).

In order to understand the ways in which parents make meaning from the choice process, the epistemology of constructionism has been adopted. Within this frame, symbolic interactionism is one of two theoretical perspectives adopted for this study. Furthermore, Indigenous perspectives are included in this study's analysis of Indigenous parent's engagement in the school choice process. This theoretical perspective immediately precedes (Chapter 5) the discussion of the Indigenous data (Chapter 6) as a lead in to understanding the chapter. These constructs in turn direct the choice of methodologies and methods utilised to explore the problem. Table 4.1 summarises the theoretical framework of the study.

Table 4.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

EPISTEMOLOGY	**Constructionism**
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	**Symbolic Interactionism** **Indigenous Perspectives**
METHODOLOGY	**Case Study**
METHOD	**One-on-One Semi-structured Interviews** **Focus Groups**

4.3 Epistemology

Constructionism has been adopted as the epistemology underpinning this study in order to determine the meanings of parental choice of school existent in the interviewees' responses to the research questions. From an epistemological perspective, constructionism posits that reality, as perceived by human beings, is the product of social interaction (Stahl, 2003). Principally, constructionism understands that the lived world is not constituent of objective realities, but is shaped and influenced by meaningful interaction between human beings. Constructionists claim that objectivity, in relation to human subjects, is problematic because

humans make sense of the world through their individual systems of meaning (Candy, 1989). Constructionism explores the ways in which humans develop subjective meanings; this is to state that constructionism is the study of meaningful social action (Neuman, 2006).
Furthermore, the social world is composed of the intentions and meanings of the social actors (Pring, 2005) and thus social settings are unique because they are constituted by the meanings agreed to in relation to words, gestures and other 'symbolic' acts by those members of that social setting:

> The social reality under investigation is not the same as other social realities since each is constituted by the distinctive interactions, perceptions and interpretations of the members of the social group. Each group will be defined in terms of its negotiated meanings. What can be said of one group cannot be applied to another… because each social setting is defined by the perceptions and interactions of those who are participating in that particular social reality (Pring, 2005, p. 106).

From a constructionism perspective, 'truth' is predicated on agreements about valid knowledge which is produced from the relationships between members of a community through a process of mutual negotiation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This 'truth' or knowledge is constructed and reconstructed by drawing on existing knowledge in order to make sense of complicated questions. Thus knowledge only exists when it is shared with another (De Koster, Devise, Flament, & Loots, 2004). The construction of knowledge takes place through the processes of *accommodation* and *assimilation*. *Accommodation* takes place when existing knowledge is restructured in order to reconcile new understandings. *Assimilation* refers to the attempt to make sense of new experiences by producing new concepts from and in relation to existing sets of ideas (Fisher & Taylor, 1997). Therefore, knowledge is a "negotiated creation of meaning" (De Koster et al., 2004, p. 75)

Therefore, a constructionist approach to research does not claim law-like generalisations that are applicable across social settings. Rather, the constructionist research purpose is to generate idiographic detail that provides deep understandings (*Verstehen*) of an individual or event (Schnelker, 2006). Constructionist accounts in research are to avoid superficial descriptions, reiterations and reinterpretations, in favour of giving "deeper, more extensive and more systematic representation of events from the point of view of the actors involved" (Candy, 1989, p. 5). Constructionist research focuses on how people construct their worlds

rather than on what they conclude about the worlds in which they live (Schnelker, 2006). In turn, the researcher applies a *transcendent perspective* which seeks to go beyond the observable to an emphasis on the researcher and researched co-constructing "mutual understandings and affect conditions" (Neuman, 2006, p. 93). On account of this, the empirical nature of constructionism is based on the premise of making possible the construction of new knowledge or narratives, rather than as an apparatus for the production of objective knowledge (Stahl, 2003).

4.3.1 Theoretical Perspective: Symbolic Interactionism

A theoretical perspective is the philosophical position undertaken by a study, which undergirds the selected methodology and creates a lens through which the research process can be understood. The theoretical perspective fundaments the logic and criteria of the research process (Crotty, 1998). One of the theoretical perspectives adopted for this study is symbolic interactionism. Symbolic Interactionism, which posits that meaning is acquired through one's experience, is an appropriate theoretical lens for this study which considers the school choices Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents make for their children.

Symbolic interactionism was a term coined by Herbert Blumer, resulting from a synthesis of the work of George Herbert Mead on social behaviourism. Symbolic interactionism is based upon three basic premises:

1. Human beings interact towards things on the basis of the meaning those things have for them;
2. Meanings arise out of the interaction of the individual with others;
3. An interpretive process is used by the person in each instance to manage and handle meanings encountered in their environment

(Crotty, 1998; Harris, 2001).

However, it is understood that there is a degree of contestability in the area of symbolic interactionism arising out of competing schools of thought (Sly, 2008). These contestations revolve around the ways in which Blumer's premises are to be interpreted and applied. Thus it is instructive to consider Stryker's (1998) synthesis of the common ground shared between symbolic interactionists in relation to these premises proposed by Blumer:

1. An adequate account , whether explanation or simply understanding, of human behaviour must incorporate the point of view of actors engaged in the behaviour;
2. Social interaction…is fundamental, with both self and social structure emergent from interaction;
3. Persons' reflexivity, their responses to themselves, link larger social processes to the interactions in which they engage.

(Stryker (1998) in Stryker & Vryan, 2006, p. 5).

The first of these premises purports that meaning is not causative but central to the behaviours of human beings. The second asserts that meaning is formed through the integration of all the sensory and attitudinal data which are constituent of the individual's psyche. The third proposes that meaning-making is dependent on the interpretive process. This, combined with specific contexts shapes the way individuals use meaning (Harris, 2001). From these three premises, 'root images' emerge which contribute to a holistic understanding of human behaviour and human society which are generally shared across interactionists.

4.3.1.1 Root Images

One root image describes the social sources for humanness (Sly, 2008). It is asserted by interactionists that humanness is found in four, intermutual characteristics which are socially constructed. The first of these characteristics are symbols. Symbols serve the purpose of enabling human beings to name objects and occurrences in order to construct meaning:

> When symbolized, things, ideas, and relationships between things and ideas enter people's experience as objects whose meanings, developing from social interaction, become their social reality. These meanings may not be identical among participants in social acts, but human communication and interaction presuppose the existence of sufficiently shared meaning (Stryker & Vryan, 2006, p. 6).

Possession of a 'Self' is the second of these characteristics. The 'Self' is a multidimensional reality which is cumulatively constructed as actors participate in social contexts. The 'Self' can be conceptualised as the way individuals view themselves in relation to other individuals in a social process (Sly, 2008). The 'Self' consists of various kinds of 'selves' which include

ideological, linguistic, conscious and interactional (Sly, 2008; Stryker & Vryan, 2006) and within which emerge social roles and identities. The 'Self' is a social object constructed by individuals as they participate in social action, and attempt to align the social expectations of others with the 'Self'. Each social interaction contributes to the construction of the 'Self', which is suggestive of the improvised nature of 'Self' construction and eschews that identities and social roles ('selves') are static and inalterable (Johnson, 2008).

The third of these characteristics is the idea of on-going mind action. This describes the human's ability to act independently of the environment, and outside of the salient symbols and the 'Self' (Charon, 2004). Ongoing mind action takes place in the context of complex social problems, where the individual goes "beyond a state of trial and error and habitual response. This mind action is a continuous process, as we engage in mind action when we are alone with others, as we constantly engage in a conversation with self" (Sly, 2008, p. 4) in an attempt to problem-solve.

The last of these characteristics is the process of taking the role of the other. This aspect of mind action allows individuals to attempt to see the world as others do in order to interiorise the "generalized other": the integration of broad and shared cultural perspectives and social mores (Charon, 2004, p. 76). This is the process through which human action towards others matures.

Another of these root images postulates that the group lives of humans are predicated on the interfolding nature of human action (Harris, 2001). That is, humans work cooperatively in order to solve social problems, while suspending their own individual goals or aspirations. This process sees individuals collectively engaging in mind action and taking on the perspectives of others. Culture is an artifact of this intertwined human action. Culture emerges through social consensus and defines the rules and regulations of society. Thus, culture is a dimension of the 'generalised other' (Sly, 2008).

The nature of human conduct, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, perceives humans as actors of and reactors to the social environment. Humans respond to social situations by interacting with others and the "Self". This root image asserts that humans are not automatons who respond to their environments on the bases of "instinctually-given rules inherent in [their] make-up" (Harris, 2001, p. 4).

Finally, the notions of role-making and role-taking are important ideas in symbolic interactionism. The idea of 'role' implies that humans access a structure which allows them to organise behaviour. Role-taking, which has been alluded to above, refers to an individual's mind action whereby they put themselves in the place of others in order to see the world as others do. Previous experience with particular social groups, individuals, as well as symbolic intimations (language, gesture and so on) "provide tentative definitions and expectations that are validated and/or reshaped in interaction" (Stryker & Vryan, 2006, p. 7). Role-making takes place where there are interstices in the roles (structure), and where actors must frame their behaviour in order to respond appropriately to a given situation.

4.3.1.2 Symbolic Interactionism: A Conceptualisation of Parental Choice of School

Figure 4.1 conceptualises parental choice of school from a symbolic interactionist perspective. This conceptualization of the school choice process is grounded in the literature on parental choice of school and is articulated through the 'root images' of symbolic interactionism.

This conceptualization highlights the relevance of this theoretical perspective to the research purpose of this study. Essentially, the research considers the ways in which parents construct and interpret understandings of education and schools, and how these constructions and interpretations influence their engagement in the school choice process in selecting a boarding school for their child.

Figure 4.1 Interactionist conceptualisation of parental choice of school

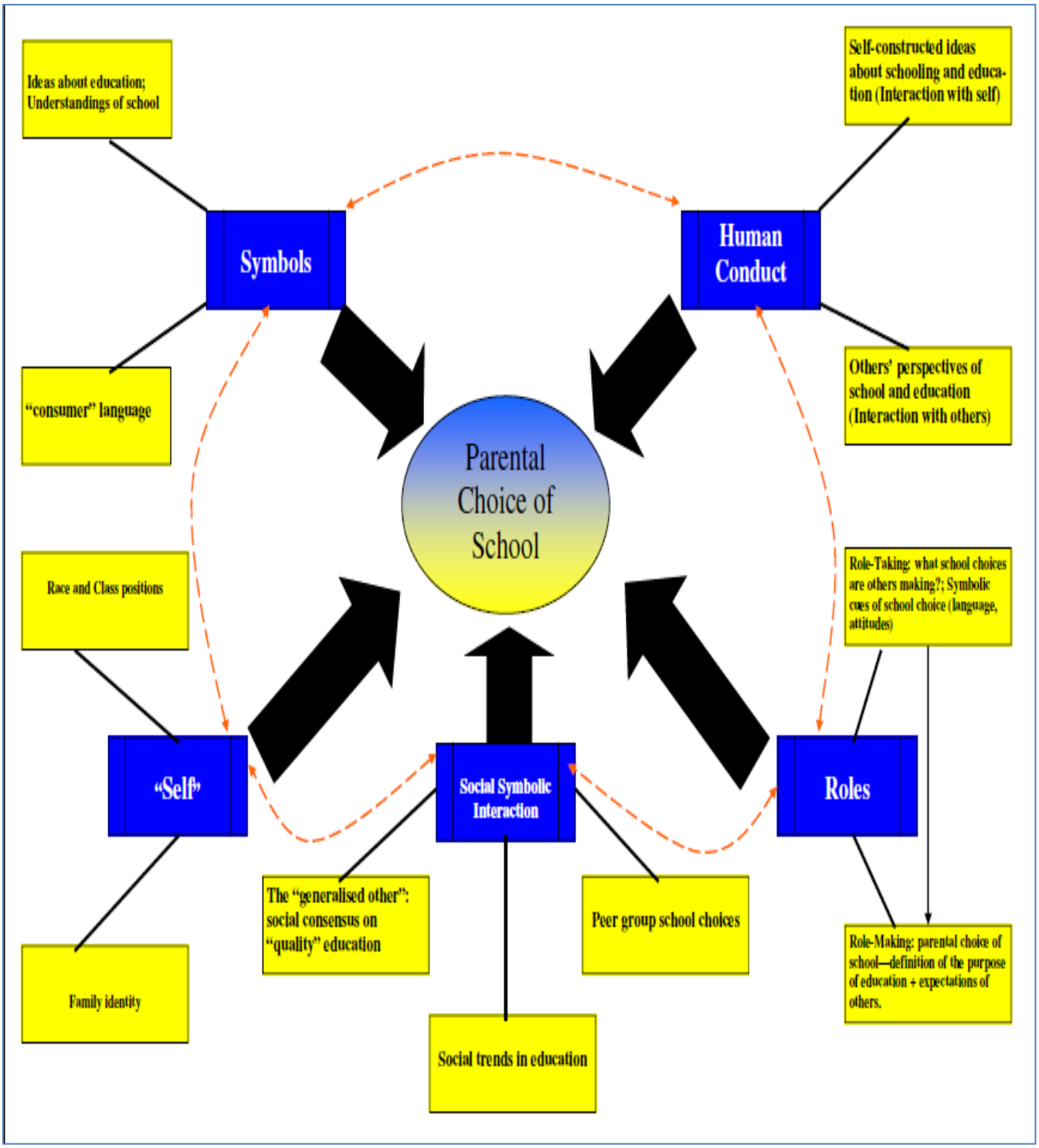


Figure 4.1 suggests the way in which parents engage in the school choice process from the perspective of symbolic interactionism. The diagram illustrates this by framing the process around the 'root images' – the interdependent characteristics which together provide a holistic understanding of human behaviour and human society. The first of these is *symbols*. *Symbols* enable people to name objects and occurrences in order to construct meaning. Here symbols, in the form of language, refer to the ideas and understandings about school and education that parents possess, as well as their exposure to and influence of market and consumer language on the choice of school for their child.

The second of these characteristics is *Self*. *Self* refers to the ways individuals view themselves in relation to other individuals. The *Self* is multifaceted and includes the various roles and identities that a person possesses in social life. With reference to Figure 4.1, the dimensions of race, class and family identity as dimensions of the *Self* are identified as possible influences on the parental choice of school process. It is suggested that parents will align their choice behaviour along class and race lines, as well as according to familial expectations.

The third aspect of the model is *social symbolic interaction*. *Social symbolic interaction* describes the process of taking the role of another in an attempt to see the world as others do. In the case of parental choice of school it is suggested that parents will be influenced by the broad and shared cultural understandings of school and education, particularly through peer groups, perceptions of the consensus on what constitutes quality schooling, as well as social trends in education. *Human conduct* is also considered in the figure, which suggests that parents make decisions based upon self-constructed understandings of school and quality education, as well through drawing on the perspectives of others. That is, parents make school choices with reference to the *Self* and through their interactions with others. Finally, the notions of *role-making* and *role-taking* are included in the figure to demonstrate how parents' selection of a school for their child is based upon a consideration of the choices others are making (role-taking) and combining this with their own definitions of the purpose of education in order to make a school selection (role-making) (Holme, 2002). The figure clearly illustrates the interdependence of the 'root images' in the choice process, which highlights the confluence of elements of human (parental choice of school) behaviour.

4.4 Research Methodology

This research explores the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children. Thus, a case study is the orchestrating approach to data gathering. A case study is an empirical inquiry that examines a contemporary, naturalistic, cultural and interactional phenomenon in its real life context (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995; Merriam, 1998). The defining characteristic of a case study is the case: a single entity, thing or unit, and "bounded system" (Stake, 2005, p. 444).

The *boundedness* of a case study is important in that this points to the context-dependent nature of this methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Case studies permit a refined view of reality which sees human behaviour and activity as a process of meaning-making in particularised social contexts. This is understood as interactivity: the analysis of the situational, contextual, cultural and social elements of a case. Case studies are 'multi-perspectival analyses' which see the researcher consider the voice and frames of reference of the actors, as well as the relevant groups of actors and the ways in which these groups interact (Tellis, 1997, p. 5). Therefore, this methodology is appropriate in light of the epistemology (constructionism) and theoretical perspectives (symbolic interactionism; indigenous methodologies) of this study (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stark & Torrance, 2004).

Case studies are characterised by rich and thick or vivid descriptions and chronological narrative accounts. Such descriptions are able to capture the depth and significance of the situation under consideration. They present descriptions of events which are often in tension with the analysis of these events, highlighting the complexities of the 'story' of a particular aspect of social behaviour in a specific context: a case study which provides a hard to summarise narrative indicates a rich problematic which reflects the complexities of real life (Flyvbjerg, 2006). A case study focuses on particular actors or groups of actors in relation to particular events and the perceptions of the actors in relation to these events and each other (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995). Through the use of the case study, the reader can be guided towards the discovery of new knowledge, the confirmation of existing knowledge, as well as be experience-broadening (Merriam, 1998). In sum, the case study is descriptive, particularistic and heuristic (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, a case study enables the researcher to provide an account of human social behaviour in relation to the interdependence of actors,

and the process by which these actors construct knowledge through interaction in clearly bounded environments.

While a case is a single entity, it consists of subsections (e.g. rural, metropolitan), groups (e.g. Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents, students), occasions (e.g. open days, parent-teacher evenings) and dimensions and domains (Stake, 2005, p. 449). Stake (2005) suggests that the study of each of these may reveal different contexts, enabling a deeper comprehension of relationships. This highlights the complexity and diversity of issues uncovered through a case study approach. Furthermore, a case study intends to be descriptive and interpretive. It is descriptive in that it provides a detailed account of the contemporary phenomenon under study. A case study is interpretive in that it contains thick, rich descriptions which enable the development of conceptual frameworks, the critical evaluation of assumptions prior to the data gathering, or the development of theories (Merriam, 1998) .

Three types of case studies can be distinguished, which indicates that case studies can be used for a variety of purposes. The first of these is the *exploratory case study*. This type of case study defines the questions and hypotheses of previous studies. *Descriptive case studies* are those that provide descriptions of a phenomenon in its own context. Finally, *explanatory case studies* seek to explain how events happen by drawing on data relating to cause-effect relationships (Yin 2003, p.3 in Seuring, 2005). In addition to this case study typology, Merriam (1998) suggests four types of case studies which are commonly employed in education research: ethnographic, historical, psychological and sociological. Ethnographic case studies focus on the behaviour of people within particular cultural contexts. Historical case studies are highly descriptive accounts, which draw on primary source material relating to organizations and systems. Psychological case studies are concerned with the individual in order to investigate elements of human behaviour. Sociological case studies in education focus on the social constructs and socialization:

> Sociologists are interested in demographics; social life and the roles people play in it; the community; social institutions such as the family, church, and government; classes of people including minority and economic groups; and social problems such as crime, racial prejudice, divorce and mental illness (Merriam, 1998, p. 37).

Therefore, this study employs a descriptive/sociological case study, in that the focus of the research is to describe the ways in which parents select schools in rural and remote contexts. Further, the research explores the confluence of class, race and culture on the parental choice of school process.

While the place of case studies in the social sciences is well established, there are a number of commonly cited limitations associated with this methodology. Trustworthiness and generalization are often at the centre of debate surrounding the use of case studies. The internal validity and hence reliability of case studies is questioned on the basis that the observation of phenomena and subsequent reporting of same requires that the observer makes changes. Such thinking arises out of the understanding that language is a symbol used to communicate something in reality (Sly, 2008) and in relation to case studies, the observer is responsible for interpreting the data (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995). The internal validity of case studies is addressed through a process termed triangulation. Triangulation is a process of using a number of perceptions to distil meaning, validating the extent to which an observation or interpretation of a phenomenon might be repeated (Stake, 2005). Advocates of case study methodology acknowledge that there are multiple perceptions of particular realities, and thus triangulation helps to clarify the different ways the case can be interpreted (Stake, 2005). Generalisation from case studies is also proposed as a limitation. It is asserted that because case studies focus on single cases, it is not possible to draw generalizations. However, proponents of the case study methodology assert that generalisations can be made from case studies where researchers carefully select cases on the bases of their broad applicability: "this centres on the "matter of 'fit' between the situation studied and others to which one might be interested in applying concepts and conclusions of that studied" (Schofield 1990 in Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995, p. 326). Furthermore, it is suggested that readers of the case study research will vicariously generalise from the findings. That is, readers will approach the data from their own experiences and understandings and apply the findings to their contexts: "The reader has a certain cognitive flexibility, the readiness to assemble a situation-relative schema from the knowledge fragments of a new encounter" (Stake, 2005, p. 456).

A case study is the appropriate methodology for this study in that it provides the opportunity to explore and engage with the complexity of the social activity of parental choice of school (Stark & Torrance, 2004). It is understood that this process of school selection is influenced by social, cultural, racial and class constructs and the case study allowed for the development

of a more nuanced view of this reality (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Furthermore, the rich, thick descriptions allows the research to illuminate the tacit knowledge underlying the parental choice of process, and is useful in delineating the variations between parents of Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds given that case studies "provide a holistic understanding of cultural systems in action" (Tellis, 1997, p. 5).

This case study focuses on the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in the boarding school choice process in order to illuminate the reasons for changing enrolment patterns at a Catholic boarding school in north-west Queensland. Thus, the study is bounded by the group of parents who selected a boarding school for their child within this particular context. This research is unique in that it considers the confluence of factors involved in the parental choice of school process, within rural and remote contexts which includes participants from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds: "The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). Finally, the study adopts a number of methods in order to address the complexities associated with validating people's construction of reality (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995).

4.5 Participants

The selection of participants in qualitative research is most commonly achieved through the method of non-probabilistic sampling. Non-probabilistic sampling allows researchers to explore what occurs, the implications of occurrences, and the relationships which exist between occurrences (Merriam, 1998). Such an approach allows for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under consideration, and provides important contextual information which allows for rich and thick descriptions of findings (Byrne, 2001). The ways in which researchers identify and select participants is important for controlling bias and for effectively gaining a sample which is representative (Arcury, 1999). Purposive sampling, the most common form of non-probabilistic sampling, is adopted for this study. Purposive sampling is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Thus, purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of participants and sites so that the most can be gleaned and understood about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008).

Given that the purpose of this study is to explore the reasons for changing enrolment patterns at a Catholic boarding school which, in turn, requires an analysis of the ways in which parents select a school for their children, participants were purposively selected based upon criteria established for the case under consideration (Merriam, 1998).

4.5.1 Selection of Participants

The case study is bounded to include (a) Indigenous (n=16) and non-Indigenous (n=16) parents living in either rural or remote locations who had selected the research site as a boarding school for their child in the previous five years; and (b) key personnel at the school (n=2) and system level (n=2). The study uses maximal variation sampling to select parent participants. Maximal variation sampling allows the researcher to select individuals who can be differentiated according to particular characteristics or traits (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998). Parents are grouped according to geographical location (rurality/remoteness), racial background (Indigeneity) and enrolment status. This information was gleaned from data collated for government accountability purposes (School Census). These sub-groupings are representative of the parent body of the school, allowing for a rich description of the parental choice of school process, enabling conclusions to be drawn about the school population (Creswell, 2008). The parents selected all had completed school to a minimum Year 10 level, with the majority completing Year 12. One (Indigenous) participant had a tertiary qualification.

The current (2008-) and a previous long-serving principal (1998-2007) are included as participants. Principals have discretionary decision–making authority in the enrolment process. Therefore, the parental selection of a school does not automatically denote enrolment in that school, but is dependent on the decisions made by the principal at the time of enrolment. The inclusion of current and former principals as participants provides scope for a multi-perspectival analysis (Tellis, 1997) of the reasons for the school choices of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents from rural and remote locations.

Finally, two Indigenous Support Personnel (ISP) from the Catholic Education Office (CEO), and a coordinator of a highly regarded Indigenous institute respectively, are included as participants in the study. The school at the centre of this study has an Indigenous student population of over 30 percent. The CEO and Indigenous institute are responsible for

education policy in their respective areas, and such decisions shape the various cultural and educational emphases at these schools, including the research site school. The inclusion of Indigenous Support Personnel (ISP) acknowledges the Indigenous education emphasis in diocesan and geographically isolated schools and allows for a deep consideration of the confluence of factors which underpin the parental choice of school process for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents. This selection is consistent with maximal variation sampling, where the intention is to develop many perspectives (Creswell, 2008). These participants were selected to assist in ensuring that all Indigenous protocols are adhered to in the research design and to provide advice on how to best gain Indigenous parents' perspective of school choice.

4.6 Data Gathering Strategies

The data gathering strategies selected for this study were guided by the research design. Data gathering through the use of multiple methods is the adopted approach for this study. This is consistent with the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism and the case study methodology. Multiple methods allow for a deeper consideration of the contemporary phenomenon under study, and address the complex nature of validating people's construction of reality. Further, multiple methods allows for methodological triangulation of findings, which ensures trustworthiness of the data (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995).

The key data collecting methods of this study are focus groups, documentary analysis, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The following sections outline the relevance of these methods to this study.

4.6.1 Data Gathering Phases

Exploration Phase

Focus Groups

The focus group method has been a popular choice in the area of market research, but has become increasingly prominent in education research. Focus groups can be defined as a planned discussion, where the purpose is to obtain perceptions and meanings in a particular area of interest. The environment in which the focus group took place was permissive and non-threatening (Lewis, 1995). This method was appropriate given that the research

methodology adopted for this research is case study. Case studies provide rich, thick descriptions of contemporary phenomenon, which are naturalistic and focus on perceptions of actors in real life contexts. Focus groups allow for an insight into actor's perceptions and shared understandings of everyday life, and the ways in which meaning is produced through interaction with others (Creswell, 2008; Gibbs, 1997). This asserts the focus group as an appropriate method to be used with the chosen methodology.

Focus groups are able to elicit a number of views and feelings on a given issue, and provide insight into issues, attitudes and perceptions that are developed through interaction (Gibbs, 1997; Lewis, 1995). The differences between what actors state and their actual actions can be uncovered by discerning multiple understandings revealed during the focus group discussions (Gibbs, 1997). Therefore, the researcher is able to provide divergent interpretations of participants' behaviour and attitude. This is most readily achieved where the participants in the focus group are characterised by homogeneity (Jarrell, 2000; Larson, Grudens-Schuck, & Lundy, 2004; Marczak & Sewell, 2009). It is suggested that homogenous groups are more likely to speak openly when they are in the presence of like-minded people. Groupings can be decided according to race, culture, class; the key factors are that participants are intellectual and social equals (Jarrell, 2000) which creates an environment in which people can respond without feeling threatened.

Notwithstanding the advantages of the focus group method, a number of disadvantages have been levelled at this approach. Included among these is the lack of control over the group by the facilitator and hence there is little control over the quality of data (Marczak & Sewell, 2009). Further, the reliability of participant responses may be biased as a result of more dominant group members, making it difficult to analyse for shared understandings which are the result of interaction (Jarrell, 2000). In addition, the focus group method is not reliable in determining individual perceptions or views on selected issues. Therefore, it is not a method to be used in isolation, but in combination with other methods to ensure individual views are obtained (Larson et al., 2004).

However, the focus group method was used as one of the methods of data gathering for this study, with a specific focus on eliciting perspectives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents on school choice. Enhancing this positive environment was the careful selection of an informal gatekeeper to act as intermediary (Delamont, 2002). Informal gatekeepers are those

people that are known to and trusted by the community. The selection of an informal gatekeeper as an intermediary allowed the researcher access to the data, known as political feasibility (Delamont, 2002). A member of each Indigenous community was approached and volunteered to act as an intermediary with participants from their respective communities. Such a selection gives the gathered data cultural validity:

> …cultural validity entails an appreciation of the cultural values of those being researched. This could include: understanding possibly different target culture attitudes to research; identifying and understanding salient terms as used in the target culture; reviewing appropriate target language literature; choosing research instruments that are acceptable to the target participants; checking interpretations and translations of data with native speakers; and being aware of one's own cultural filters as a researcher (Morgan 2005 in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 7).

The member composition of the focus group was both culturally and geographically homogenous. This allowed for greater interaction between participants, and also acknowledged the clear cultural nuances which exist between Indigenous people of different locations.

The careful preparation of the focus group discussion went some way toward addressing the disadvantages of this method. This preparation included:

- Contacting participants via letter, with full disclosure of the purpose of the focus group and use of the data (Gibbs, 1997);
- Selecting an appropriate venue, which is accessible to all participants.
- Using a digital voice recording device to record responses after consent to do so has been granted by participants;
- Ensuring the aims and purposes of the research and that these are clearly outlined for participants on the day of the focus group;
- Clearly stating to participants the ways in which the data will be anonymised and coded.

The recorded responses of were transcribed verbatim in order to provide a rich database for analysis. The data from the focus groups was read, re-read in order to refine ideas, identify

and discard themes in preparation for the Inspection Phase of data analysis through the development of one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

Inspection Phase

One-on-one, Semi-structured Interviews

Interviewing is a popular method of interpretive research because it seeks to gain the perspective and understandings of actors on particular areas of interest, which allows for an unfolding of the way in which these understanding and perspectives are constructed. Semi-structured interviews are characterised by the conversational tone (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) which allows the researcher to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 1990). Underpinning this is the accepted assumption that an individual's perspective is knowable and meaningful (Patton, 1990). This positions the interview as an appropriate method in research adopting a constructionism epistemology and theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism.

Unlike positivist approaches to interviewing, the interpretive interview is not a neutral exchange but a process undergirded by empathy (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Thus, there is not the necessity for detached distance in interviewing because it is understood that "interviews are interactional encounters and that the nature of the social dynamic of the interview can shape the nature of the knowledge generated" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 699). Therefore, interviews are bounded by context and produce co-constructed 'stories' around a particular area of concern. While critics of the interpretivist approach to interviewing might suggest that such an approach will lead to tainting of the data, proponents would argue that the interview merely reflects the broader process through which human beings construct knowledge: not in isolation, but through interaction with others (Hannan, 2007).

The role of the interviewer in interpretivist interviewing can be termed as 'natural'. That is, the researcher is not someone with a distinctive and official role, but simply as a person engaging with another (Hannan, 2007; Hawley, 2008). Therefore, the interviewer must establish rapport and empathy with the informant in order to establish a relationship predicated on equality (Partington, 2001). The interviewer must ensure that the informant has a sense that their responses are important and valued, which will assist in the gathering of rich and thick descriptions of the area or issue under consideration, and will result in a deep understanding about human behavior (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Not unlike most methods of collecting data in research, semi-structured interviews have inherent disadvantages. Because interviewers are dealing with human beings, interviewers can be forced to deal with the megrims of interviewees' ideas and perceptions of particular issues (Burns, 2000). Interviewers cannot, however, limit responses because informants have a multiplicity of perspectives which are derived from diverse experiences and realities (Partington, 2001). However, this may cause a slowing of the interview process and the yielding of irrelevant data. The disposition of the interviewer can also impact on the quality of responses by informants. Where an informant identifies a status imbalance, responses may be refined and reserved (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Further, the nature of interviews are such that they are contrived events which may shape the ways in which informants respond (Hannan, 2007). Finally, poorly designed questions can instill a bias whereby researchers seek to gather data which reflect their own assumptions about the issue under study. Researchers must be careful in designing instruments with sufficient flexibility to allow informants to make a variety of responses ("Designing structured interviews for educational research," 1997).

This study used the interview method to elicit the perspectives and understanding of parental choice of school process from selected Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas, and key personnel from the school and system levels. A semi-structured approach was adopted to allow some consistency across questions, as well as providing sufficient flexibility to permit the researcher to probe responses (Patton, 1990), as well as to give the informant the opportunity to make comments relating to corollary issues which contribute to their perception of reality [choice of school] (Burns, 2000).

Parents were purposively sampled according to their geographical location, indigeneity, socio-economic status (SES) and their child being enrolled at the research site school between 2005 and 2009. The assistance of Indigenous Support Personnel and key members from respective Indigenous communities were engaged to ensure all cultural protocols were maintained. Semi-structured interviews were conducted within parents' local communities, within their place of residence, acknowledging that effective interviews are more likely to take place in appropriate physical contexts (Partington, 2001). The key personnel from the school and system level consisted of the current Principal, a previous Principal who held the position for 10 years and Indigenous Support Personnel (ISP) from the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and an Indigenous education institute. These participants were selected in order

to glean their understandings of parental choice of school process and their perceptions of the competing demands and responsibilities of school enrolment.

Participants were invited to participate in an interview via a letter, which met the relevant ethical protocols of informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The semi-structured interviews used open-ended questions, with standardised questions to permit analytical generalization, but included sufficient flexibility to allow for new insights (Merriam, 1998). Interviews were recorded using digital technology and written transcription where necessary to ensure clarification. At the completion of the interviews, verbatim written transcripts were made and stored securely on both a password-protected computer and mass storage device. Because of the simultaneity of data collection and analysis, there was modification, acceptance and rejection of themes based upon the existing data

Table 4.2 summarises the data gathering strategies. In addition, the table outlines how the participants and data gathering strategies are linked to the theoretical framework of symbolic interaction (see Figure 4.1). This is an important inclusion because it highlights for the reader the ways in which the researcher sought to uncover the ways in which parents construct and interpret understandings of education through the purposive sampling of participants and the use of particular data gathering techniques.

Table 4.2 Summary of Participants, Data Gathering Strategies & Stages

	Timeline	Participants	Data Gathering Strategies
EXPLORATION PHASE	April 2010	Principal 2	Semi-structured One-on-one Interviews
	April 2010	ISP 1	Semi-structured One-on-one Interviews
	July 2010	Non-Indigenous Parents (n=6)	Focus Group
	July 2010	ISP 2	Semi-structured One-on-one Interviews
	October 2010	Principal 1	Semi-structured One-on-one Interviews
	November 2010	Indigenous Parents (n=6)	Focus Group
INSPECTION PHASE	March 2011	Non-Indigenous Parents (N=10)	Semi-structured One-on-one Interviews
	April-May 2011	Indigenous Parents (n=10)	Semi-structured One-on-one Interviews

4.7 Analysis of Data

The analysis of data is characterised in dynamism and creativity (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Data analysis is a systemised process for gathering rich data, but must also be considered as an 'open' process whereby the researcher gathers more than initially intended (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In light of this, qualitative research involves two simultaneous activities: data gathering and analysis (Creswell, 2008). The achievement of rich and thick descriptive data is a hallmark of case study research, which is the selected methodology for this study, and therefore a clear articulation of the methods of analysis which will yield valid data is necessary: it is important to be explicit about the way in which analysis is carried out. This "increases the verification and therefore the credibility of qualitative reports" (Boeije, 2002, p. 392).

This study adopts two systematic approaches to the analysis of data. The first of these methods is *content analysis*. Content analysis is simply the process of summarising and reporting the main contents and messages of gathered data (Cohen et al., 2007). This method can be applied to any text or "symbolic material" (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007, p. 6), and

is a controlled analysis of context-bounded texts (Mayring, 2000). Content analysis as a method of analysis acknowledges the important of language as a cognitive tool used by humans to communicate values, beliefs, dispositions and attitudes. Thus, content analysis is an appropriate method of analysis given this study's theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism.

For the purposes of this study, content analysis will be utilised in the *preliminary exploratory analysis* of data (Creswell, 2008, p. 250). Given that content analysis assumes that groups of words reveal underlying themes, and that, for instance, co-occurrences of keywords can be interpreted as reflecting association between the underlying concepts (Duriau et al., 2007), it was appropriate that this method be used in the initial analysis in order to discern preliminary categories relating to attitudes, ideas and beliefs about parental choice of school. The focus at this stage was on the language used by informants relevant to the parental choice of school process and allowed the information to be 'clumped' into broad categories. This analysis was inductive, in that the categories emerged out of the material under study (Mayring, 2000). Some of these preliminary categories remained throughout the course of analysis, and others were subsumed by new and more relevant categories. Table 4.3 provides a sample of the content analysis.

Table 4.3 Sample Content Analysis

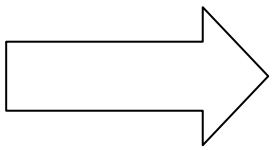
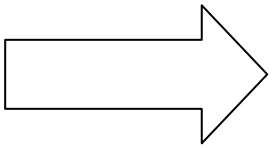
Data	Preliminary Category	Theme
We were always lucky... we were always on properties where they had other kids around, but for some children that are out on properties it is them and their parents. We see a fair bit of it 'govying' down near Clermont on properties that just have one family or one kid... and they come to mini-schools or Schools of Distance Education... they just have no... you know...social skills.... and boarding school gives you that independence	Access to social skilling	Access to 'experiences is vital
Respondent 1: there's a lot more to it, and boarding school offers that Respondent 2: Yeah, boarding school offers them the music, and the sports and the team	Breadth of experiences	
I just think of aunty Lisa and aunty Tanya and their kids are scratching to get the opportunity that my kids had at boarding school, with both those mothers working. And to give them individual choices, whether they want to do cricket or tennis, the amount of running around, you cannot give those kids.... when there's a few of them...	Broadening of social horizons	

The second of the systematic approaches to the analysis of data is the constant comparative method. While originating in grounded theory, constant comparative analysis has been widely used in qualitative research (Coombe, 1995). Essentially, this method is focused on generating theory. Theorizing takes place through the constant comparison of data within and between categories (Boeije, 2002). This process exposes new issues, ideas or other forms, and permits the verification of initial evidence (Coombe, 1995). The comparison of concepts within categories permits the integration of concepts and directs the researcher to "make

some theoretical sense of each comparison" (Glaser, 1969 in Coombe, 1995, p. 12). The analysis has reached theoretical saturation when comparisons no longer yield new categories or concepts (Lacey & Luff, 2001). For this study, constant comparative analysis is used after the preliminary exploratory analysis. Through the use of content analysis, key concepts relating the parental choice of school process are identified and arranged into broad conceptual categories. These categories are constantly compared in order to develop conceptual themes. These conceptual themes are the building blocks from which the researcher will theorise (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000).

In order to make sense out of the text data, researchers must engage with a coding process. Codes allow data to be clustered, examined, deleted, and integrated into broad conceptual themes (Creswell, 2008). This study adopts open, axial and selective coding. Open-coding is an unrestricted identification of codes for collected data. At this stage of the coding process, no prior assumptions are made, but careful selection of coding language is necessary to ensure code meanings are clear. Open-coding establishes initial categories. Once these codes are complete, axial coding is then undertaken in order to make links between codes and categories (Cohen et al., 2007). Axial-coding involves a process of identifying a category derived at the open-coding phase. The data are then analysed with this category at the centre of the process: "Hence codes are explored, their interrelationships are examined, and codes and categories are compared to existing theory" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 493). It is at this point that the development of rich data is of primary importance. By the conclusion of this stage of coding, clear conceptual themes become evident. Table 4.4 provides a sample of the axial coding process.

Table 4.4 Sample Axial Coding Process

DATA	REDUCTION	INTERPRETATION
Indigenous Parents Boarding School Choice • Limited school choices • Geographic isolation • Educational outcomes		Access: Education and social experiences
Non-Indigenous Parent Boarding School Choice • Desire for "experiences" • Geographic isolation • Safety		Access: Social skilling
COMPARATIVE REDUCTION		
Indigenous and Non-Indigenous parents have different emphases during the boarding school choice process.		

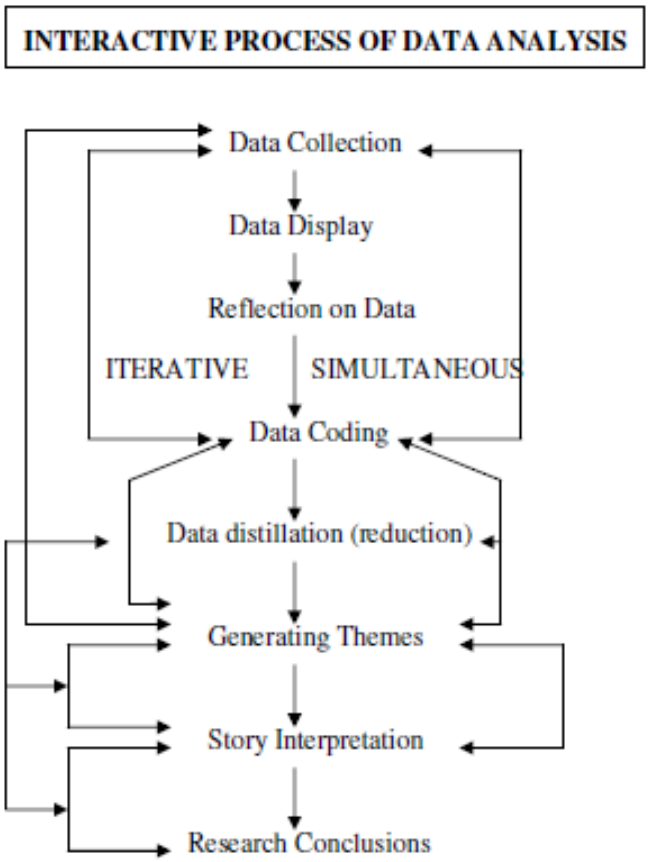
The final stage of the coding process, *selective coding*, is the integration of categories generated through open and axial coding. Selective coding focuses on establishing theory. This coding process selects a specific category in order to establish relationships with other categories. Furthermore, relationships between categories are explored and the opportunity is taken to further develop selected categories (Cohen et al., 2007; Lichtman, 2006). At this stage, a 'story line' was developed which integrated the categories identified at the axial-coding phase (Lichtman, 2006). Table 4.5 presents the themes that emerged from the four research questions.

Table 4.5Selective Coding: Key themes from the data analysis

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	***RQ1: How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?***	***RQ2: How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of boarding school for their child?***	***RQ3: How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?***	***RQ4: How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?***
Non-Indigenous Parents				
THEMES	**Access to 'experiences'.** School offers access to a breadth of extra-educational experiences School enables the development of social skills **School must be a place of safety** School must be a place of physical, psychological and emotional safety.	**Hot knowledge gained through the grapevine is a cogent source of information.** Hot knowledge (grapevine) is more influential than Cold Knowledge. The 'grapevine' operates in three networks: other parents, family members, and key people in rural feeder towns.	**Inculcation of values & medicinal religion are desired by parents.** Education in values is important for parents. Catholic doctrine and religious education not important for parents. Experiences of religion at boarding school have an inoculating effect on their children.	Racialised thinking is evident during the boarding school choice process. Differential treatment: educational, behavioural, financial Indigenous enrolment leads to the erosion of school quality: student behaviour, quality of education, school status.
Indigenous Parents				
THEMES	**Access to quality education** Choice constraints Government and private sector funding enables choice Access to 'good' schools. **Social Mobility** Access to quality schools and education Opportunities to broaden their view of the world Being equipped with the skills for successful civic life.	**Informed Choosing** The family: Informational network The function of the 'grapevine'.	**Catholic School: Values-based experiences** Exposure to experiences of Catholic schooling The transmission of values.	**Racialised thinking and school choice.** The racial composition of schools. High Indigenous enrolment.

This systematic process of data analysis illuminates the rich and thick descriptions around the parental choice of school process. This process is diagrammatically summarised in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Representation of the Interactive Process of Data Analysis



4.8 Verifications

Intepretivist research is concerned with the gathering of quality data which arise out of naturalistic inquiry. Data quality is ensured through the use of the criteria credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. This allows the researcher to claim that the gathered data is trustworthy (Trochim, 2006). This approach to determining the trustworthiness of the data accepts the constructionist underpinnings of this research, whereby it is claimed that the lived world is not constituent of objective realities, but is influenced and shaped by the interaction between human beings.

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the establishment of isomorphism between the perspectives of participants and the researcher's interpretation of these perspectives (Guba, 1989; Trochim, 2006). This study adopts a number of techniques to ensure the credibility of data and these are outlined below:

- *Persistent engagement*: This involves the researcher being engaged at the site of study to ensure constructions of reality are adequately uncovered. This also allows the researcher to respond to possible areas of misinformation or distortion. Prolonged engagement permits the researcher to create rapport and trust at the site in order to overcome the "fronts" (Guba, 1989, p. 237) put forward by participants. The researcher in this study has an already established relationship at the site of research and has established a degree of rapport with participants. This trust allows for the researcher to accurately record the ways in which parents construct their understandings of the school choice process.
- *Persistent Observation*: Persistent observation is the sustained observation which permits the gathering of characteristics and elements which are most relevant to the phenomenon under study (Guba, 1989). The use of focus groups and one-on-one semi-structured interviews in this study allows the researcher to come to an understanding of the unfolding of parents' understandings of the parental choice of school process. Persistent observation through the use of these methods illuminates for the researcher particular attitudes and behaviours about the school choice process. This gives depth to the persistent engagement at the data gathering sites.
- *Peer Debriefing & Progressive Subjectivity:* The criticisms of qualitative research revolve around the anecdotal nature of the interpretive approach, as well as the so called influence on the data by the researcher. Peer debriefing addresses this to some extent where the researcher engages with a 'critical peer' whose role is to discern bias in the research (Cohen et al., 2007). This peer assists the researcher in identifying their own values and *a priori* assumptions about the phenomenon under study. Progressive subjectivity is a process whereby the researcher undertakes to identify their developing constructions about the phenomenon under study. This process is undertaken throughout the data gathering process and is referred to the critical peer in order to identify the extent to which the researcher's constructions of the phenomenon are influencing the research (Guba, 1989). For the purposes of this study, the critical friends of the researcher include supervisors and selected colleagues. Peer debriefing and progressive subjectivity is used throughout the entire interactive process of data analysis (refer to Figure 4.2).
- *Member Checking:* In order to legitimate the data gathered through naturalistic inquiry, it is proposed that participants be given the opportunity to review the

researcher's record of their perspectives (Lacey & Luff, 2001). This study uses member checking of all data gathered arising out of focus group and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The advantages of this is that it not only allows the respondents to validate the records of the interviews, but also allows some insight in to the way in which a relative stranger understands their constructions of the parental choice of school process and affords the respondent the opportunity to add additional detail to their constructions which may have been overlooked or forgotten at the initial interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).

4.8.2 Dependability

Dependability is another criterion to ensure the trustworthiness of data and is achieved in this study through the use of an independent audit (Cohen et al., 2007). This audit involves the investigation of the processes of data gathering and all other supporting documentation by two research supervisors at particular stages of the data gathering and data analysis processes.

4.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability of research is concerned with ensuring that the analysis and subsequent findings of the research are grounded in the data, and hence connected with participants and their contexts (Guba, 1989). Thus study uses an audit trail, which will make available the data and subsequent distillations and interpretations are traceable to original sources, are logical and structured (Cohen et al., 2007; Guba, 1989).

4.8.4 Transferability

The transferability of findings is a central aim of qualitative inquiry. Guba (1989) refers to it as an "empirical process for the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts" (p.241). As opposed to positivist research where generalisability is the responsibility of the researcher, the transferability of qualitative research is determined by those that receive the research. It is acknowledged that one of the limitations of the case study methodology is that it is a study of a phenomenon in a specified time and context. However, the inclusion of rich and thick descriptions by the researcher is a response to this limitation, which allows readers to vicariously generalise from findings (Stake, 2005). The potential for transferability of findings from this study is based upon the assumption that readers have a readiness to create context-relative schemas from which they can draw meaning from parents' constructions of the school choice process (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995).

4.8.5 Ethical Issues

The ethical foundation of this study is defined in autonomy, beneficence and justice (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005). Participants are invited to participate in the study without any coercion or pressure. The autonomy of participants is ensured by obtaining the informed consent of all participants. Furthermore, this study seeks to avoid harm to participants by ensuring their anonymity is maintained, and that participants receive benefit from the research. This is a particularly salient point of ethical research of Indigenous peoples, particularly research undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers:

> Indigenous groups argue that legal definitions of ethics are framed in ways which contain the Western sense of the individual and of individualised property – for example, the right of an individual to give his or her own knowledge, or the right to give informed consent. The social 'good' against which ethical standards are determined are based on the same beliefs about the individual and individualized property. Community and indigenous rights or views in this area are generally not recognized and not respected (Smith, 2000, p. 118).

In light of this, the use of Indigenous knowledge for research purposes must be for the benefit of Indigenous peoples, conceptualised as self-determination. In this study, Indigenous parents are included as participants and therefore the knowledge gathered during this study is always considered the property of these parents. Furthermore, the initial gathering of the data of this study meets all necessary Indigenous community protocols in order to avoid any cultural harm, and to ensure that the findings derived from the study respectfully contributes to Indigenous people's knowledge of themselves (Smith, 1999). This study acknowledges that "[f]undamental to the exercise of self-determination is the right of peoples to construct knowledge in accordance with self-determined definitions of what is real and what is valuable" (Castellano, 2004, p. 102). This principle underpins the theoretical perspective of Indigenous methodology which, in turn, directs this study.

Finally, the notion of justice in research ethics refers to the ways in which participants are selected for the research (Marczyk et al., 2005). This study uses maximal variation sampling to ensure that the selection of participants is representative of school population. This purposive selection of participants is made according to rurality/remoteness, socio-economic

status and race. While the researcher purposively selects, this selection is made so that comprehensive, rich, thick descriptions of the parental choice of school process can be achieved.

Participants who meet the criteria for inclusion are invited to participate in this study via a research letter. This letter outlines the research purpose, the design of the research and the methods for gathering data. In addition, tentative timelines for the study are outlined, as well as the ways in which the researcher will anonymise gathered data. Details relating to ethics clearance, letters of invitation and informed consent are included as Appendices.

In addition to the documentation received by participants prior to the commencement of data gathering, respondents involved in the focus groups and one-on-one semi-structured interviews are made aware of the coding strategies employed by the researcher to ensure the anonymity of responses. It is also made clear that respondents will be given the opportunity to review their responses and the researcher's interpretation of same. Table 4.3 outlines the ethical consideration for each of the data gathering strategies.

Table 4.6 Data Gathering Strategies and Ethical Considerations

Data Gathering Strategies	Ethical Considerations
Focus Groups	• Respondent codes: Each respondent is allocated a code and pseudonym in order to anonymise their responses. For example, *[Non-] Indigenous Parent Focus Group Michelle* denotes the respondent's participation in a focus group. • Letter of Invitation outlining the way in which a focus group is conducted. • Signed letter of consent. • In-person reiteration of the expectations of focus group interviews.
One-on-one Semi-Structured Interview	• Letter of Invitation outlining the way in which a semi-structured interview is conducted.

	• Signed letter of consent. • In-person reiteration of the expectations of one-on-one semi-structured interviews. • Participant Coding: strategies will be outlined to participant. For example, the pseudonym *Sean 1on1* [N]ISSI denotes participation in [Non-] Indigenous [S]emi-[S]tructured [I]nterview; *Principal /2* and *ISP* denotes Principal and Indigenous Support Personnel participants respectively.

4.9 Limitations and Delimitations

As has been highlighted throughout, there are a number of limitations associated with the use of case study as a research methodology, as well as the data gathering methods. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that this case study is bounded to a specific context and therefore the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalised to other contexts may be a delimiting aspect of the research.

In addition, the limitations of the research paradigm and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism are also acknowledged. This study makes no claim of objective knowledge, but rather considers parents perspective of the parental choice of school process in order to uncover the reasons for changing enrolment patterns at a Catholic boarding school in north-west Queensland. Indeed, the gathering of rich, thick descriptive data achieves this purpose.

Finally, it must be highlighted that this research includes the analysis of the perspectives of Indigenous parents by a non-Indigenous researcher. Thus, the cultural divide between the researcher and Indigenous participants may also be a limitation. However, all effort has been made to meet the cultural protocols of research involving Indigenous people, including the use of gatekeepers and culturally appropriate data gathering instruments.

Furthermore, the researcher was the Deputy Principal at the research site. As such, there may be concerns around positional power and the extent to which this affects the trustworthiness of the data.

4.10 Overview of the Research Design

This chapter outlines the design of the study where the purpose is to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents from rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children. Constructionism has been adopted as the epistemology for this study, which posits that, for human beings, reality is the outcome of social interaction. Dual theoretical perspectives undergird the methodology of the study, namely symbolic interactionism and Indigenous methodology. The study considers the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents construct and interpret their understandings of education and schools, and the ways in which these understandings and interpretations influence their engagement in the school selection process.

The research questions frame the process for data gathering and analysis. The research questions provide the focus for this study and these are:

1. How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?
2. How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of boarding school for their child?
3. How does school culture influence rural and remote parent's boarding school choice?
4. How does race and class influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

The methodology of case study was adopted for this study as orchestrating approach to data gathering. This methodology allows for an in-depth study of the complex phenomenon of parental choice of school. This depth is notable in the thick and rich data gathered which allows the researcher to gain insight into the significance of the parental choice of school process.

The data gathering strategies included focus groups and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. A summary of the research design is presented in Appendix F.

CHAPTER 5 Non- Indigenous Findings

5.1 Introduction

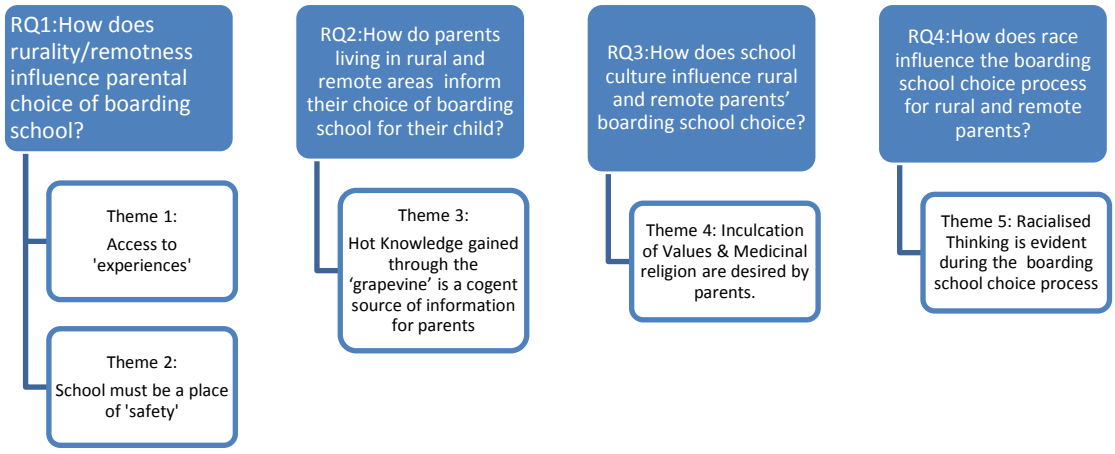
The purpose of this research is explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from an analysis of how non-Indigenous parents engage in the parental choice of boarding school in order to illuminate the reasons for changing enrolment patterns at a Catholic boarding school in north-west Queensland. The data were gathered using focus group and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with sixteen parents and the current and former Principals of the research site school. The research questions which focussed this study are:

1. How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?
2. How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of boarding school for their child?
3. How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?
4. How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

This analysis of data is the result of the first and second order interpretation of data, consistent with that which is stated in Section 4.6. First-order interpretation, utilising an open-coding process, allowed for a deeper understanding of the research problem. This phase of data analysis enabled the researcher to identify in the data the ways in which participants defined their understandings of the school choice process. A second-order interpretation, utilising an axial-coding process, allowed the researcher to identify emerging themes and categories and to identify interrelationships between codes and categories. This process of data analysis is outlined in Figure 4.2. This second-order interpretation yielded five themes. These themes represent the ways in which non-Indigenous parents engage with and construct their understandings of the parental choice of [boarding] school process.

Figure 5.1 summarises the findings of the second-order interpretation.

Figure 5.1 Thematic Development: Non-Indigenous Data



The following sections present the findings in relation to each of the four (4) research questions. The themes which emerge from the data are used to frame the analysis.

5.2 Research Question 1: How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?

The themes that emerge in relation to the first research question were:

1. Access to 'experiences' is vital
   - School offers access to a breadth of extra-educational experiences
   - School enables the development of social skills

2. School must be a place of 'safety'
   - School must be a place of physical and psychological safety.
   - 'Happiness' as emotional safety

5.2.1 Access to 'experiences' is vital.

School offers access to a breadth of extra-educational experiences

The notion of access was defined in the data as opportunities for extra-educational experiences for the participants' children. Extra-educational experiences are articulated in the data for the most part as non-curricular opportunities. This desire for extra-educational experiences demonstrated a relationship between the notion of access and rurality with various implications.

For parents living in rural and remote areas, their access to secondary education for their children is limited and this was considered a disadvantage to their children. For many of the

participant parents, their children did not access the local State Primary school for their education, but instead chose School of the Air[12] as the preferred option. For these parents, there were significant drawbacks to the provision of education in their local areas. For instance, it was suggested that that smaller schools commonly located in these areas do not cater effectively for students' individual interests, but rather choose to focus on meeting the collective needs of respective cohorts. It was suggested that in these schools the curriculum is often dictated by their geography with a perceived presumption made by those responsible for curriculum development that all students living in rural and isolated areas have interests that are rurally-related:

> Frances: Some of the small schools... cater for the majority in that area. So your child might be good at something, or have a gift or something in a certain area... but if that is the case, in smaller [schools] it's not a priority because if none of the other children are that way inclined... the local curriculum can be dictated by geography of where they are and who they are... (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.8-12).

The experiential dimension of school life was a priority of parents living in rural and isolated areas. There was a strong desire by parents to expose their children to environments that would enable them to "see what's out there".

> There's nothing better than School of the Air. In my experience anyway, for primary; secondary, they are getting better, because they have only just brought it in, but there is not enough choice and it doesn't offer the kids enough and they've got to get away and see what's out there (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.4-7).

The implication here is that the educational and social alternatives to boarding school do not offer students enough variety of extra-educational experiences sufficient to give their children more than a rudimentary education. When these parents were considering their secondary school options they had three broad choices: (a) boarding school; (b) School of the Air; and, in some cases, (c) enrolment in the local State school. In the process of making her decision, one parent discussed her options with the principal of the local School of the Air who suggested that despite School of the Air offering secondary school to Year 12, the options

[12] School of the Air is an educational provision for children living in remote and isolated areas. Teaching and learning takes place using telephone and the Internet.

were limited to only "the basics" and "if you just wanted them schooled and get out of there [graduate], good..." (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, l.67). School of the Air and similar options also did not offer students' access to non-curricular opportunities which other options, such as boarding schools, made available to them. Again, this further highlights the broad definition and implications of the idea of 'access', in that educational access does not strictly relate to curriculum depth and breadth, but rather to other activities, which for all intents and purposes can be considered as extra-educational:

> We see a fair bit of it *govying*[13] down near Clermont on properties that just have one family or one kid... and they come to mini-schools or Schools of Distance Education ... they just have no... you know, social skills.... and boarding school gives you that independence (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.73-75).

Illustrating parents' emphasis on extra-educational experiences, a Principal participant cited "hav[ing] things to do after school" (Principal 1, l.43) as an important and attractive aspect of a boarding school's residential program. This participant stated that from a parent's perspective these offerings were far more important than those relating to the curricular and co-curricular programs. Indeed, this participant stated that at the time of enrolment parents only took a perfunctory interest in the academic dimension of school life, and preferred to seek information about what their child could be expected to do after school and on weekends:

> And they certainly were not interested in any religious aspects of any school. You know what was going to happen after school hours and the breadth of those experiences after school and at weekends were really important to them (Principal 1, ll.57-59).

The desire for a 'good education' was not absent from the data. Parents expressed this in a variety of ways, though they did not look deeply into the curriculum offerings of the school nor the available data in terms of academic performance. Nevertheless, the choice of subjects, class sizes and a general hope that their child would receive a standard of education that allowed them to have post-school options was evident:

[13] Refers to the role of *governess*. This role includes the care and basic education of children of pastoralists.

> Well you hope they get an education naturally. And find their future in life. You know from education meeting other students, friends, enemies. You know all that sort of life, see which way of life they would like to do, to proceed with (Mal, 1on1 NISSI, ll.146-148).

Non-Indigenous parents defined education in broad terms to include experiences which were life-long and life-wide. Indeed one parent considered this as two sides of the same coin: "[I considered] whether or not that school could deliver things for my child, as in subject choices and extra-curricular activities" (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.18-19). It was evident in the data that the curricular dimension of the school choice process was implied if not simply taken for granted by non-Indigenous parents. This was reinforced by a lack of emphasis by parents on their own child's academic success: "there's just so much more to it than just academic results" (Louise, 1on1 NISSI, l.39). For most non-Indigenous parents, their notion of education was dominated by an experiential dimension or an education "in life", that they hoped their child would receive during their time in boarding school. This was often coupled with parents' limited capacity to continue to teach their own children at home:

> Well I couldn't teach any longer here at home. [It was] academic and the fact is at some point we all know that children have to learn to live in the world and that's the best way she can get that. Because we're isolated you can't give children all of those experiences unless they go to boarding school (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.149-152).

For another parent, their personal negative experiences of rurality in relation to their own education motivated them to choose the best opportunities for their children:

> Well because they had to have options and they had to have independence and because [husband's name] regretted the fact that he had lots of opportunities when he left school but it was the done thing for him to come home. And that was very much his family thing he resented that, so he was quite passionate about them learning things that they wanted to learn and giving them opportunities, and we're still doing that (Angela, 1on1 NISSI, ll.195-199).

The choice of words such as “options”, “independence”, “resentment” and “opportunity” point strongly to this participant’s desire to offer her children a school experience that was much broader than just the learnings that occurred in the classroom.

Thus for parents living in rural and remote areas with limited secondary school provisions, educational access is broadly defined to not only include academic opportunity, but also to include access to school contexts which will offer their children extra-educational experiences. This underscores the perceived limitations for a holistic education in rural and isolated contexts which, for these participants, was best resolved by enrolling their child in boarding school.

School enables the development of social skills

Social isolation and insularity are experiences of people living in rural and remote areas. For most parents, school offered their children the chance to broaden their social horizons which contributed to their psychological health and well-being. For young people living in rural and remote areas, peer group experiences are limited and in some case non-existent: “I definitely think that boarding school has been very good... [child’s name]... grew up at [property name] with just himself and it was a total different outlook. When he went [to boarding school] it was a total different attitude all together (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.79-80).

Boarding school offered the participants’ children the prospect of developing their social skills. Parents highlighted that boarding school offered their children unique opportunities to engage with peers, develop a sense of independence, deal with conflict and participate in a range of activities that allowed their child to experience ‘the other world’. Specifically, parents wanted their children “to have an experience other than station life and we felt really strongly that they need to know other children...” (Sandy, NISSI, ll.150-152). Thus, their concerns for their child’s social development were closely related to their geographical isolation. The data suggest that their child’s social development was a key concern for non-Indigenous parents in choosing a school for their child, and this often superseded other aspects of schools’ offerings:

> Maybe not the facilities but what was on offer for children after school so that when you send a child from the bush and they've had not much socialisation and they don't really know how to become involved in things, I think that's really important, those children need to be encouraged forward, shown how to get involved, because they don't know because they've never had to. That was probably one of the big things that I would have liked to see in a boarding school (Louise, NISSI, ll.20-25).

One parent expressed her child's boarding school experience thus: "They go away kids and come back little citizens. They do" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group,l.398). The relationship between boarding school enrolment and social skilling was an important consideration in light of their child's social isolation at home. Parents in rural and remote areas experience great emotional anguish in sending their children away to be educated, but they acknowledge the necessity of this process, if only for their child's personal and social development:

> Well I see Mick's [relative] kids now, they're weekly boarders and they desperately want to do sports, but they can't because they come home every weekend. And that's what I thought with these [my] kids... they're going down there for the social interaction and everything. If they're home every weekend, what's the good of that? I mean, the hardest thing I have ever done in my life is send my kids away... (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.454-458).

The rural location of the research site school offered participants' children contextual familiarity which was considered an enabler of social skills development. For them, the research site school offered their children opportunities for social skills development in an environment that reflected their home contexts:

> ...like coming from where we are, our nearest neighbour is an hour and a half drive away. They're lacking socially as far as stranger danger and things like that; they're very trusting. So that was sort of an issue as well we're sort of a smaller country town and people are friendlier, but it might not have been so confronting going to a small country school rather than a big city school, break them in gradually. So if they choose to go to university they've gone just that one step to get there (Laura, NISSI, ll.69-74).

The contextual familiarity of the research site school eliminated perceived dangers. These enabled the participants' children to more readily and comfortably take on new social experiences. For Laura, the choice involved maintaining a balance between her own child's well-being and the opportunities afforded to them in relation to social development: "it might not have been so confronting going to a small country school". There was a sense in parents' responses that this familiarity with the context eliminated many of the difficulties that they anticipated their children would have faced had they been at a boarding school in a larger regional or metropolitan centre: "... I chose [township] because I wanted my children to have that country feeling about it all" (Adina, NISSI, ll.7-8). One participant went on to state that she was already able to observe the benefits of her decision to send her daughter to boarding school:

> It's already showing with [child's name], you know gaining the confidence to be with other people. I mean she went out and got a job at Christmas time and worked through at Kmart, got herself ready, I mean I wasn't there to help her out with anything. She'd stay with her grandmother and aunty. And you know I definitely think it's a positive experience for her... (Laura, NISSI, ll.210-213).

The data indicate that developing a sense of independence, responsibility and work ethic were a priority for the social development of their children. Boarding presented children with challenges around living independently from parents/caregivers and engendered a degree of responsibility that was not afforded them at home. Indeed, one parent considered the distance of the selected boarding school from home as an important part of the process of socialisation: "I thought well that's good I can get her whenever I want to. Then I thought, I'm sending her for social interaction and... you know.... things like that... that would be dumb" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.487-488).

The development of social skills was clearly related to participation in facets of school life that could not be experienced at home. Boarding school presented participants' children with the prospect of engaging in a range of activities that were ordinarily unavailable to them. However, there was an emphasis on the social outcomes of the activities, rather than on the quality of activities specifically. There was a clear social dimension to parent's desire for these experiences which highlighted a perception of the dearth of social interaction as an experience of life in rural and isolated areas. One of the Principal participants acknowledged

that this was an expectation of parents enrolling students into boarding school. It was stated "because they would have had limited experiences if they were living in the bush...[they would be] expecting their children to be exposed to other activities that would "broaden their horizons" (Principal 1, ll.50-52).

After being questioned about the educational and social advantages of the boarding school experience for children, one participant highlighted:

> We were hoping that they would make lifelong friends which were important. We hoped that they would learn to work as a team because you can't really work in a team at home. I mean they work as a team in the cattle yards from when they are [young]... You know whether it's a sporting team, a debating team. You know our kids have gone on Red Cross door knock appeals, so you know do those things as a team. Another thing [research site township] being so close to [large regional area], you know they had access to things that they wouldn't have access to here. Going to a footy [game], going to [local football team] games is just not an option here unless we do a really big trip for it. That's not actually at the school, but they're some of the things that were of great benefit to them (Sandy, NISSI, ll.159-176).

These social skilling experiences offered by the research school were seen by parents as intimately connected with the holistic development of their child; that these experiences "were of great benefit to them". The data indicated that it was less about the quality of the activities and more about the social implications these activities had for their children. These non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas have a concern for their child's capacity to operate independently in the post-school world, and the decision to send their child to boarding school helped to address this concern: "And then he'll be able to be an independent person because he's been able to do school without parents around all the time" (Louise, NISSI, ll.112-113).

5.2.2 School must be a place of 'safety'

School must be a place of physical, psychological and emotional safety.

Sending children away to school, sometimes at a distance of thousands of kilometres, raises concerns around safety and security. The decision by parents to send their child to boarding

school is a difficult one, replete with emotional turmoil and conflict. As one parent participant stated: “I don’t think I will ever get over it. But it’s the best for them, so you’ve got to do it” (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], l.462). This is the natural inclination of parents, which is heightened when their child is enrolled in boarding school. Thus, parents in rural and remote areas seek out schools which are going to provide their children with a safe and secure environment, and it is therefore incumbent on schools to provide this environment. However, for the parent participants, safety was a multivalent concept which incorporated physical well-being, and psychological and emotional safety and well-being.

Physical safety

Parents stated that, during their framing of particular schools, they considered the physical layout of dormitories in order to evaluate the physical safety afforded their children. Indeed, the notion of physical safety and students’ physical well-being was well recognised by the Principal participants who considered it a critical aspect of their boarding offering. For one parent, the physical layout of facilities was something observed at the time of enrolment in order to satisfy her requirements for safety: “I must admit a big thing in my choice was condition of the dorms and how many were in a dorm. And where the dormy was... was positioned” (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a]ll.663-664).

For another parent, the communal nature of the living environment heightened the conflict she had with sending her child away:

> For me, not being a boarding parent, I remember leaving them in the dorm, and back then the dorm was pretty Spartan and that was pretty awful (14:29). You know they are a lot better now, but then it was just a mob of beds, you know pretty old beds all in a row. You know and [husband’s name] being a boarder then from Year 4 said “Gee it’s a lot better than when I went there”, so you know that was difficult (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.137-141).

Psychological safety

Parents also considered during the choice process their children’s psychological well-being. Parents considered schools which were selected by other families who had similar backgrounds to them or were from the same local area:

> Also I think..... being with their friends.... not necessarily their best friends or whatever, but families from the same area or lifestyle... that sort of thing...both of my kids... would not have mattered what you said they wanted to go to [selected school] because there was family there for a start and friends, you could have said they were gonna cane you every day... they wanted to go there for that reason. Having some security there before they went (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], ll.51-55).

The need for psychological safety was satisfied to some degree by the presence of other students that were familiar to their children. This familiarity connoted a level of security which contributed to the seamless transition to boarding for their children, but also instilled a sense of confidence in parents because there "were other country people there" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], ll.267-268):

> And I guess the big thing to bush people is the fact that their kids are going in to live with a lot of different people from a lot of different cultures and coming from a very narrowed view of how you cope with that compared with the exposure I had as a child with their exposure. We're quite a close community up here as you know, and our kids are quite comfortable in that (Angela, 1on1 NISSI, ll.63-67).

Further to the importance of familiar environments ensuring psychological safety, Laura stated unequivocally that the schools in larger regional or metropolitan centres may have resulted in her children's exclusion on account of the social demographic of the parents and their children attending schools in such locations:

> Whereas in Brisbane they probably had academic parents, I guess you'd say, professional people, so they may not fit in quite as well, may not feel as quite as comfortable. So that was something as well that we'd thought about... They were quite happy to go there (Laura, 1on1 NISSI, ll.168-171).

Psychological safety was articulated by parents with reference to the way the boarding house operated. The notions of "term-time family" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a],l.336) and "home-away-from-home" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a],l.337) once again

highlighted the importance of the multidimensional nature of safety. For parents, the boarding house needed to operate as a family proxy, which offered their children similar degrees of safety and security as their own family environment. One parent highlighted the role senior students played in the residence, citing that at other schools "the senior children and school captains have an extremely large amount of power over the children" (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.43-44). This particular model was not present at the research site school and that this was "one of the factors as well" (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, l.46) that featured in her decision making.

Emotional safety: 'happiness'

The notion of emotional safety for parents was articulated through their perceived positive relationship between safety and happiness. Indeed, their child's happiness was emphasised over academic success, sporting achievement and other experience, though these positive experiences were also seen as engendering happiness. For the parent participants, their child's happiness was considered "the bottom line" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a],l.861) and this was contingent on their experience of success in other areas of school life: "Because in the end, they have to be happy there. They're never going to do well if they're not happy" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a],ll.679-680). All parents considered their child's happiness as very important in the school selection process. Furthermore, one parent's hopeful outcome for her children's education was that they be "happy and fulfilled... happy in who they are as people" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a],ll.1053-1054). For parent participants, happiness was not the result of school success, but rather an inherent experience of boarding school:

> I mean you send your children to boarding school and you have two main focuses. You want your children to be happy and you want them to be safe. If that can't work out. Not every kid's good academically and not every kid is going to play top grade sport. But if they are happy then they lead a good life; if they are safe then as a parent and if the boarding school is taking on the role of protecting your children then they're the two main focuses. And if your child is not happy, then I think you need to look closely at why they are not happy and then do something about it (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.233-238)

Happiness is not derived from the attainment of educational qualifications or the prospect of post-school success. There is no discernible relationship in the data between

academic outcomes, the attainment of certain educational qualifications leading to civic participation and the child's happiness. The above response is very representative of non-Indigenous parents' views on the importance of the 'happiness' of their children in relation to their boarding school experience. There is, however, a strong sense among the participants that the happiness of their children is the foundation for their child's experience of success:

> Probably for me the fact that I was told that the dorm was run in a really strict but friendly manner. And that had a big influence for me, because where they live, even though they go to school every day, if the living is not happy well then the child generally is not happy (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.84-86).

5.2.3 Conceptualisation of Findings from Research Question 1

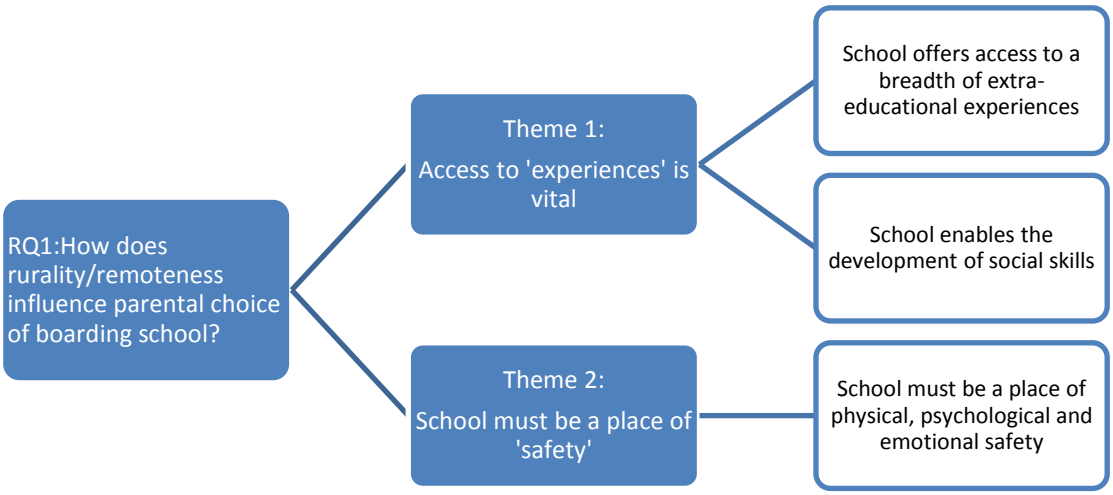
The notion of **access**, which is broadly defined to include access to education, social skilling and opportunity, are the offspring of rural life and highlight the involutions of parental choice of school in a rural and remote contexts. It is clear that rurality presents parents with complexities not confronted by those living in larger regional and metropolitan areas. The notion that boarding school offered the participants' children unique opportunities to prepare for the post-school world was a feature of participants' responses. In some ways parents felt more confident that their child would be able to confidently participate in adult life after their time at boarding school:

> Yeah, I want her to go away from boarding school and say I am ready for the outside world. Because there's just so much out there now, even from when we were kids, that they need to be aware of and able to say no I don't do that, this is what I am going to do (Barb, NISSI, ll.160-162).

Parents living in rural and remote locations, out of necessity, must send their children to boarding school, and thus they emphasise the **safety** of their children as a priority. When living at a distance from their children, they needed to be certain that their child's **physical**, **psychological** and **emotional** safety needs were being met by the school that they selected. Furthermore, safety expressed **as 'happiness'** was a key feature in the data, whereby parents considered this to be the platform for success. This is contrasted with the conspicuous

absence in the data of references to academic outcomes and achievements. For the non-Indigenous parents, this was not of any particular concern. When participants were asked to outline how they hoped their child would benefit from boarding school, overwhelmingly parents made reference to the personal rather than the educational domain. Figure 5.2 summarises the thematic development in relation to Research Question One:

Figure 5.2 Thematic Development: Research Question One



5.3 Research Question 2: How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of a boarding school for their child?

The theme in relation to Research Question 2 was:

1. Hot Knowledge gained through the 'grapevine' is a cogent source of information for parents.

5.3.1 Hot Knowledge gained through the 'grapevine' is a cogent source of information for parents

Parents seek out particular types of information when making school choices. These information sources can be divided into two broad categories: hot knowledge and cold knowledge. *Cold Knowledge* refers to information which is in the control of the school. For example, most schools produce prospectus documents, websites and other communiqués which parents can access readily. *Hot knowledge* refers to information sources which are outside the control of the school. Most notably, this information is derived from other

parents. For the parent participants, *hot knowledge* is summarised in one expression: "word of mouth" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], l.101) and can be understood via the expression 'grapevine'.

While some of the participants noted that they accessed information from the school as part of their decision-making process, it was hot knowledge that was most informative and offered them an insight into the school that was otherwise unavailable. Indeed, some of the participants noted that the information supplied by the school was "...very overwhelming" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], l.658) and another that the prospectus was a "skite magazine" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], l.656). One parent confirmed this view by stating that a "school's not going to send you out a prospectus that has their disadvantages really" (Louise, 1on1 NISSI, ll.62-63).

The data suggest that there are three broad networks of hot knowledge, or the 'grapevine'. The first of these networks consisted of other parents who had or were in the process of making school selections. For many of these parents, this network predominantly included people associated with School of the Air and schools of Distance Education. This network consisted of people engaged in the boarding school choice process. The second network was made up of family and close friends who had a direct affiliation with school. The third network comprised key people in rural feeder towns, such as the Parish priest and the principal of the local Catholic primary school.

Other parents who were either considering attending the school or had students enrolled at the school were influential sources of information. These sources of information served a number of purposes. For some parents, the information received from other people gave them insight into the research site school of which they had no prior knowledge. For others, the information served to confirm their selection that they had made prior to seeking information from their networks. The information also allowed parents to access information in relation to the sub-cultural aspects of the school that is not readily available through school sources:

> I heard of one parent who had pulled her child out of a boarding school mostly because of the bullying issue that they hadn't dealt with. You know I know there's always a settling in period but this had been going on for right through the 2nd term and the 3rd term, and she just pulled him out in the end. So to me, that's not

> acceptable. You know you can understand the first few weeks there's a settling in period, but.... (Laura, 1on1 NISSI, ll.95-100).

Moreover, there was a clear emphasis on the "other mothers" as the sources of this information, which may suggest that mothers play a more active role in seeking out information to inform the choice process:

> Therese: other mums for me.... that's the ones I listened to the most.... especially mums whose kids..... were on a par with mine.
> Jenny: Yeah, word of mouth definitely
> (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, l.610-613).

The second network consisting of family and close friends was a very powerful source of information which gave parents unique insights into schools which informed their decision making. These people offered information about their own child's experiences., For the most part this served to consolidate the decision of the parent: "I spoke a bit to [friend's name]... But I do value [sister-in-law's name] opinion you know. And I could tell that with her children if they weren't happy that would have put me off" (Betty, 1on1 NISSI, ll.59-60).

For most participants, *hot knowledge* from the first and second information networks was used to more to confirm school selection than to assist with the initial selection : "probably not so much influential but probably backed up what I already knew by asking the questions" (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.68-69). These parents had moved beyond merely short-listing possible schools and onto the next phase of distinguishing between school options:

> Frances: I think with me it was not so much looking... What I enquired about, what I read about, what people told me about it didn't make me think oh maybe not. So it seemed there didn't appear to be any red flags... and that was from other parents and that too. Even though some of them might have been having problems with something, I felt it was something that couldn't be.... it wasn't a school policy or anything like that (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], l.615-624).

For this participant, the grapevine served the purposes of identifying "red flags" which may have informed a process of deselection. This participant was also able to tolerate that there

may have been issues at the school, but not sufficient to reconsider her choice. However, she placed greater emphasis on other aspects of her school choosing processes and used the information gleaned from the grapevine to confirm that she had made the correct choice.

'Grapevine' sources needed to be filtered, and there was a danger in not realising this to be the case. The accuracy of the information was a judgment made by parents based upon who was offering the information. One participant emphasised the gravity of misinformation, or malicious informing:

> That's the other point... it depends on what [an objection] is based upon... but you might have heard from someone else, from someone else that something happened at [school name] and that might have been an unfounded fear that you had... (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], l.693-695).

When participants were asked if the information they received through the *grapevine* shed a negative light on their preferred school, they responded with

> Frances: Depends who it was. And if I knew the child
> Therese: Yes, I was thinking that myself. 'Cause there's been a couple of those and you just think, yeah righto (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group[a], l.630-633).

For these parents the reliability of *grapevine* information needed to be questioned in order to ensure its dependability. Nevertheless, these sources of information were cogent indicators of a school's sub-culture which, for these parents, is the information they seek. For most participants, negative feedback about the selected school would have prompted more research rather than immediate deselection: "I would have done a lot more research into it I think. I would have had to have found out, done a lot more 'ins and outs'... (Barb, 1on1 NISSI, ll.110-111). One parent detailed the process she would have undertaken had she not received information that confirmed her choice:

> Well I think we would have had a look at it... dug a bit deeper to see why [what] the reasons were... if we were actually considering the school, you know we would have dug a bit deeper to see what the issues were whether it was the child [from whose parents the negative reporting came] was the problem or whether it was the school.

> If it was the school that we really wanted to go to. Luckily it wasn't. You know like, to be fair, there are things that kids come back with, and it's not really the school's fault, it's the kids themselves that create the problems sometimes... had it been [research site school] with a few issues we would have looked into that and seen what was going on and asked the question basically... I was sort of happy with them going there (Laura, 1on1 NISSI, ll.137-144).

The *grapevine* in rural feeder towns was a third network of information. It was considered that information from this network could shape the enrolment decisions of a large proportion of feeder towns. The importance and relevance of the *grapevine* was not lost on the principal participants.: "You've only got to have one person in a country town who is disaffected by whatever reason and bang, you're gone" (Principal 1, ll.397-298). It was acknowledged that *hot knowledge* was an important type of information sought by parents and was most damaging when there was negativity circulating about the school.

Key people in these rural contexts were also considered to be influential harbingers of information, and it was these people who could damage a school's reputation, almost irreparably. In particular, these influential people included Religious and principals of Catholic primary schools. In some instances, these people were viewed as actively discouraging parents to enrol their children in the research site school:

> Some religious did not help our Catholic school. I can name three that didn't who I believe worked actively against children enrolling at [school name]. I also think some of the principals in some of the western schools by permitting [other schools outside of the diocese] to have their bursary exams at their schools when you're part of the one diocese, I found that quite disgusting (Principal 1,288-290).

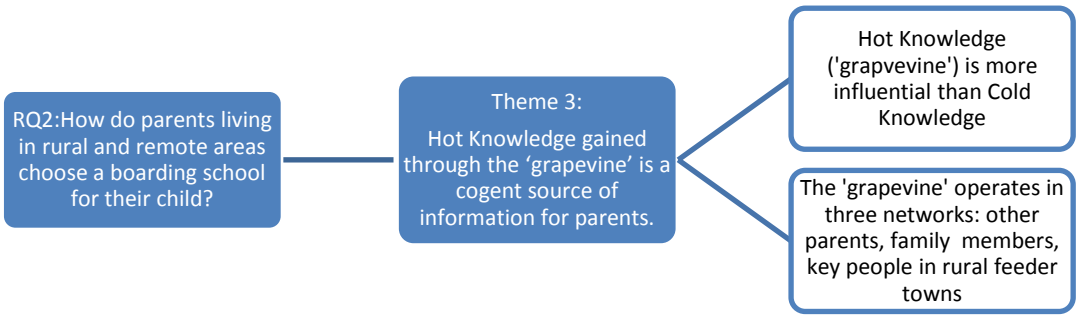
This principal participant emphasised the lack of collegiality between the research site school and certain rural feeder areas, intimating that key people in these towns took a negative view of rural boarding, with a preference instead for boarding schools in metropolitan centres: "See [school name] has never had a foot say in [rural township]. Now the Parish Priest there at one stage actively encouraged kids to go south. Mainly to Marist Ashgrove" (Principal 1, ll.294-295). It was highlighted that this type of advice undermined the efforts of rural boarding schools to maintain their survival.

It is clear in the data that *hot knowledge* is sourced from other parents, family/friends, and key people who may have some insider status within small feeder rural communities. The information that these people provided were influential because it often commanded a great deal of respect and authority in the small townships in which they reside.

5.3.2 Conceptualisation of Findings from Research Question 2

Hot knowledge operating as **the grapevine** is a cogent source of information for parents. This information gives parents varied insights into the subculture of schools which would not otherwise be readily accessible. However, the data suggest that the 'grapevine' is not definitive in terms of school choice. Indeed, parent participants accessed this information in order to confirm a predetermined selection. Furthermore, the grapevine consists of three discernible networks: (i) other parents; (ii) friends/family; and (iii) key people with status in the local community. For the parent participants, these networks operated with varying degrees of influence. In most cases, negative feedback from the *grapevine* did not necessarily result in deselection, but would have prompted parents to seek out further information in order to clarify the trustworthiness of the *grapevine*. It is also clear that 'cold knowledge' has minimal influence on parents' choice of school. Figure 5.3 summarises the thematic development in relation to Research Question Two.

Figure 5.3 Thematic Development: Research Question Two



5.4 Research Question 3: How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?

The finding in relation to Research Question 3 was:

1. The inculcation of values and 'medicinal religion' are desired by parents.

5.4.1 The inculcation of values and 'medicinal religion' are desired by parents.

The culture of the Catholic school was relevant to parent participants insomuch as the school inculcated particular values in their children. The culture of a school was variously understood and expressed by parents. A number of the participants were clear to distinguish between religious education and Catholic education. For them, the Catholic religion was not a vital element of their child's participation at school. Rather, Christian values were emphasised, as well as a perception that Catholic education offered something unique:

> Frances: I think Catholic education is terrific.
> Therese: Yes. That was a big one for me.
> Frances: Not so much the religion education, but Catholic education
> Therese: Christian values
> Frances: Christian values.... and
> Therese: [school name] seemed to be very big on that...
> Fiona: There seems to be.... don't want to be snobbery or anything like that.... but I honestly believe that Catholic education has some of the best teachers.
> (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.148-156).

While the parent participants refer to "Christian values", they do not conceptualise these values from a religious perspective. Instead, parents emphasise humanistic values and cite that the Catholic school was the best place to instil and reinforce these in their children. One participant cited her own Catholic school experience as formative and that she wanted this replicated for her own children:

> And I think that was really for me, you know I went to a Catholic primary school... we grew up in a Catholic home so we had Christian values and then the carrying on of those Christian values and we did a lot of god stuff at school which I think has given me a strong basis of a great faith, that's carried me through life (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.299-302).

A feature of the data was the belief by parents that the Catholic school experience allowed their child to receive opportunities for education in values, understood by parents as a "good

grounding" (Barb, 1on1 NISSI, ll.43-44). One parent participant stated that the school is "a school because of the whole tapestry" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group,ll.837-838) as opposed to the sum of its achievements and achievers, and that this is an important element of what constitutes a quality school. Another parent stated that the school "made the girls, you know, people that I am proud of, sort of thing. And [school name] had a lot to do with that" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group,ll. 854-855) which further underscores the value development dimension of Catholic education.

There was a degree of specificity in the transmission of values to participants' children. Parents suggested that they wanted "Christian values... of having respect for themselves and for other people, to be honest and always act with dignity" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group,ll.374-375) for their children. For one parent, she wanted her children "to have a Christian education, not so much Catholic, even though we're Catholic. I wanted those values and you couldn't get them from other schools"(Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.615-617). For this participant, Catholic theology was unimportant and the ecclesial identity of the school was not claimed as relevant. However, there was reference made to a decline in emphasis on participation in Catholic culture, compared with one parent's own personal Catholic school experiences. This parent implied that religion remains an important aspect of a student's education at school as it was for her. However, it is less about faith formation and more about exposure to religious activities (i.e. ritual) that perhaps help transmit particular values:

> I wanted my children to be brought up as Catholics.... not that I wanted so much Catholic, I wanted Christian. I'm a Catholic, they're Catholic... I'm very disappointed in the Catholic Church, I think it has a lot to answer for. I think [school name] as a Catholic school, as far as religion goes, has a lot to answer for, but still the basic values are there... There's still enough goodness in the Catholic side of Christian education for me to want to go that way. I felt that at boarding school... my children didn't get out of religion what I got out of religion at boarding school, regardless of whether it was Catholic or not, they didn't seem to get that. [child's name] got more and more sceptical if anything. They [her children] didn't seem to be as involved with what was going on. We took it in turns when I was at boarding school to pick the readings.... to do posters.... but I think too, with [school name], that is because you attend the town church. We had... I mean [township] had a

> church but we all... most of the time it was in the school chapel, and there was ownership (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.716-731).

The opportunity to "pick out the readings" is the extent to which this participant articulated her experience of an ecclesial culture. The emphasis is on value development. This notion of a 'religious experience' was echoed by another parent. She intimated that the experiences of being churched were important ones, but in her conversation there was a lack of concision and specificity in terms of the ways in which these experiences benefitted her children:

> Well they certainly went to Church [at boarding school], which they never really did [at home] apart from Mass around our kitchen table which we had every 6 weeks or so when a priest came to visit. So that was really a positive for me, they became very involved in Church, because it's a Catholic school... and that's something that stays with them, whether they'll be religious or not, it certainly is something that will stay with them (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.169-173).

Indeed when parent participants were asked what the hopeful outcome of the child's Catholic education was, most emphasised "greater empathy", "greater understanding of what Christian values are and I think he lives by them better" and "Christian values" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll. 1059-1062). This reinforces that the education in values dimension of Catholic education is an aspect of the choice process for parents. One parent stated that the research site school created an environment of personal growth and development, which she understood as peculiar to Catholic schools:

> Believe it or not, but your school tends to allow students to grow in themselves without, I don't know how to put this, but without holding a big stick over their heads. But a lot of other schools hold a big stick over their heads and say you will conform to this or else. You seem to have a way of doing that without too much force. I don't know how you manage that, but I'll leave that up to you (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.169-173).

The data indicated that traditional religion was unimportant in the choice process, as were the transmission of key Catholic-Christian teachings. Indeed, there was ambivalence if not an absence of reference to the quality and substance of religious education. Moreover, those

participants who stated that the Catholic affiliation was important for them during the choice process did not emphasise the importance of Catholic teaching and religious education:

> Interviewer: Why did you specifically select a Catholic school?
>
> Louise: Because that's a part of our family. I think all children need an exposure to religion because then they have the opportunity later in life if they need it it's there (1on1 NISSI, ll.121-122).

There is conspicuous absence in the data of any emphasis by parents on the on-going religious participation or affiliation of their child. Many of the participants had limited to no expectation that their child would participate in Catholic church life post-school:

> Interviewer: And do you expect him, when he leaves school, to be a practicing Catholic, and go to church and all those sorts of things?
> Barb: I don't expect him to do that.
> Interviewer: Do you anticipate that he will?
> Barb: No I don't. But then he's got that behind him if he, I think christening things, and wedding things and things like that I think that he'll go that way if he has children or gets married, I think that it'll be enough in him to do that (Barb, 1on1 NISSI, ll.177-179).

The exposure to Catholic ritual and other Catholic cultural experiences were believed to have some level of 'medicinal' influence on participants' children. That is, there was a sense that parents did not concisely articulate how their children would benefit, but they knew that they would:

> It's hard to know if they've benefitted. But I don't think it did them any harm. I'm sure other Church schools have really good values and that sort of thing. You know, I don't think it hurt that they were working the projector in Mass, [child's name] became an altar boy type thing and they did all that sort of thing, and I don't think that hurt them one little bit (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.190-193).

The data indicated that enrolment in a Catholic school afforded participants' children a stronger foundation from which to deal with the post-school world. This reinforces the 'medicinal' nature of Catholic education for these participants: that their exposure to particular values immunised their children against the vagaries of the outside world. A corollary of the desire for post-school readiness in the data was the idea that enrolment in a Catholic school was going to offer the participants' children a basis for 'belief' which, while not self-evident to their children now, may pay dividends in the future. While the 'Catholic dimension' to their choice of school may have been downplayed by parents, there was a sense that they had made an investment in their child's future personal stability:

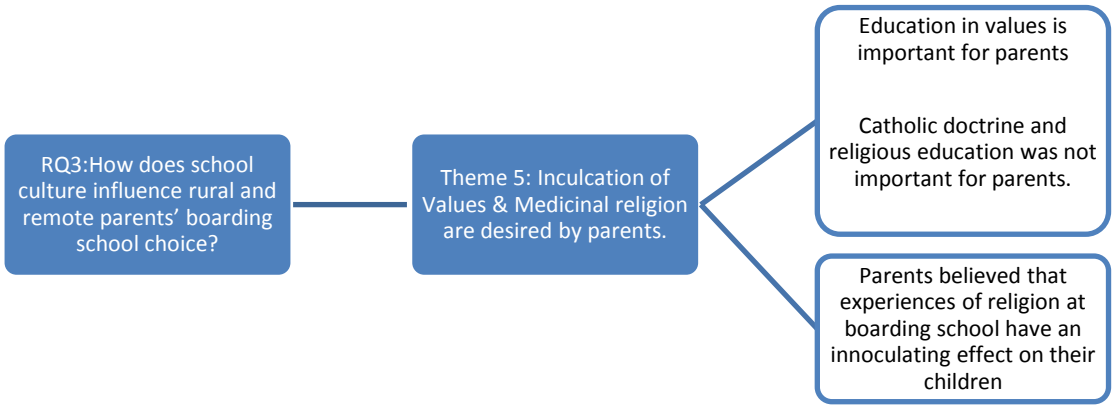
> ...without some good guidance and some level of exposure, where does a young person go to develop a strong faith? I want my kids to think for themselves, and I also know that when the chips are down that strong faith and support then... I get so concerned is that why the suicide rate is increasing, because people have nothing on which to hang. It's terrifically important to me (Angela, 1on1 NISSI, ll.225-229).

5.4.2 Conceptualisation of Findings from Research Question 3

The data indicate that the religious affiliation of the school was not a strong dimension of the choice process. However, it was clear that participants believed that their child would benefit from the experience of a Catholic school. For the most part, participants suggested that the Catholic school espoused particular values, most of which were consonant with their own, and the school was able **to inculcate these values** in their children: "...they still need to learn those basic values of life..." (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.163-164).

However, the data suggested explicit teaching of Catholic doctrine and evangelisation was not highly prioritised by parents. Indeed, most participants had very low expectations that their child's attendance at a Catholic school would result in more frequent participation in the life of the Church. However, parents stated that the Catholic school experience was akin to **harmless medicine**: the effects were unknown, but there was confidence that these could not be negative. Further, the data indicated that parents perceived that enrolment of their child in a Catholic school facilitated readiness for the post-school world. Figure 5.4 summarises the thematic development in relation to Research Question 3.

Figure 5.4 Thematic Development: Research Question Three



5.5 Research Question 4: How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and isolated parents?

The finding in relation to Research Question 4 was:

1. Racialised thinking is evident during the boarding school choice process
    - Children experience differential treatment.
    - Indigenous enrolment leads to the erosion of school quality.

5.5.1 Racialised thinking is evident during the boarding school choice process

Race is a consideration in the choice process and the racial composition of a school has a variety of implications, and these are carefully considered by parents as they make their school choice. For many of the non-Indigenous participants, while they considered the number of Indigenous students at the research site school during the choice process, this did not necessarily result in its deselection. However, there is a clear racial dimension to their thinking around their school choice decisions. Many parent participants were adamant that had the numbers of Indigenous students been higher at the time of enrolment, their decisions would have been different:

> Interviewer: So Frances, you're saying that if the number of Indigenous students had have been where they were say, in 2006 (more than 30%) and in girls' dorm it was around 62% that would have changed the decision to send your child?
>
> Frances: Oh definitely.... I hate saying it....
>
> Interviewer: What about you Therese?
>
> Therese: Yes.
>
> (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.914-922).

For other parents, an increase in the number of Indigenous students would prompt a reconsideration of their continued enrolment at the research site school. For these parents there was a clear tipping point in their mind, and this tipping point was defined in different ways. For many, increases in Indigenous enrolment would result in an increase in poor behaviour and a diminishing of the standard of safety afforded to their children:

> When a girl takes a pair of scissors, and [child's name] was in a dorm with Aboriginal girls because she had lived with them and didn't have any problems they were just people she normally saw around all the time. The [Indigenous community] girls were, and it's not their fault in many ways, it's the exposure they've had in their lives. A girl took a pair of scissors and threatened another girl but nothing was actually done about that, outside of naughty naughty girl. I was concerned for [child's name] safety. There was a time when the College became so over the top with painting all the walls with Aboriginal symbols and there was a loss of recognition that it was a multicultural school. That was offensive (Angela, 1on1 NISSI, ll.241-248).

A number of parents attached certain negative implications to high Indigenous enrolment. For one parent, the reason she selected the research site school for her eldest daughter was the small number of Indigenous students enrolled at the school: "There were hardly any there when my kids were going. That was the reason why [selected]" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.894-895). For other parents, the number of Indigenous students did not

explicitly factor in their decision making, but there was an implied racial dimension to their thinking about the school they selected:

> Well it wasn't really an influential thing, because we ended up sending [child's name] there. But it became a problem to us. Only because we're not racist, we just don't agree with the way some of the kids, you know, [how they] go on, and I don't think you need to suscept (expose) your children to that sort of thing (Adina, 1on1 NISSI, ll.183-186).

For another participant, absolute numbers of Indigenous students was an issue:

> Interviewer: What if there was no disruption, if it was just in terms of numbers. Would you still move him?
>
> Betty: Yes. Because I know what they're like. I couldn't believe it couldn't be disruptive. It would have to be. I don't believe you'd be able to control you know the amount of kids that are in boarding now if the majority were Aboriginal (1on1 NISSI, ll.206-209).

It was also noted that other parents familiar to the participants had deselected the research site school "...because of the program they were in with the Indigenous and how many Indigenous... [there were enrolled], (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group,l.897). For these participants it was evident that the racial composition of the school was an important consideration in their choice of school and, again, that there were tolerable and intolerable quantum of Indigenous enrolment. For one parent, the most important information he received from his networks was "Mainly, the general one was that it was getting over run by Aborigines. And that was a bad thing" (Mal, 1on1 NISSI, ll.89-90).

The data indicated a moderate to strong level of racialised thinking in relation to the boarding school choice process. The extent of the racialised thinking of parents was predicated on their personal views of Indigenous people. These parents had preconceived ideas about Indigenous people, sometimes a result of their own personal experiences:

> Because when I went to boarding school there was a lot of black girls there, mainly [Indigenous community]. Caused a lot problems. Behavioural problems, they were very hard to live with which I am sure you know what they're like. It was really disrupting. Yeah there was a different set of rules for them to us. That's a big thing and Catholics seem to take them on. The other school that I did look at, for about 5 minutes, was [Indigenous college], because my brother went to [Indigenous college]. And then I just saw how many Aborigines were there. No way, I'm not even going to think about that (Betty, 1on1 NISSI, ll.186-192).

For other parents, Indigenous people were considered to be threatening at a level which was far greater than non-Indigenous people:

> We've all got our views on Indigenous people, there's some good Indigenous people, but by crikey, there's some bad ones. Just like in white race, same thing. But you get more trouble out of the Indigenous than you do the white (Mal, 1on1 NISSI, ll.190-192).

It is evident that these parent participants exercised racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process. Their own negative views of Indigenous people shaped the ways in which they perceived certain schools. This perception was articulated with reference to numbers of Indigenous students and what this meant for their children.

The data highlighted two aspects of Indigenous enrolment which was problematic for non-Indigenous parents. The first aspect referred to the notion of difference whereby Indigenous students were perceived to be advantaged because of their culture and the financial support the received from the Government. The second aspect was that high Indigenous numbers eroded school quality. These two aspects are discussed in the following sections.

Children experience differential treatment

For many of the parent participants their racialised thinking about the selected school was articulated in terms of differential treatment of students. Some parents intimated that Indigenous students received advantages at the research site school and these same advantages were not extended to their children.

The perceived financial advantages offered to Indigenous students were contrasted with the struggle of non-Indigenous parents to meet fee commitments, further highlighting the perception of inequity:

> Number one I think they can get resentful because they know that their friends who live in the same area get flown home every holiday because they're on Abstudy. They get pocket money that our children don't get; they only get what mum and dad can give them, so there is resentment... And it usually just washes over them and they just don't care. They do get resentful (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.212-219).

The financial advantages for Indigenous students were also perceived to be advantageous for the research site school.

> The reason we got so many at [research site school] during those years was the program that it was safe money. It was upfront money. The government would pay upfront, that was it, they were there 'til the term [up to date on fees]. We struggle every term to write that cheque... (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.983-985).

Another parent stated her understanding of the perceived financial advantages of Indigenous enrolment:

> And I said, because of the price of boarding at the moment and if you go down south it's more costly, they get grants for them [Indigenous students] don't they. So they're not going to keep it open, I mean there used to be 300 something boarders here, and now we're back to 60 or something. So they've got to cut the costs somehow (Doris, 1on1 NISSI, ll.208-211).

A Principal participant also suggested there was a prevailing attitude among members of peak parent bodies that there was a financial divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and this divide advantaged Indigenous students:

> There was a feeling that's come out several times though the school board that the Indigenous students get looked after too well and it's discriminatory against the non-Indigenous students who are for example not wealthy enough to afford a private Catholic education or some aspect of their education. Yes I've certainly heard parents voice that (Principal 2, ll.191-194).

Participants referred to educational (curricular and extra-curricular) advantages offered to Indigenous students that were not available to their children. This was conceptualised as "two different scales" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group,l.939) whereby Indigenous advantage and non-Indigenous disadvantage were reciprocally related:
"There's the PASS[14] program, which, if you have children who are really sporty they can't understand why they can't just go and play sport every Friday too. So they do get resentful" (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.215-217). Another parent stated:

> But also the two different levels. I'm sorry, but... and as far as I'm concerned, kids are kids, I don't care if they're black, white or brindle, but just to point out a thing. The football. [Child's name]'s into football... if it wasn't for football I don't know what we would have done. Now, Jonathan Thurston and Matthew Bowen were going to the school, only the Indigenous kids were allowed to go... he was heartbroken. You know, he couldn't go and see his heroes... and you know... what the... why not? (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.932-937).

This parent then went on to state that she had considered withdrawing her child on the basis that the numbers of Indigenous students were increasing and this was contributing to her child's unhappiness (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group,l.943).

From the data emerged the perception that there is an inequitable educational divide, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, in favour of Indigenous students. This divide was articulated by participants in a variety of ways. Some participants questioned the validity of education programs that focused on Indigenous students. One parent stated that the school "turned my children into racists" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, l.975) because of her children's exposure to groups of Indigenous students where the perceived educational

[14] A government funded, in-school Indigenous sports program.

divide was evident to them. Another parent suggested that Indigenous education programs are "failing miserably", intimating these programs set Indigenous students against non-Indigenous students.

The series of responses below encapsulates the perception that there is a wedge of inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. References to "mainstream education" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, l.991) by the participants suggests that they believe there is no place for specialised programs for Indigenous students, particularly where these programs exclude their children:

> Jenny: Unfortunately, we have set up this great divide, with good intent of Indigenous programs addressing the issues... and for these Indigenous, unfortunately they're coming through a system where everything is given to them... which is not good for them because we're taking away their self-determination again by doing it...
> Therese: However, if someone was giving it to me, I'd take it too.
> Jenny: Absolutely. But where do they learn to become self-reliant and to live in the world and the school of hard knocks...
> Frances: That is more my beef with it, is the rules and discipline.
> Jenny: There's two standards. There's two levels. If you're non-Indigenous or Indigenous, there's definitely two standards.
> Frances: Behaviour. Nothing to do with your learning, or what language you speak or how you do your hair...
>
> (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.1000-1011).

Different consequences for Indigenous students' poor behaviour in the data further highlighted the relationship of the perceived differential treatment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The notion of "two different scales" (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group,l.939) was reiterated with reference to rules:

> I feel that there's two lots of rules. There's rules for non-Indigenous kids and there's rules for Indigenous kids. If you're non-Indigenous and you're on your second or third offence, you're out of the school. If you're Indigenous and you're on your 14th

> offence you're still at the school somehow... and it is hugely problematic, hugely problematic as a parent.... because I just think it's very dangerous territory (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.970-974).

This attitude was not isolated to these participants. Indeed, the data suggest a strong and enduring perception among parents that Indigenous people generally are advantaged and this is most evident to them in the ways in which their children are treated at school. One parent stated: "We have a problem with the perceptions of young Aboriginal people out there that think they are entitled to everything" (Angela, 1on1 NISSI, ll.253-254). Moreover, another parent suggested that the issues of (perceived) differential treatment of Indigenous students was the result of particular ideologies at the systemic level:

> It's hard for our children [from] who[m] we expect a certain behaviour and I think at certain times haven't behaved well but, at times I think Cath[olic] Ed[ucation Office] might like to encourage the Aboriginal students to stay at the school whereas if those children were white they might have been gone. And I think sometimes it's got a lot to do with the hierarchy of Cath[olic] Ed[ucation Office], their airy fairy ideas (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.221-225).

Indigenous enrolment leads to the erosion of school quality

The participants highlighted a maleficent relationship between Indigenous enrolment and the quality of the school. For the most part, high numbers of Indigenous students eroded the quality of the school, where 'quality' is understood in a variety of ways. The decline in quality due to Indigenous enrolment was most manifest in student's behaviour and the extent to which the parent participants' children were subject to this:

> ...I shouldn't say it went way down... the behaviour was allowed to go way down with the enrolment the more Indigenous children that came. And a lot of it was discussed as being cultural and nuh ah! I'm sorry, I don't wear that. There should be no difference.... More individual children from different areas didn't play up as much as a group together I just noticed that when you walked into the dorms, into the school area, the loudness, the lack of dress, the yelling out... (Non-Indigenous Parents, Focus Group, ll.907-912).

Moreover, some parents suggested that the general quality of education is eroded as a result of high Indigenous enrolment. Even the parents that could be considered to have limited racialised thinking in relation to their school or represented themselves as open and accepting of Indigenous people, conceded this 'phenomenon':

> I actually stayed on a mission in the Territory for a couple of weeks. And if you can appreciate the culture of the Aboriginals of the way they lived a long time ago, but they've gone, and if they could stay away from the outside influences of drugs and alcohol and petrol sniffing and all that sort of thing, they really have a... good family group... like the extended family group is really a good thing. You know the Indigenous kids weren't an issue, academically you know there might be quite a few that might be bit behind, depending on how the parents had got them going to school.... my kids aren't going to stay behind because of that. They're going get taught something and they want to learn it, they'll learn it (Laura, 1on1 NISSI, ll.256-263).

So for this participant, there is something of value in Indigenous cultures, but there is a clear concession that Indigenous students reduce the quality of education to which her children have access.

Ensuring school quality by balancing the racial composition of the school was a priority for the Principals of the research site school. This was an important aspect of school administration which ensured that the research site school remained attractive to non-Indigenous parents. Principal 2 stated that the way he enrolled students had changed over time and he implied he now had to be more discerning when it came to enrolling Indigenous students. He stated that he made errors in selection "probably due to inexperience" (l.158) which prompted changes to the enrolment process. The participant referred to a particular Indigenous community where he was not selective enough and this led to issues surrounding student behaviour and raised complex challenges with non-Indigenous parents. He then went on to outline how he had changed his approach to the enrolment of Indigenous students:

> We try to maintain a racial balance. Certainly, Indigenous to non-Indigenous we try to maintain at least one to one, a maximum of one to one. We have had situations in the

> past where non-Indigenous students have withdrawn because they've been the only boarder who's non-Indigenous. I'm not aware of any Indigenous students withdrawing for that particular reason but it's possible it could happen too. You don't always get feedback from the non-Indigenous families. So yes, we try to maintain, ideally we'd probably maintain a ratio similar to the community ratio but it's just not possible to do that (Principal 2, 198-204).

The principle of "racial balance" was founded on a notion of integration, which was directly related to maintaining school quality. It was stated that if the research site school was to enrol too many Indigenous students there would be a decline in non-Indigenous enrolment: "...and as soon as that trend starts if you're not very, very careful you can turn it into an Indigenous boarding school and that's certainly not what we want. It has to be a school that works on integration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous..." (Principal 2, 209-211). The point of difficulty here is on the enrolment of Indigenous students in relation to the perceived quality of the research site school. It is conceded that the enrolment of Indigenous students brings challenges that are difficult to justify on the basis of integration and racial balance:

> I guess behaviourally there were problems with students who weren't suited to this type of school situation... In the boarding area in particular, the issues tended to come up but not exclusively in the boarding area. The issues involved misbehaviour, home sickness, inability to settle, not prepared to work those type of issues (Principal 2, ll.163-171).

In some circumstances, perceived errors in judgement at enrolment time resulted in the loss of multiple students and an erosion of the perceived quality of the research site school:

> I mean I recall one particular instance where I got very badly burnt by a student who was very highly recommended, highly recommended. And it worked out that that was not the true picture of the child and I ended up having to expel him. But as a result we lost students because of that as well because of what he did, you know (Principal 1, ll.146-149).

Racial imbalance in enrolment where the imbalance was in favour of Indigenous students was an indicator of poor quality. This was considered a malignancy which threatened the on-going financial well-being and the subsequent viability of the school. Both principal

participants either explicitly stated or implied a commitment to the enrolment of Indigenous students on the condition that this enrolment did not exceed the enrolment of non-Indigenous students: “as your Indigenous numbers go up, your non-Indigenous numbers go down” (Principal 1, ll.67-68).

This particular approach to enrolment was a formula for future viability of the school because it was their perception that non-Indigenous parents had intolerance for too many Indigenous students:

> And people in your enrolment interviews were very blatant in their questions about the number of Indigenous, to the point of saying things like I am happy for Indigenous kids to get an education but not with my kids. Or, I don’t want my kids sleeping next to a black kid (Principal 1, ll.68-70).

The data indicated that high numbers of Indigenous enrolment diminish the status of the school as an indicator of school quality. Principal 1 highlighted this issue, stating that this had the potential to shift enrolment demographics:

> ...And if you go to school with black kids you’re going to be diminished in the social rung...Because you’ve got increased Indigenous. I mean....when kids went to boarding schools say post war 60s and 70s, that period, I mean the majority who went there were not high on the social ladder. They weren’t. They were struggling families. I mean think of [husband’s name] father. [husband’s name]’s the eldest of 7 kids, his father was a shearer until he was 72. He sent all his kids to boarding school. Can you imagine how much that cost him without any financial help? Now, you don’t put a shearer on top of the social ladder. So, [pre-amalgamation boys’ boarding school] and [pre-amalgamation girls’ boarding school] always had that socio-economic group, yet when they [parents] went through [the research site school] and did well, it wasn’t good enough to send their kids to [because the school did not meet their improved social status].

The implication here is that Indigenous enrolment erodes the quality of the school in relation to its capacity to offer social mobility or social class maintenance to non-Indigenous students.

For this participant, the role of the Principal was to ensure that the racial composition of the school did not discourage non-Indigenous enrolment: "it's probably the most difficult thing I had to deal with as a Principal...trying to maintain a harmonious living environment in boarding where the racial mix was not going to impact negatively on either group... (Principal 1, ll.250-253).

Indeed, when there was racial imbalance in student enrolment towards Indigenous students, this was tantamount to disaster:

> And you could guarantee that I would have Indigenous kids on a waiting list because I was trying to, you know you couldn't come out and say it openly, but you were trying to keep some sort of balance particularly in boarding, in school it wasn't as big an issue because you've got the day student influx. But you could guarantee you'd wait until the last minute and then you'd say I'll take another Indigenous, I'll take another child because this one's been on the waiting list and you'd take one and the next thing week one of the term, five non-Indigenous wouldn't turn up because they hadn't notified you they weren't coming back. So then your balance was gone again (Principal 1, ll.235-242).

Thus, parents were actively avoiding schools with high numbers of Indigenous students because it stymied their child's social progress: "they don't want their kids associating with a lower socio-economic group" (Principal 1, l.326). Principal 1 considered the systemic Catholic vs. Private school image as pivotal in some parents' decision-making, stating that "the elitism thing" (l.378) is an important consideration. The quality of the research site school was reduced because of Indigenous enrolment and this was used by competing schools as a lever with prospective enrolments that had racially motivated reservations about Indigenous people:

> And because [research site school] has Indigenous kids that diminishes you on that social scale. Gossip is part of that. I think there's too many boarding schools in [rural township], I think that also has played a factor. And I think the other boarding schools play that to the hilt in their enrolment interviews. They don't come out and say on their billboards we only have 2% black kids, but they certainly will make sure it's dropped in the conversation at enrolment interviews (Principal 1, ll.379-384).

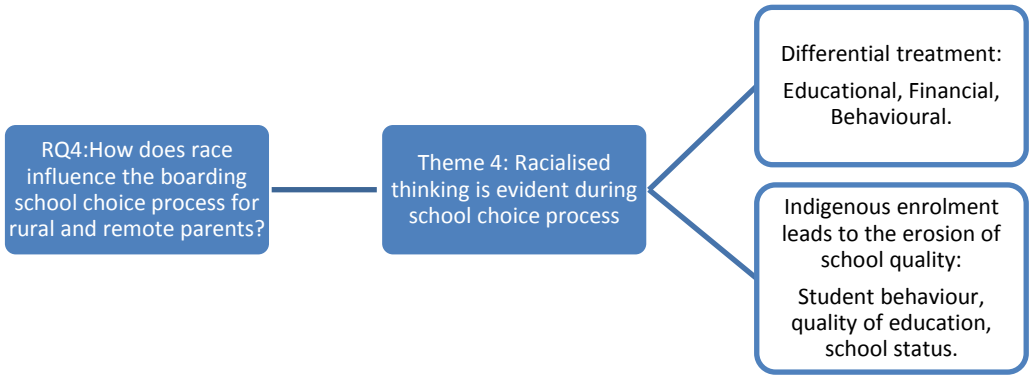
These data indicate a race-social class element of the parental choice of school process, whereby certain non-Indigenous parents deselect schools on the basis of the racial composition of the school. For some of these parents, the higher the concentration of Indigenous students, the more likely their child was to be socially immobilised, in addition to being exposed to poor behaviour and an unsafe environment.

5.5.2 Conceptualisation of the Findings from Research Question 4

The data suggest that there is **racialised thinking** during the school choice process, but this is not the strongest element. Indeed, while these participants clearly highlighted their concerns about levels of Indigenous student enrolment, the parent participants enrolled and continued to enrol their children at the research site school. This may have been due in part to the perception that the school was able to 'control' Indigenous students: "We know that the school was on to it. So they dealt with the matter in the appropriate way" (Adina, 1on1 NISSI, ll.193-194).

However, there is evidence in the data to suggest there are certain tipping points for parents that are articulated in terms of their own personal tolerance for levels of enrolment of Indigenous students. Further the data demonstrated that parents perceived that Indigenous students were educationally and financially **advantaged over their own children** and that the enrolment of Indigenous students **eroded the quality (student behaviour, quality of education, school status) of the school**. Figure 5.5 summarises the thematic development in relation to Research Question Four.

Figure 5.5 Thematic Development: Research Question Four



5.6 Third Order Data Interpretation: Contentions about Non-Indigenous Parental Choice of School.

Consistent with the interactive process of data analysis (Section 4.6), a third order data interpretation process is undertaken in order to theorise about the interrelationships between categories. The following section outlines contentions about the parental choice of school process for non-Indigenous participants. This selective coding process is informed by the literature (Chapter 3) around parental choice of school, as well as the symbolic interactionist conceptualisation of the parental choice of school process (Section 4.2.2.2). The contentions are theoretical statements about the ways in which non-Indigenous parents engage in the parental choice of school process. As previously stated, the fundaments of the contentions are the research questions and the emergent themes. A third-order analysis resulted in the assignation of theoretical significance expressed as contentions. The following sections outline the development of the contentions which are the result of data analysis and subsequent thematic development.

5.6.1 Contention 1: Non-Indigenous Parents select schools that will prepare children for the post-school world.

The data indicated that non-Indigenous parents made school choices on the basis of a school's capacity to prepare their children for the post-school world. Parents were clear that their children needed to have access to opportunities for extra-educational participation and personal growth. In particular, parents cited their child's access to experiences that would, in essence, 'broaden their horizons'. For these participants, such social development experiences would ensure that their child would be prepared to socially engage in a complex post-school world. In addition to access, parents considered the safety of their child while at school to be important. For these participants, the **physical**, **psychological** and **emotional** safety of their child assured them that their child was getting the most out of their school experience. Furthermore, their child's happiness was fundamental to their child's success and, in the view of parents, was the basis for them leading a life of fulfilment.

5.6.2 Contention 2: Non-Indigenous parents' definitions of quality boarding schools are supported through their interactions with others.

The data show that non-Indigenous participants interact with others during the school choice process. Indeed, their definitions of 'good schools' are evidently influenced through their relationships with others. These information sources, referred to as 'the grapevine', consisted of three broad informing networks: **other parents** who were engaging in the choice process; and **family members** with a direct affiliation to a certain school; and **key people from within rural feeder towns**. These participants sought information from the 'grapevine' which both confirmed their choice of school and also gave them an insight into the school's sub-culture.

5.6.3 Contention 3: The transmission of universal values, rather than parochial religion, is a feature of non-Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school.

Non-Indigenous parent participants emphasised during the school choice process the role of the school in **inculcating core or universal values**, but eschewed the denominational identity of schools. Parents were able to separate the organisational dimension (doctrine, rites, ritual) of the school's religious identity from **the propensity of the school to offer their child values formation by virtue of its religious identity**. The latter was the most important for parents, with a view that the **espousal of certain values was important for their child's personal development**. Furthermore, the data asserted the notion that attendance at a Catholic school gave children a "good grounding" where students "could learn those basic values of life" which in turn contributed to their child's future personal stability. Conspicuously absent from the data was a sense that faith formation in the Catholic tradition was an important element of Catholic school choice. Indeed, some participants were not able to firmly identify what it was that the child was going to gain specifically from enrolment in a Catholic school. For many, mere exposure to '**religion' while at school had an inoculating effect** which would hold their children in good stead in the post-school world.

5.6.4 Contention 4: Non-Indigenous parents engage in racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process.

There is a racialised thinking dimension in the school choice process for non-Indigenous parents. The data indicated that participants view **Indigenous enrolment as threatening** across a number of different levels. The data suggested that for non-Indigenous parents large numbers of **Indigenous students was consistent with poor quality** and was evidenced in a decline in student behaviour. Moreover, Indigenous students threatened the safety and well-

being of their children, which was also expressed in terms of school quality. The data also indicated that participants perceived that the enrolment of Indigenous students resulted in **experiences of disadvantage** by their own children, contrasted with the perceived differentially advantageous treatment of Indigenous students. This disadvantage was complex, comprising financial, extracurricular, education and behavioural dimensions.

While parents did not deselect the research site school on the basis of Indigenous enrolment, the data did suggest that there was a **tipping point of Indigenous enrolment** which would have been the impetus for deselection by non-Indigenous parents. It was also suggested through the data that large numbers of **Indigenous students would erode the quality of the research site school**, and that non-Indigenous parents would deselect the research site school on the basis that it might socially immobilise their children.

Table 5.1 outlines the development of contentions and how these are related to the research questions and emergent themes.

Table 5.1 Development of Contentions

RESEARCH QUESTION	THEME(S)	CONTENTION(S)
How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?	Access to 'experiences' is vital School must be a place of 'safety'	1. Non-Indigenous parents select schools that will prepare children for the post-school world.
How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice a boarding school for their child?	Hot Knowledge gained through the 'grapevine' is a cogent source of information for parents.	2. Non-Indigenous parents' definitions of quality boarding schools are supported through their interactions with others.
How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?	Inculcation of values and 'medicinal religion' are desired by parents	3. The transmission of universal values, rather than parochial religion, is a feature of non-Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school.
How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?	Racialised thinking is evident during the school choice process.	4. Non-Indigenous parents engage in racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process.

These contentions about the parental choice of school process for non-Indigenous parents will form the basis for discussion in Chapter 8.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings of the data obtained from non-Indigenous parent and school Principal participants. These data were obtained through focus groups and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with parents who had enrolled their child/ren in the research site boarding school. The current and a former Principal of the research site school were also interviewed.

Through a first and second-order interpretation of the data it was found that non-Indigenous parents' selection of school for their child/ren involves a confluence of beliefs, ideas, interactions and perceptions. These participants desired that their children have access to quality schools that enabled them to engage in a broad range of extra-educational and social experiences. Moreover, parents emphasised the importance of the physical, psychological and emotional safety of their child.

In addition, non-Indigenous parents' definition of a 'good school' was supported through their relationships with others. Parents accessed formal and informal networks of information during the school choice process which offered confirmation of their choice and insights into their selected school.

It was also clear in the data that the inculcation of values was an important part of their child's education. However, the desire for a Catholic education was not important for parents. Indeed, the data around this suggested that the religious affiliation of the school afforded their children an "*immunizationary effect"*, in that the Catholic school offered something harmlessly indefinable and harmless.

Finally, while the non-Indigenous participants maintained their enrolment in the research site school, there is evidence in the data of racialised thinking during the school choice process. Parents perceived that the enrolment of Indigenous students resulted in inequities for their own children as well as the erosion of school quality.

The contentions, as outlined above, which arose out of the third-order interpretation of the data will form, the basis of discussion in Chapter 8. In this chapter, the findings are discussed in light of the research contexts and literature review, and the Indigenous findings.

CHAPTER 6 Indigenous Epistemologies

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is a necessary inclusion in this study due to the Indigenous dimension of the research. This study seeks to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children. The changing enrolment patterns at the research site school has included changes in the enrolment demand by Indigenous students and thus this requires exploration of the ways in which Indigenous parents make school choices for their children.

In light of this, a discussion of Indigenous epistemologies is pertinent given that Indigenous people think and construct understandings about the world in which they live in a variety of complex ways. To speak of a single Indigenous epistemology is erroneous in that it does not reflect the diverse nature of Indigenous knowledge across tribes and location. Indeed, this study gathered data from Indigenous people living in coastal, rural and remote areas, and the ways in which these participants understood their lives and the lives of their children were peculiar to their location and cultural identity.

6.2 Indigenous Epistemology: Ways of Knowing

It is understood that the colonial projects of the West have had deleterious effects on Indigenous peoples. In many cases, this project continues in more covert ways, regularly masquerading as "cultural liberation". It is because of this historical and contemporary colonization that Indigenous peoples around the world continue to suffer great cultural, social and economic disadvantage. The struggle for Indigenous people has been centred on the reclamation of this identity which is expressed in various ways. Indigenous epistemologies or knowledge fundaments Indigenous identity and is a central concern of those involved in the reification of Indigenous culture.

The recovery of Indigenous knowledge is considered a decolonizing process because it gives way to a "consciously critical assessment of how the historical process of colonization has systematically devalued our Indigenous ways" (Wilson, 2004, p. 362). However a singular

definition of Indigenous knowledge is unavailable which speaks both to the Western approach of neatly categorizing and labelling, and to the varieties and complexities of Indigenous cultures. Thus, Indigenous knowledge is considered too various and complex to singularly define. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to make reference to Dei, Hall and Rosenberg's (2000) conceptualisation of Indigenous knowledge:

> We conceptualize an 'indigenous knowledge' as a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as was the mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people's ways of living and making sense of their world. It is the sum of their experience and knowledge of a given social group through both historical and current experience. This body of knowledge is diverse and complex given the histories, cultures and lived realities of people (p.6).

In this way Indigenous knowledge is more than just a conscious, cognitive process, but consists of a metaphysical dimension including dreams, visions and emotions (Shahjahan, 2005). Further, Indigenous knowledge is a way of living which is ecologically centred and is expressed in various ways including through art, dance and ritual. In doing so, Indigenous people undertake to maintain their identity, place and peculiar cosmology (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009). Nevertheless, an understanding prevails in the West which views Indigenous knowledge as a relic of the past; an aspect of Indigenous culture that needs to be preserved for the sake of preservation and posterity. For some Indigenous people, such a view is an element of the on-going colonizing project and should be rejected in favour of the view that the recovery of Indigenous knowledge is tantamount to the survival of a people, "to reverse the damage wrought from those assaults" (Wilson, 2004, p. 362).

Indigenous knowledge is different from the Western, Euro-centric understanding of knowledge. This distinction is a necessary inclusion in the discussion of Indigenous knowledge on two counts: firstly, such a discussion will highlight the cultural peculiarities of Indigenous knowledge. Secondly, the contrast will illuminate the ways in which Euro-centric knowledge underpinned historical colonization of Indigenous people, usurped their knowledge bases and, in some instances, continues through stealth and disingenuousness.

Western knowledge understands the world as static, invented and fixed. Human development is the result of struggle and overcoming that struggle, and such a view grows from a Marxian ideology which sees human beings divided along the lines of class, race, and economy (Doxtater, 2004). This, along with an expansive Darwinism, is the ideological impetus of colonization which inevitably views Indigenous peoples as 'peasants' to be appropriated and annexed. Consequently, the colonial process legitimised Western knowledge as 'truth', invalidated other knowledges in order to develop "powerful positions from which to speak" (Prior, 2006, p. 164). Doxtater (2004) asserts this as the "Euro-Master Narrative" (p.620) where the West asserted itself as the fiduciary of all knowledge through an intellectual process of colonial-power-knowledge. According to Doxtater, colonial-power-knowledge is a process by which the West acts as 'a guardian over its Indigenous knowledge ward' (p.618). This inferiorisation of Indigenous knowledge reinforced the 'progress or die' mentality which was designed to eternalise the colonizing mission. Indeed, Indigenous knowledge was deemed useless and irrelevant in the colonial context:

> Indigenous traditions are of little value in a world based on the oppression of whole nations of people and the destructive exploitation of natural resources. Our values and lifeways are inconsistent with the materialism and militarism characteristic of today's world powers. In this world that colonialism has created, there is no place for Indigenous knowledge (Wilson, 2004, p. 360).

The Indigenous conceptualization of knowledge sharply contrasts with the Western/Eurocentric understanding. A fundamental concept of Indigenous knowledge is the idea that beyond the immediate perceptible world is another world from which knowledge is derived (Battiste, 1998). Indigenous epistemology is defined through the various, contiguous and complimentary ways of knowing which have been transmitted through an oral tradition (Battiste, 1998). The organization of Indigenous knowledge is a point of further differentiation from Western epistemologies insomuch as Indigenous knowledge is composed of relationships between people and the natural environment: relationships form a substrate for Indigenous people and the three most distinguishing features of Indigenous knowledge are that it is a product of a dynamic system, it is an integral part of the physical and social environment of communities, and it is a collective good (Durie, 2005). Indeed, it is posited that Indigenous epistemologies are the basis upon which decisions about food, family, ritual, education and community are made, but are often intellectualised via anthropology and

sociology (Quanchi, 2004). Therefore, Indigenous epistemologies express an ecological worldview:

> Aboriginal knowledge is not a description of reality but an understanding of the processes of ecological change and ever-changing insights about diverse patterns or styles of flux. Concepts about "what is" define human awareness if the changes but add little to the actual process of change. To see things as permanent is to be confused about everything: an alternative to that understanding is the need to create temporary harmonies of interdependence through alliances and relationships among all forms and forces. This web of interdependence is a never-ending source of wonder to the Aboriginal mind and to other forces that contribute to harmony (Youngblood Henderson 2000 in Kenny, 2004, p. 15).

A fundamental of Indigenous knowledges is language, which is often overlooked by non-indigenous people because of the monolinguality of Western culture. Indigenous languages are diverse and "provide the deep and lasting cognitive bonds that affect all aspects of Aboriginal life" (Battiste, 1998, p. 18).

These 'cognitive bonds' express a specific ontology which is reproduced through a variety of processes. These understandings of the world can undergo "expansion and contraction"(Martin, 2003, p. 209) as the circumstances prescribe, which further highlights the dynamism of Indigenous epistemologies and contrasts with the linearity of Western ways of knowing:

> [Aboriginal] Ways of Knowing also entail processes that allow expansion and contraction according to the social, political, historical and spatial dimensions of individuals, the group and interactions with outsiders. So this incorporates the contexts as well as the processes. It is more than information and facts, and is taught and learned in certain contexts, in certain ways and at certain times (Martin, 2003, p. 209).

6.3 Indigenous research methodology

Among Indigenous people there is cynicism surrounding western approaches to research in Indigenous communities. This cynicism is borne out of the perception that traditional approaches to research are part-and-parcel of the process of colonization. Such a perspective is the result of the hegemonic position of western researchers who often approached the researched as 'other', as objects under investigation (Porsanger, 2004). The colonial endeavour, predicated on the notion of Christian guilt (Sikes, 2006), spurred a process of 'converting and saving' the so called 'savage'. The remnants of this colonial attitude is evident in the imposition of western beliefs, perpetuated through western approaches to research (Sikes, 2006).

The movement toward an Indigenous methodology grew out of the historical experience of western anthropological research. Anthropologists sought to gather information about the 'natives', who were considered to be on the brink of extinction. Moreover, the methods employed intruded on the lives of Indigenous communities and essentially these methods were used as instruments of oppression (Prior, 2006). In turn, the exercise of power legitimated this gathered knowledge about Indigenous people, further positioning the West as the seat and centre of all knowledge: "the research methods applied sees the Indigenous subject (or subjects) as a secondary form of content juxtaposed with the 'superiority' of a Western research framework" (Blanchard et al., 2000, p. 6).

Racism is also an important aspect of the foreground of the establishment of Indigenous methodologies. The racist movement was predicated on the theoretical science of polygenism and Social Darwinism (Rigney, 1999). Race was thus used to hierarchically organise people along a continuum of inferiority to superiority. The organization of races in this way enabled the establishment of relationships of power: where one group exerts power and the 'other' is subordinated:

> …when any group within a large, complex civilization significantly dominates other groups for hundreds of years, the ways of the dominant group (its epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies), not only become the dominant ways of the civilization, but also these ways become so deeply embedded that that they typically are seen as

> "natural" or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions (Scheurick & Young, 1997 in Rigney, 1999, p. 113).

However, the need for an Indigenous methodology is not just the result of a once distant historical experience. A number of researchers (Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 2000; Steinhauer, 2002) suggest that more recent research practices have continued to perpetuate the disadvantage of Indigenous people, asserting that contemporary approaches to researching Indigenous peoples problematises Indigenous communities, and underestimate or fail to recognise the value of Indigenous knowledge. It has been suggested that such research be considered as "terra nullius research", where Indigenous people continue to be viewed as "objects of curiosity and subjects of research" (Martin, 2003, p. 203).

Therefore, one of the major thrusts of an Indigenous research methodology "…validates an ethical and culturally defined approach that enables indigenous communities to theorise their own lives and that connects their past histories with their future lives" (Smith, 2000, p. 90). From this it is clear that Indigenous methodologies are centred on the notion of self-determination and development of Indigenous peoples and their communities. It is a counter-hegemonic process which positions Indigenous people as having control and 'voice' (Rigney, 1999), and directing their own destinies.

Indigenous methodologies might be considered within a broader framework of *decolonizing methodologies* (Smith, 1999). A decolonizing approach to Indigenous research does not eschew the contribution of Western research endeavours, but seeks to critique, challenge and reform those aspects of the western approach to research, and indeed the entire research enterprise, which are colonizing and oppressive. Decolonizing approaches to research are focused on the 'deep underlying structures and taken-for-granted ways of organizing, conducting , and disseminating research and knowledge' (Smith, 2000, p. 89).

While the number and type of Indigenous research methodologies grows, there is a consistent emphasis throughout on:

- the importance of nurturing the capacity for research in Indigenous people;
- the integral role that cultural mores, practices and values play in the research process;

- developing methodological approaches which value and include the participation of Indigenous peoples and communities in the research process;
- the utilization of research methods which respect Indigenous people and their culture.

(Henry, Dunbar, Arnot, Scrimgeour, & Mwakami-Gold, 2005).

Decolonizing methodologies "use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house" and compels the Indigenous person to use these same tools on themselves in order to identify and liberate them from burdensome colonial ideology (Sikes, 2006, p. 354). Emerging from this process is a rediscovery of what it means to have knowledge from an Indigenous perspective. According to proponents of Indigenous methodology, the traditional and dominant research paradigms see knowledge as an "individual entity: the researcher is an individual in search of knowledge, knowledge is something that is gained, and therefore, knowledge may be owned by an individual" (Steinhauer, 2002, p. 3). Alternatively, an Indigenous paradigm acknowledges that knowledge is inherently relational: it is shared among people, creation and the cosmos (Steinhauer, 2002). Thus at the centre of an Indigenous paradigm is a peculiar Indigenous ontology which understands that the nature of 'reality' is relational: the universe, the earth and all entities within are interrelated and interdependent (Rigney, 1999; Steinhauer, 2002). This ontology is vastly different from western ontology, and highlights the epistemological marginalisation of Indigenous people by traditional western methodological approaches to research: "As Indigenous people we are dependent on everyone and everything around us – all our relations, be it the air, water, rocks, trees, animals, insects, humans, and so forth. We need each other to survive" (Steinhauer, 2002, p. 3). From this emerge the guiding principles of Indigenous methodologies:

1. Recognition of [Indigenous] world views, [Indigenous] knowledge and [Indigenous] realities as distinctive and vital to[Indigenous] existence and survival;
2. Honouring [Indigenous] social mores as essential processes through which [Indigenous people] live, learn and situate [themselves] as Aboriginal people in [their] own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people;
3. Emphasis of social, historical and political contexts which shape [Indigenous] experiences, lives, positions and futures;

4. Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands.

(Martin, 2003, p. 205)

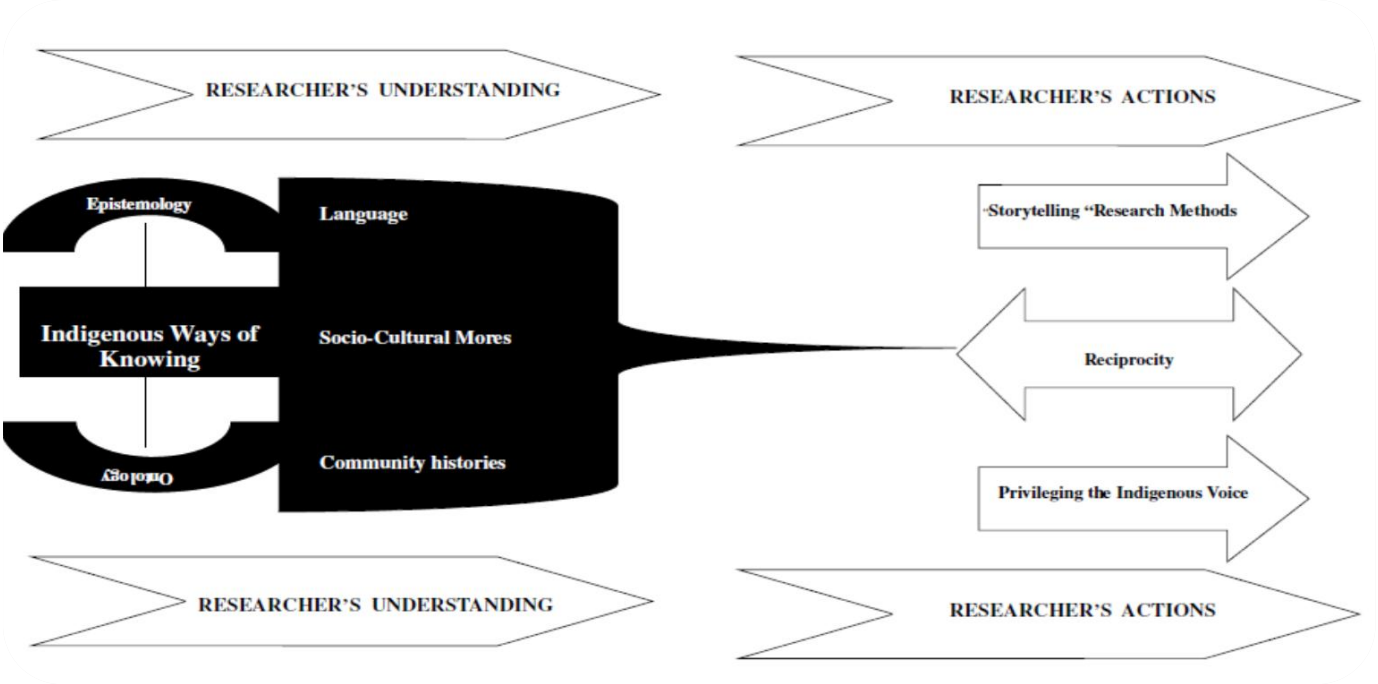
6.4 The Non-Indigenous researcher and cultural positionality

In considering these guiding principles, the complexity, if not the insurmountable difficulty of a non-Indigenous researcher carrying out research in Indigenous communities becomes apparent. Research of any kind is a Western process. Thus, the decolonizing project of Indigenist research is ordinarily undertaking by Indigenous people, which further highlights the challenges of Indigenist research by non-Indigenous researchers. Research undertaken by a non-Indigenous researcher is problematic in that the researcher inevitably has embedded in their psyche a Western approach to research. The difficulty in the use of Indigenous methodologies by non-Indigenous researchers is the extent to which he/she can "contribute to that struggle by unmasking some of the overt and brutal racist oppression, which have been and continue to be part of [Indigenous] reality" when she/he does not participate in and has never experienced this reality (Rigney, 1999, p. 118). Furthermore, undertaking an Indigenous research methodology requires the researcher to have an understanding of the cultural mores and beliefs of the people he/she is studying (Steinhauer, 2002); to carefully select research methods so that the spirit and integrity of the research is not compromised (Prior, 2006); and ensure that there is reciprocity: the benefits of the research actually benefit the researched (Prior, 2006). This is where the non-Indigenous researcher embarks on treacherous territory. Indeed, some Indigenous researchers (Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999) suggest that such territory should never be traversed by the non-Indigenous researcher.

While there is a degree of contestability among proponents of Indigenous methodologies, the common ground exists in the acceptance that such methodologies should challenge the colonial assumptions laden in Western approaches to research, and that such methodologies should be aimed at forwarding the journey towards self-determination and development. Indigenous methodologies should contribute to the body of knowledge for Indigenous people for their own benefit (Porsanger, 2004). The non-Indigenous researcher needs to avoid the temptation of reengaging the Western master narrative, which has an inherent colonizing characteristic (Doxtater, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary that a conceptualization be

presented of this study's approach to 'outsider' Indigenous research by a non-Indigenous researcher.

Figure 6.1 Conceptual Framework: Indigenous research by a non-Indigenous researcher



The conceptual framework (Figure 6.1) delineates a process with which this non-Indigenous researcher engaged in an attempt to affirm an Indigenous cultural view and avoid a Western hegemonic which inferiorises "other" perspectives. While it is impossible for a white, Western researcher to develop a holistic decolonising methodology, this research values the discourse which is evoked from the research process which is an important contribution to the broader anti-colonial project:

> The agenda of decolonising research movement is not simply to give 'voice to the voiceless' (Cary, 2004, 70) nor can it be to represent the story of minorities; rather its aim is to evoke discourse… Evoking discourse is a process of developing meaning or 'truth' through a relationship of trust, reciprocity and co-operatively evolved methods of research that remain true to the context of the story being presented (Prior, 2006, p. 165).

The framework posits that the non-Indigenous researcher must have an understanding of the ways in which Indigenous people construct understandings of the world. Moreover, a cognisance of the way these understandings are expressed (language, mores and community

histories) is an important element which contributes to the design of the research. It is acknowledged that any understanding by the non-Indigenous researcher is incomplete on account of the researcher's white, 'outsider' status. Nevertheless, implicit in the framework is a critical view of inequality and power imbalance (Smith, 2000) in favour of enabling Indigenous people to give *testimonio* to their lives.

In order to further delineate the researcher's approach to research with Indigenous people, an overview of the inquiry process, as reflected in Figure 6.1, with regard to racial and cultural awareness is necessary. The use of Milner's (2007) framework of researcher racial and cultural positionality is the heuristic adopted to approach issues of race and racism implicit and explicit in the research.

A vital component of this inquiry process is the notion of *researching the self*. This component of the research process requires the researcher to critically self-reflect on the cultural assumptions and beliefs which are implicit in the research design. Such a process: illuminates the researcher's understanding of themselves from a cultural perspective; requires that serious questions are posed to the self-regarding cultural heritage and ways of knowing and understanding the world; forces a reflexivity about the personal constructions of culture and race and how these may or may not shape the research decisions of the study (Milner, 2007).

The second component of the inquiry process is the extension of this self-reflection to include reflection about others, notably those involved in the research. This reflection clarifies that those involved in the research process (including the researcher) bring with them multiple identities, roles, ideas, beliefs and positions. It is the responsibility of the researcher to come to an authentic understanding of the people and communities participating in the study. The hopeful objective of this process is to avoid situations where:

> …the researchers' interests… overshadow the interests of those participating in the research. Interests are negotiated in pursuit of what critical race theorists call interest convergence. Issues of power are understood to be relational, and researchers understand the tensions inherent in their own interests and power in relation to the people and communities under study (Milner, 2007, p. 395).

Thus, there is a filtering that takes place in relation to the data, which acknowledges that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding particular phenomena. In the case of this study, it is acknowledged that the researcher bring to the study different but no less correct understandings of education and the ways in which people engage in process of selecting schools for their children. It is also acknowledged that the views of the researcher and the participants may be in conflict, but this is not concealed or misrepresented in any way. All of this contributes to an advancement of this particular field of study, rather than mere confirmation of the dominant cultural perspective (Milner, 2007).

An enjoined reflection between researcher and participant is the third component of the inquiry process. The focus here is on shared perspectives and representation of the 'voices' of the researcher and the participants. This representation ensures that the variety of perspectives on school choice, and education more broadly, are represented throughout the study; one voice does not dominate the voices of others (Milner, 2007). The divergences between the researcher and participants function as counterpoints which serve to highlight how different people understand the world differently, which in turn "add a layer of evidence to compliment what is known" (Milner, 2007, p. 396)

The final element of this inquiry requires the researcher to move beyond the confines of the study to consider how the issues raised in the research can be situated in the broader social, political and cultural landscapes. That is, to consider to what extent historical and contemporary organizational and systemic apparatus have shaped the participants and their communities. This requires the researcher to move beyond the level of individual to consider the broader mechanisms of race, racism, injustice and oppression which have shaped people and communities:

> Shifting from self to system allows the researcher to work through the danger of rejecting the permanence and pervasiveness of race and racism because they, individually, do not see themselves as racists… If on an individual level racism does not seem to exist or to occur, it may be unlikely that the individual researcher will research the salience of race and racism in what Rios (1996) called the cultural context and ultimately work to fight against it because racism is being perceived at the individual rather than the systemic and institutional level (Milner, 2007, p. 397).

Specific to this study are the considerations of the extent to which western models of education have shaped the ways in which Australian Indigenous people engage with education and in turn, how Indigenous parents make school choices for their children in this context. Furthermore, a cognisance of the socio-political climate around Indigenous education and the way in which this affects the participants and their communities is of necessary importance. Therefore, the gathering and analysis of data was undertaken with this in the mind of the researcher in order to, as best as possible, recognise these influences during the first, second and third order interpretations of data. In doing so, a data narrative which reflects the unique Indigenous cultural values and beliefs around education and school choice is evident.

In summary, the research design of this study incorporates an Indigenous research perspective because of its inclusion of the ways in which Indigenous parents engage in the school choice process. The analysis of the school choice process by Indigenous parents highlights the cultural nuances of school choice in an attempt to uncover the motivations, values and beliefs which underpin these choices. In order to assure trustworthiness of the data, appropriate member checks are utilised to ensure all Indigenous research protocols are preserved.

The following chapter is a presentation of the findings of data gathered from Indigenous parents and system personnel in relation to the ways in which they engage in the school choice process.

CHAPTER 7 Indigenous Findings

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas select a boarding school for their children. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from an analysis of how Indigenous parents engage in the parental choice of boarding school process. The data were gathered using a focus group and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with sixteen Indigenous parents[15] and two Indigenous Support Personnel (ISP) that work at the system/strategic level. The research questions which focussed this study were:

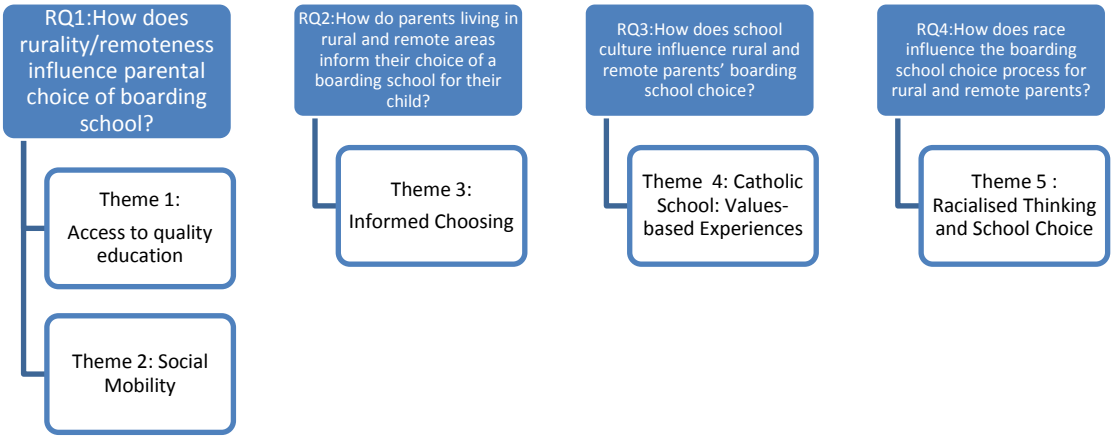
1. How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?
2. How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of a boarding school for their child?
3. How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?
4. How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

The analysis of the data involved a two-stage process of preliminary exploratory analysis and a constant comparative analysis, framed within an understanding of Indigenous epistemology. In the first stage of analysis, the researcher sought to identify preliminary categories in relation to the choice of school process for Indigenous parents. This allowed for a clear discernment of the meanings ascribed by Indigenous parents to the school choice process. The second phase of data analysis allowed the researcher to determine the key concepts of the parental choice of school process for Indigenous parents and arrange these concepts into broad categories or themes. This process of data analysis is outlined in Figure 4.2. This second-order interpretation yielded five themes. These themes represent the ways in which Indigenous parents engage with and construct their understandings of the parental choice of [boarding] school process

[15] Four of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with pairs of respondents (spouses) in order to meet certain community protocols.

Figure 7.1 summarises the outcome of the second-order interpretation..

Figure 7.1 Thematic Development: Indigenous Data



Indigenous parents living in rural and remote communities face unique challenges in the school choice process. The combinations of geographic isolation, language, cultural knowledge and challenges associated with accessing the dominant culture, makes engagement in the school choice process a complex task that is skilfully negotiated by Indigenous parents. These data were gathered from Indigenous parents living in rural and remote Indigenous communities in Queensland

7.2 Research Question 1: How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?

The themes in relation to the first research question are:

1. Access to quality education
   - The contexts of access
   - Access to 'good' schools.

2. Social Mobility

7.2.1 Access to quality education

The contexts of access

Indigenous parents living in rural and remote communities have few options with regard to secondary schooling for their children. In some larger rural communities, the local school offers schooling to Year 10, while in more isolated townships Preparatory-Year 7 schooling is the education provision. Thus Indigenous parents can either choose to enrol their children in (i) external modes of schooling, (ii) send their children to live with members of their extended family who reside in larger rural or metropolitan centres, or (iii) select a boarding school. This final option was enabled through parents' eligibility for government funding or access to privately-funded programs.

External modes of schooling, such as School of the Air and Distance Education were mentioned by parent participants as an option, but not one readily selected. For one parent, an external mode of schooling was the only option available when boarding school did not work for her child. For other participants, external modes presented parents and children with academic challenges because "They need a teacher with them at all times. And it's a bit hard for them [the child] because their reading and writing is sort of slow" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, ll.31

In order to access other schools in other regions further from the participants' hometowns, parents had the option to arrange for their children to live with extended family. However this was expressed as an arrangement that was not ideal: "But when you send ... kids to [nearby township] and leave with your family up there they just get out of hand, really" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, ll.17-18). It was also suggested that living with family had the potential to encourage homesickness in their children, which would distract them from school: "And if they got homesick, it's just so easy to say 'I wanna go home'" (Kym, 1on1 ISSI, ll.73-74).

Parents also considered boarding schools for their children and this was facilitated by their eligibility for Abstudy[16]. It was implied that without this government assistance parents would have no other option but to choose a school in their community or local region or another external mode of schooling, neither of which were the preferred options of participants: "luckily... she can get Abstudy. If we were on our own... it [boarding school

[16] Federal government education funding program for Indigenous people.

choice] wouldn't happen" (Dawn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.224-225). Government funding was also noted by the Indigenous Support Personnel (ISP) participant who stated that it is a vital component of making secondary school education available to Indigenous people living in rural and remote communities:

> You know the Australian Government has injected 242 million dollars into Indigenous education and that is to go into schools like [student] leadership and Sports Academy which we never had in the last 5 years. So, obviously the tide has turned for us and providing good quality outcomes (1on1, ISP 1, ll.25-28).

In some cases, due to the way Abstudy funds eligible families, a greater range of secondary school choices are available to Indigenous parents living in rural and remote communities compared with their urban counterparts. For one participant, withdrawing their child from an urban setting and resettling in a remote town was considered in order to open up the possibilities of secondary schools for her children:

> I think that, especially where I have come from, I am from a very remote community, and obviously I go in through the processes of myself and my own kids, they were brought up in an urban setting, just to look at, OK, how do you really justify what is the best option, you know do you take the kids back to a remote community because of the incentive programs that are coming through from the federal government, or do you just stay in an urban community so that they're just able to have access and opportunities where they may not before in a mainstream school. They're the things that I guess you have weigh up (ISP 1, ll.78-84).

While not all parents have to make these types of decisions, it does highlight a paradox that suggests remoteness offers more in the way of school choice, and this expanded choice owes much to the level of funding offered to Indigenous people by state and federal governments. All of the Indigenous parent participants in this study were eligible for Abstudy funding.

In addition to governmental funding, access to secondary schools was expanded through privately funded programs. Both Indigenous Support Personnel (ISP) participants cited these programs as fundamental to improving Indigenous education outcomes. Such programs provide Indigenous families heretofore unprecedented access to high quality

secondary schools. One of the ISP participants noted Yalari and Australian Indigenous Education Foundation as two privately funded programs that are "giving students access to good education" (ISP 2, l.188) and a "wider opportunity so that they can attend schools...further down south" (ISP 1, ll.17-18).

Access to 'good' schools

For the majority of participants, the access to quality schools for their children was a priority, and for most this was in contrast to and motivated by the absence of what they considered to be 'good' local schools. For the parent participants, a 'good' school: (i) was outside of the local community; (ii) a boarding school which offered an exit from community life (iii) offered quality education; (iv) gave their children access to experiences which would promote personal and social development.

The participants considered their own communities as impediments to their children's educational progress and, as parents they had the responsibility to give their child options outside of and beyond the community: "To me there was no option. I wasn't going to send her here. We got our own high school here..." (Ted,1on1 ISSI, ll.159-160). The local communities with partial or full secondary school provisions were bypassed by parents because they contended that their children would be faced with influences which would distract them from their schooling. In one instance, parents were able to send their children, by bus, to a public secondary school outside of, but in close proximity to the community. However, when large groups of students from the community began to enrol, some parent participants were forced to withdraw their children so that they could avoid the negative influences of their peers:

> We put two of them in [nearby public school], moved them from here, because that's when things started changing in the school here. Because it was getting less people here they were sending their kids as well, and now you got a few of them going to [nearby state school], so they're still exposed to that stuff you know (Dawn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.114-116).

Boarding school offered both an exit from the community and its perceived poor school provisions, and access to quality, structured educational opportunities for participants' children:

> I just want to make the point that... at boarding school at night we had to do the same thing, study. You get them hours allocated...we never had any distractions. At least out there the academic situation at school is being supported by the boarding arrangement where you have those hours allocated for everyone to study.... (Chris, 1on1 ISSI, ll.150153).

For this parent, his own experience of boarding school was that it offered a distraction-free learning environment and he wanted this for his own child. Another parent from the same community echoed similar sentiments about the choice to send her child to boarding school, stating that it offered her child an exit from the negativity of community life and the consequences this has with regard to education:

> Probably will [would have gone to school] but not the same way. She would have, but I don't know,... it's the pressure because the other kids from here go to the other schools as well. I just wanted her to be where not a lot of other people from the community... she's got [cousin's name] and [cousin's name] there and I don't mind, but I don't want, I don't want... her to be around a lot of people from the community.
>
> Q: Why is that?
>
> Because of what's going on in the community and they can take it to the school and I don't want that. And it's a better learning environment where she can concentrate more on herself and not others.
>
> (Madison, 1on1 ISSI, ll.56-63).

Educational quality was a priority for Indigenous participants in the process of deciding on a secondary school for their children. The availability of boarding schools afforded their children the best educational opportunities:

> Well we always want the best for our children. And whatever opportunity we can grab for our children, we'll grab it. And I saw it there and you know I thought these

> are more elite schools too. I suppose to me I think they were like... teachers and principals sort of concentrate more on the students... (Claire, 1on1 ISSI, ll.78-81).

For these participants, the capacity of the school to offer their children a broad curriculum was considered an indicator of educational quality. This was a valued dimension of the schools under consideration because it was understood to be the foundation for post-school life: "The good marks to get the good job" (Wal, 1on1 ISSI, l.112). For these parents, boarding school offered a breadth of educational experiences for their children and this breadth could not be accessed locally:

> Yeah so basically it was exposure to a whole new environment and whole new learning process for them where up north it was very limited and very narrow path and they didn't really have much choices with subjects and learning environments (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, ll.221-223).

One parent stated that one of the most important aspects of the school she selected for her children was the variety of subject choices and course breadth:

> I think like the high level of education, the amount of choices that they have, in terms of subjects and you've got the school based apprenticeships and you've got all the traineeships that they do (Lyn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.52-54).

For other parents, the perception that the local schools offered sub-standard education motivated them to seek out alternatives for their child's secondary schooling. Some of these parents suggested that their local schools did not offer "mainstream" education and their child would be educationally advantaged by leaving their communities to go to secondary school:

> I think with me it's just getting a better education. Education is definitely the key and the focus and to get her exposed to many many other opportunities... in line with education that was not provided locally. And when I mean exposure to other things relating to education, basically to do with the subjects like music and sports as well. Like music is something that the kids don't get variety of in the local schools up north. So having that access in the mainstream education system, or environment I should say, a lot of opportunities there (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, ll.212-217).

The data also indicated that a 'good' school was perceived to offer access to experiences which would promote the personal and social development of the participants' children. For some of these parents, their relative isolation meant that sending their child to boarding school was necessary in order to develop them socially, and also to provide them with opportunities which would otherwise be unavailable to them at home: "... we know that we have to send our kids away for their own benefit; for their socialisation, for the sporting" (Lyn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.141-142).

The personal gains offered to their children were regularly cited by parents. The idea that boarding school allowed their children to develop into independent young adults was considered an important outcome of their time at school:

> Just to be well-rounded. I just want her to be at a sound level with her academic studies. And just to be well-rounded which I really do think that boarding school does give them....like when [child's name] comes home, the amount of independence, just being able to deal with things by themselves. Just a lot of the little different things that really does get them ready for life, it really does set them up basically...[it allows them to be] a lot more emotionally stable and ready for the outside and the working life, I think... So when they're in their work life they come across a similar situation they know how to deal with it. It's not such a big deal... (June, 1on1 ISSI, ll.244-252).

For this parent, the academic outcomes of her child's schooling coupled with the experiences "that boarding school does give them" provide her child with the opportunity to develop a sense of independence which, in turn, would assist her to confidently and adeptly solve confronting or challenging situations in "outside and the working life". For these participants, boarding school opened their children up to a variety of social experiences – both positive and negative – which they viewed as necessary for their children to function in the adult world. Similarly, those from isolated communities understood their home contexts as socially disadvantaging and boarding school allowed their child to broaden their 'social horizons':

> Well I think sometimes we just over here where you know like with the outside world...well here you've got no sporting clubs...within our school ourselves they're not seeing different people. They're just seeing you know their family and friends. I

> mean we've got a couple of non-Indigenous kids here at the school. But the main ones that are here have actually grown up here... And I said when they go way from here, even to places like [large regional centre]... they see Chinese or Asians or other people. It's always like they're you know looking and thinking you know who is this person or what nationality are they. So I think it's good when they're out there like that because they're mixing with other people, not just mixing with their own family and their own relations and what not...That in itself is a big thing, I think. And I think just being out there in another world, because some of the kids while probably everyone that we know of that have been to [research site school] so far have ended up back here or back in their own communities (Kym, 1on1 ISSI, ll.366-378).

The idea that a 'good' school allowed participants' children access to "another world" is important for Indigenous parents living in rural and remote communities. For some, the boarding school experience engendered a sense of personal empowerment in their children allowing them to understand their own potential, all of which was directed at their post-school life:

> ...to me that's giving her a sense of accomplishment on her own in that environment. The rules and structure out there...that would give her a sense of knowing about her potential and being able to... developing that and sustaining that with that supportive structure out there.... she'll have her own little kit bag to go out there... (Chris, 1on1 ISSI, ll.262-267).

The data indicate that for these parents a 'good school' was one which developed the intellectual, the social and personal dimensions of their children. The reference to the "little kit bag" is reflective of the general perceptions of these parents in relation to the advantages of boarding school. Parents suggested that the experience would result in their children being more responsible, independent and knowledgeable about the way the world functions beyond community life. These experiences, coupled with educational outcomes, were considered by parent participants' to be enablers for their children for social and civic success in adulthood.

7.2.2 Social Mobility

The data indicated that the Indigenous participants had a general desire for social mobility for their children. It was clear from parents' responses that the school they selected for their

children had to provide their children with opportunities to move beyond an existence in their hometown. For these parents, the quality of teaching and learning was of paramount importance, where it was recognised that this gave their children the basis from which to build a future.

The significance of access to quality education and social mobility was contrasted with and heightened by the disadvantage of the participants' local communities. This attitude to community life was a feature of all participants living in Indigenous communities. The participants emphasised the weak socio-economic situation of their communities, which further highlighted the value of access to quality schools. For one participant, enrolment of his child in boarding school went some way to immunising his child against the deleterious effects of community life:

> Q: Do you think she could have still achieved that [career in health/childcare] if she'd remained here [in the community]?
>
> No. Because after school [his daughter] falls into that cycle. Drinking, smoking, staying up late... That's what happens on Aboriginal community. On community... just not much to do. You know after you leave school you just fall into that cycle, you know drugs, alcohol...You know, you have [a] boyfriend come along and you have little families then... I got to sit down and talk about that issue too, after school.... (Ted, 1on1 ISSI, ll.236-244).

"Improving their education" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], l.350) was considered as a means through which the Indigenous participants' children could be socially mobilised in life beyond school. The relationship between a good education and social mobility was made most clear when parents discussed the importance of options outside of the community. Parents reflected on the stories of past students who remained in the community after graduation, and remained caught in the cycle of unemployment and social stagnation: "In [home town], there are a lot of year 12s who graduated and there's nothing here in [home town] for them. So an apprenticeship [as an option outside of the community] is a good thing when they finish grade 12" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], ll.437-438).

Again, life opportunities of their children were directly tied in with their children's access to quality education at both school and tertiary levels:

> In the context of the community situation at this point in time... it's a very challenging thing for us socially. There's very limited economic structure here. So in the context of that the [scholarship] pathway has that support structure in place which is good for families like us, in a community like [name of community]. For us, we want to see her go on. We want to academically to go on... through to the end of the academic arrangement, through to the end of academic life (Chris, 1on1 ISSI, ll.330-334).

It was also noted by ISP 1 that the academic outcomes are what Indigenous parents are looking for in schools. And while Indigenous parents may not "be able to articulate like you or I" (ISP 1, l.55), social advancement through access to quality education is a priority:

> Valuing mostly the quality of education. And the outcomes are there, so the outcomes for us, there is no longer completing the Year 12 and getting that certificate, it's far greater now, so OK now my child has been successful in obtaining employment outcome if not further education. That's seen as a real tangible outcome now (ISP 1, ll.47-50).

Education was viewed by the Indigenous participants as having a socially mobilising effect by offering their children a pathway to employment. One parent noted that, while her hometown is the closest to a large phosphate mine, young people either do not apply for or rarely win apprentice-/traineeships with the mining company. This situation added further to the perception that remaining in the community post-school has demobilising effects:

> You know we got mine out here and you're flat out getting a traineeship. In [home town], we're the closest to this mine, and there's a lot of traineeships come up every year, none of the kids here put in for a traineeship, nup, none of them ay (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a],ll.446-448).

> I don't like to put my community down, but it's better that they're out of the community than in the community, with everything around us. I just want her to have

> a good future, like continue on in mainstream and get a job... (Madison, 1on1 ISSI, ll.51-53)

Social mobility was inherently related to school choice. School selection was motivated by the Indigenous parent participants' desire for a better life for their child, relative to the narrow life experiences in the community:

> Sometime or another you're not going to be in your community all the time, you're going to get out. There comes a time when you've got to get out. Like I said there's a big world out there, children have got to realise that. When we were going to school, we were sort of blocked off from [nearby city].... I found it hard going to [school in large city] (Ted, 1on1 ISSI, ll.288-291)... Well seeing I didn't go to boarding school, I give her the chance, what we didn't have (l.319).

Another articulated that her children's education gave them a range of choices which would not have been available had they remained in the community:

> It's going to give all of those choices. You've got to want to use that however you can. But at least you've got that. It's there in your pocket if you decide tomorrow you want to go to this place or you want to go to that place, you can go (Kym, 1on1 ISSI, ll.400-402).

Social mobility was facilitated through access to quality boarding schools. This was seen by the participants as establishing a foundation for their children to explore a broader range of post-school options, including further education. For one participant, her and her husband's experiences served as a lesson in motivation for her own children:

> It's just sharing with them and if they take it on, they take it on. If they don't there's nothing you can do. Often like [husband's name] says to them, I can't do this because I never did that. Or if I want to go and [get a] higher education learning then I need to go back and do this and stuff like that. And just explain that by mucking around and not trying your hardest, cause that's what we ask them to do, is try their hardest, then this is the track it can take you, whereas if you try your hardest or

> whatever it can take you, just show you the different pathways that are available (June, 1on1 ISSI, ll.122-129).

Exposure to a variety of other experiences offered by boarding schools fed parents' desire for social mobility. Boarding school offered participants' children exposure to unique experiences which would help to enrich their lives. One parent stated: "We want more options for them" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], ll.455). In addition to the employment opportunities that arise from a sound education, boarding school offered young people key and formative experiences which would broaden their understanding of the world around them. This was succinctly expressed through the concept of "orbiting":

> Noel [Pearson] talks about the orbiting, and it's logical. If a student is willing and ready and raring to go and ready to take on that orbiting, you probably can't orbit bigger than the biggest capital city of your state, because they are big places. So I can tell [employee's name] down in Brisbane, "[employees name] tell me when all the human rights marches are happening down in Brisbane, get the boys together and get them to march for against violence against women and check out the unis [universities] and find out who are the leaders and all these important people coming and doing all these talks. Get the girls together and see if they're interested in going to talks about empowering women from Africa, where they went through hell to get where they are to give them a perspective on how strong women are and empower them, or whatever it is you know. The football: you know we had one boy up north was flat out getting one game a month getting a game of sport and within six months of going to one of our schools in Brisbane he was running with the junior Broncos. So, the orbiting thing is a big thing (ISP 2, ll.247-257).

Associated with the concept of 'orbiting' is the suggestion that parents may make school choices based upon the trends or needs of that particular community. An ISP participant suggested that parents are making school choices on the basis of the potential future benefits to the community:

> But I think at the end of the day...they'll certainly get there, but you have places like Hopevale that is spitting out leaders just like anything and you know, Burketown and places like that are just starting to come through now and saying this is what we

> want our kids to do. So it's no longer a family approach it's a community approach, people are talking within (ISP 1, ll.38-41).

While the Indigenous parent participants did not explicitly state this concept in their responses, the notion that certain schools are selected because of the opportunity they offer their children to move beyond the confines of their community was certainly apparent: "No we want them to get out there and get a good job". This suggests that Indigenous parents do consider the community in which they live when making school selections, but the motivation of this community-based choosing may be peculiar and specific to certain communities.

Boarding school offered the parent participants' children social mobility by equipping them with the tools required to successfully engage with civic life beyond their home communities. The idea of 'orbiting' is a relevant way of expressing the parent participants' hopefulness about their child's enrolment in boarding school. However, the nature of the 'orbiting' concept is such that the student returns to whence they came, and this is a desire for some parents. Their education offers them access to a "bigger picture" (Kym, 1on1 ISSI, l.314) which actually includes an eventual return to their homes:

> In the sense when I say that I want them to graduate but I don't want them to come back immediately because back at home there's really no employment opportunities. They'll have to either work part-time, there's no real goals set in there. So, for my children I would want them to at least take further studies or go on to university, get that degree, get that ticket and then get employment. But look at getting employed back in the community where they can use their abilities to give back.... I would rather them find employment elsewhere first probably have maybe 10 years out and about and then come back later and give back to the community. And that way they can be a bit more settled and I suppose experiencing the other environments that they actually come back with eyes wide open to say hey I've been down there I know how it is down there, and using that personal experience to motivate them to encourage others in the community to, look there's another world out there... because people in the community tend to have that narrow mind that this is it, you know there's nothing out there, this is it; I have to do something in here and because there mind is set on that they don't tend to take it out or seek any other opportunities.

> So just getting that opportunity and to bring back that experience then I suppose they could probably give a lot more that way (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, ll.234-248).

These data suggest that Indigenous parents select schools which offer their children broad educational and social opportunities which, in turn, open up potentialities for social mobility. The importance of post-school options outside of the community is considered vital by parents, and schools are selected on this basis. Indigenous parents actively engage in the choice process and in doing so they actively frame particular schools with reference to their potential to offer their children social mobility.

For some parents, boarding school offered their child an escape from community pressures and its socially demobilising potential. For most of the parent participants, this was connected with better educational outcomes, combined with the belief that boarding school provided a 'safe distance' from the negative influences of the community. However, this could only be achieved if parents selected schools that other children from the community were not attending or selecting: "Well, for example [Indigenous College] it's an all Indigenous school. Well, same thing: bullying, family fighting, student against student. That's what happens. That's how it is" (Ted, 1on1 ISSI, ll.308-309).

7.2.3 Conceptualisation of Findings from Research Question 1

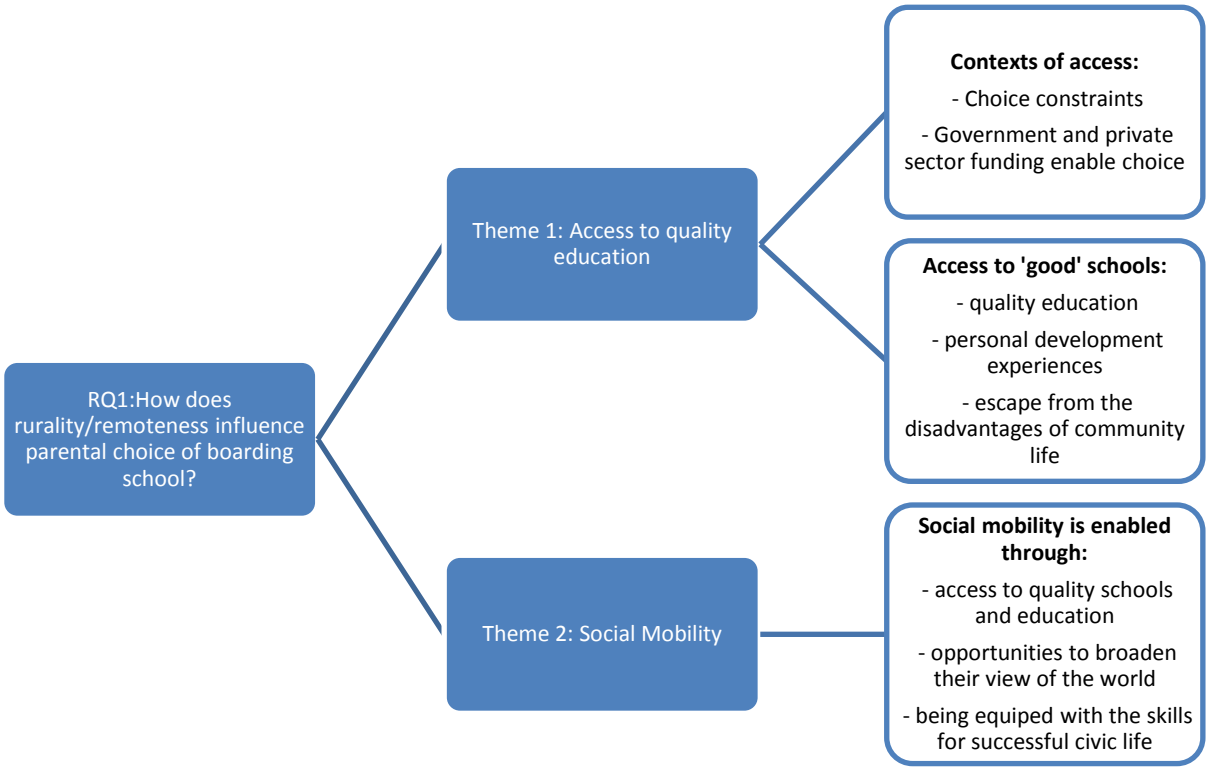
For these parents, their school selection for their child needed to provide their children **access** to 'good' schools. A 'good' boarding school was one which offered **quality education, personal and social development experiences and an escape from the vagaries of community life**. It is evident in the data that these different conceptions of **'access'** are interconnected or, as one parent expressed, a desire for her child to "...be well-rounded" (June, 1on1 ISSI, l.244). This articulation of 'access' takes place within a school choice context which is peculiar to Indigenous people living in remote and isolated locations.

These data also suggest that Indigenous parents select schools which offer their children broad opportunities which, in turn, open up potentialities for **social mobility**. The importance of post-school options outside of the community was considered vital by parents. These options were made available to their children through access to **quality schools and**

education; exposure to a variety of experiences which would both **broaden their view of the world** and **equip their children with the 'tools' to successfully engage in civic life**. Indigenous parents actively engaged in the choice process and in doing so they actively framed particular schools with reference to their potential to offer their children social mobility.

Figure 7.2 summarises the thematic development in relation to Research Question One:

Figure 7.2 Thematic Development: Research Question One



7.3 Research Question 2: How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of a boarding school for their child?

The theme in relation to research question three is:

1. Informed Choosing
    - The family and community: An informational network
    - The function of the 'grapevine'

7.3.1 Informed Choosing

Indigenous parent participants made school selections with reference to a variety of sources of information. Most of the parent participants made contact with their preferred schools and requested a prospectus. Participants stated that this information was useful. For other participants, phone contact was made with the school, and conversations with the Principal and Indigenous support personnel were undertaken in order to broaden their knowledge of the school's offerings: "I just rang the school. They just send me the information and I just talked to them over the phone" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, ll.141-142).

Face-to-face encounters with school personnel and visits to schools were also an important and valued source of information about framed schools, with one participant stating that a head of residence from a particular boarding school would visit the community to meet with interested members of the community and Year 7 students to discuss the school (Indigenous Parents Focus Group,ll.103-104). Another parent stated that their experience on site was an important aspect of their decision making:

> I think that [research site school] that gave the cost information and basically yeah, gave us.... and even took us around and said look a lot of the things are closed you're not going to get to see all of this but come and have a look. They told us about their uniform shop. So we had a look around (Madison, 1on1 ISSI, ll.208-211).

However, the information supplied to parents by the school was secondary to that which they encountered from their own personal informational networks or the 'grapevine'. Indeed, one parent stated: "The thing is they would be put in their prospectus, you know their boarding house. But it's not what it's supposed to be" (Indigenous Parent Focus Group, ll.248-249). This suggests that the 'cold knowledge', the information controlled by the school, was not consonant with the information circulating within their own information networks.

The family and community: An informational network

Indigenous parents drew upon informal sources of information through their own networks in order to inform their boarding school choice. These fixed networks of information included immediate and extended family, and other past students from the community. For all participants, what other people had to say about the school was most influential in their decision-making, with all considering this to be their main source of information: "A lot of past students... Other parents and families" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, l.163). The parent participants were seeking information about the capacity of certain schools to offer a variety of extra-curricular and social opportunities to their children

The most valuable information provided parents with an idea of what the school had to offer in terms of extra-curricular and social opportunities for their children. They needed to be reassured that their children were going to have access to experiences that would have ordinarily been unavailable to them in their home community: "A lot of sporting things, ay. You know like they go to [name of a large regional centre], there's fun things to go to down there. My kids like it, anyway" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, ll.184-185).

Parents were seeking information from their networks in relation to the experiences of other children who were currently enrolled or were going to enrol at the research site school. This information assisted them to confirm their choice:

> When they go down as a group from the town. Like [relative's name] boys, she had a couple of boys down there. They find it better, from the homesick side. If they go as a group, they fit in real good there (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], ll.200-202).

Indigenous parents engaged with information networks with a view to selecting and deselecting particular schools. For the most part, participants suggested that the most common sources of information that influenced school selection and deselection were immediate and extended family, and then those who were not related but live in the community. The information gleaned from family members was, however, the most cogent source:

> So therefore, when selecting a school as such a lot of our Indigenous parents are selecting ones where they've had particular experiences before, whether it was them attending that particular school... if not it's word by mouth or experience within that particular family, saying hey yeah I had my relative, cousin/brother is going to that school so therefore that school becomes the choice because of the connection with that family (ISP 1, ll.6-11).

It is clear that the experiences of family members in particular at specific schools were used as a strong school short-listing mechanism, allowing parents to confidently select and deselect certain schools. Indeed, informed deselection was determined through parents' information networks. Negative comments or experiences led parents to deselect these schools: "Well it changed my mind about [school name]... We knew [school name] before and it was a no no for me... she had cousins going to [school name] in 2003, and I said I don't want it happening to her (Madison, 1on1 ISSI, ll.96-99).

The function of the 'grapevine'

For most participants, the 'grapevine', albeit closed, was used to confirm and affirm their selection. When parents asked questions of the 'grapevine', these tended to focus on the offerings of the school, particularly in relation to the capacity in the school to support their child's personal development:

> Question: What types of questions were you asking these people?
>
> What sort of school it was, probably the rules, how strict it was. It actually made him a better person, that's what he said. And actually my cousins daughter, so my niece, went there probably 7 or 8 years ago. So that was fairly recent too. And she was a challenging child and she's turned out to be a wonderful young lady, so those sorts of things. And we didn't know that until we spoke about [child's name] to [name of relative], and she said oh great school, and it actually changed [name of relative] life. All these reports were actually helping us a lot. And those sorts of discussion with people that had experiences with [research site school] were really helping us, it was all this positive stuff that was happening, and it made us feel better....really building us up and giving us the confidence (Sam, 1on1 ISSI, ll.141-148).

The ‘grapevine’ was a useful source of information that functioned to confirm a choice, but needed to be filtered when it reported negatively. In instances where the ‘grapevine’ might have reported something negative about the selected school, parents overwhelmingly stated they would conduct further research into these comments:

> I’d probably still do my own research. Check it out for myself again, with regards to the school. People saying bad school don’t send them there, I’d still look it up on the website, or call somebody and get a bit more information, because I probably wouldn’t tend to listen to negative comments like that. I mean I take it on board but I wouldn’t make any decisions based on that. Because everyone’s situation is different. Maybe they had a bad experience and whatever the circumstances. So I’d take that into consideration but I would still follow it up. Do my own research and talk to other people.... and probably get other people, they might actually say the opposite (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, ll. 150-156).

> I’d do research definitely. Depends who the person is. I wouldn’t take it, assume... (Jo, 1on1 ISSI, l.157).

The ‘grapevine’ was considered trustworthy when it reported negatively about other schools. This trustworthiness was enhanced where the negativity about other schools served to confirm the preferred school:

> The resounding thing that came back was that they had a huge bullying issue at [name of other school]. Now that came from people who didn’t go to either school, to that school or the other [preferred] school. And that just kept coming out repeatedly and you just sort of think word of mouth is generally fairly good. And the people I talked to I knew aren’t gossipers, because I don’t condone that. You know what I mean, some people start nasty little things, like the car park talk (June, 1on1 ISSI, ll.166-171)

For another participant, the most cogent aspect of the offerings from the ‘grapevine’ was the absence of negativity with regard to the research site school:

> Probably that we don't hear too many bad things. There's not too many bad stuff coming out of [research site school]... So that was the main thing that we don't hear anything bad and there are positive stuff going on... And you hear quite negative things about other schools (Lyn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.103-105).

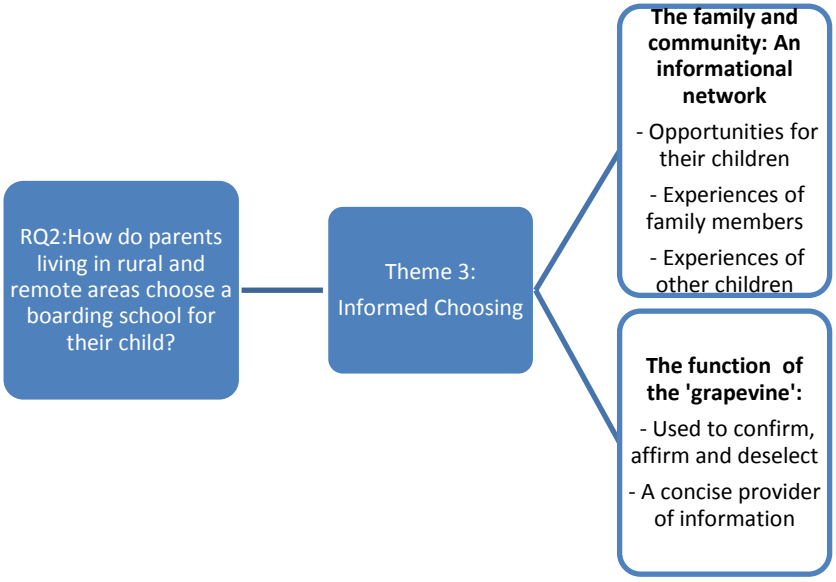
The data indicated that the 'grapevine' was concise in its communication. That is, parents did not seek extensive amounts of information from their sources. Rather, they needed to know whether the school was 'good' or 'bad' and if the informants had a positive experience. Again, the focus for many participants was on the personal development strengths of the school: "A cousin of mine sent her son out there.... yeah his mother really spoke highly of [research site school] and she said it was the best thing she ever did for him. And I saw it in the young lad myself" (Chris, 1on1 ISSI, ll.62-64).

7.3.2 Conceptualisation of Findings from Research Question 2

The data show that Indigenous parents engage with a number of sources of information in the process of making school selections. This **informed choosing** by Indigenous parents included sourcing information from both school and fixed, informal personal networks. Specifically, the data indicate that **family and past students were cogent sources of information** about what schools could offer their children in terms of opportunities. However, Indigenous participants did not seek out detailed information but, rather whether the school was 'good' and if the experiences of informants were positive. Furthermore, the 'grapevine' functioned and was utilised by parents in particular ways. It **was used to confirm, affirm and deselect boarding schools.** When the 'grapevine' reported negatively about the preferred school, it needed to be filtered. Conversely, when it reported negatively about other schools, the 'grapevine' was considered a trustworthy source and confirmed the selection of the preferred school.

Figure 7.3 summarises the thematic development in relation to Research Question Two.

Figure 7.3 Thematic Development: Research Question Two



7.4 Research Question 3: How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?

The theme in relation to research question three is:

1. Catholic School: Values-based experiences
    - Exposure to experiences of Catholic schooling
    - The transmission of values supersedes denominational religion.

7.4.1 Catholic School: Values-based experiences

Exposure to experiences of Catholic schooling

The Catholic school offered Indigenous participants' children an experience of a unique educational culture which, for some, could not be replicated elsewhere. For these parents, a (Christian) Catholic education was always a priority for their children. Other participants highlighted that the Catholic school offered their children exposure to certain values and beliefs which may (or may not) be useful to their children in future adult life. The notion of a 'caring and safe community' was articulated in a number of different ways by parents.

The Catholic school offered Indigenous participants' children an experience of a safe and caring environment. This was understood in different ways, with one participant noting that "It's more strict" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], l.280). However, it was clear from

parents' responses that the idea of discipline was couched within the broader concept of care. The parents articulated the idea of 'care' and 'safety' in implicit and explicit ways: "In [home town] we used to have a convent up here and we had two old nuns here and... I went to boarding school in [large regional centre], the nuns used to look after us. We had the nuns looking after us and caring for us" Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], ll.286-288). This response suggests that this parent's experience of Catholic education via a particular religious order meant that she desired her own children to have the same experiences. For this parent, the experience of a caring school environment included discipline and rules, which she also wanted for her children:

> Yeah. I went to a Catholic school in [large regional centre] for three years and I went to [rural boarding school] then. You know they've got this stupid rule that you can't discipline your kids. It's a stupid rule and it should be like it was when I was going to school (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], ll.296-298).

Another parent participant suggested that her daughter's challenges in the early stages of her transition to boarding school were addressed through "pretty good support from the school..." and that the "religious environment has helped her" (Dawn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.125; 128). Further to this notion of the Catholic school offering an experience of an environment of care and concern, one parent noted:

> I just find that in the Catholic system... there's just a niceness, and like they look at the student as a whole. Not just their academic side, not just their sporting side, they generally they look at all of the things. And generally if there's a problem with a child they'll generally try and work ... I've just seen a couple of different instances where they're a lot more accommodating to just help the child, rather than just saying too big a problem so away you go... (June, 1on1 ISSI, ll.266-272)

The religious dimension of the Catholic school offered the participants' children another dimension to their school experience. The religious aspect of the Catholic school was not highlighted from the view that it played a role in the inculcation of belief, but it was highlighted as "important". For some of these parents, their own experiences of religion at school made this a valued aspect of education for their children: "Those kids when they go down to [township] they say oh we've got to buy our Mass clothes, special clothes to wear

over there. Yeah, they talk about it" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], ll.308-309). Thus the discussion surrounding the importance of religion was more about experiences of religion as opposed to religious experiences. The ideas of faith formation and transmission of beliefs were conspicuously absent from parents' responses: "Religion doesn't hurt anyone; it's good that they know that aspect because it's not something that they don't get at home greatly" (Kym, 1on1 ISSI, ll.265-266). While participants did not consistently emphasise the importance of denomination, they did highlight the relevance of religion in the lives of their children. However, this was expressed as a valuable addendum to their school experience, which was conceived by parents in different ways. They appreciated that their children were being offered experiences which were unique to Catholic schools and, in some cases, replicated their own experiences of going to a Catholic school:

> At [school name] they've got that little chapel, and you've got to go in there every morning. At least I used to have to go in there every morning. And we used to go over in the hall, I think it's burnt down now. We had to dress, you know... yep when I was going down there we had to wear black leather shoes (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], ll.311-314).

The transmission of values supersedes denominational religion

There was a strong desire for Indigenous parents' children to be exposed to certain values which would, in turn, be of some use to them in their adult life. For one parent, the school's values reflected those of the home, and it was his view that the school supported his family values:

> The family stuff the discipline, respecting us, respecting their grandparents, respecting elders, respecting elderly people. And just knowing fundamentally, the rights and wrongs, you know...[through the experience at the research site school] just watching her grow up from grade 8 that some of the values from here that we've picked, and we've taught and hold very dear, in terms of our family structure and circle, we find that has supported [Child's name] in terms of her popularity and personality at the school and vice versa. I believe the school supports that (Chris, 1on1 ISSI, ll.117-125).

The inculcation of values was a hopeful outcome of a Catholic education. This was even the case for selected parents despite those values being derived from a Christian denomination different to their own:

> Well I am a different religion, and I was going to look into that, because I know there is 7th Day Adventist church in [township] where I could have kind of found out, if someone could do like a study with her. And of course they have their church on a Saturday. But I don't mind. Whatever she can get, well the bible. The King James Bible version is our church as well as Catholics... no I think that's good for her, there's some good values (Claire, 1on1 ISSI, ll.262-266).

Despite the misunderstanding about the use of certain versions of the Bible, the response highlights the importance of values education and inculcation. Conspicuous in many parents' responses in this area was the lack of importance placed on the necessity of their child to be exposed to their own Christian denomination. Indeed, there was a clear ambivalence of some parents, who adopted a religious relativism in relation to their child's religious education:

> It didn't really matter to me in a sense because my family's Assembly of God... being Catholic, totally different, I am not familiar with all of that. But I am not biased in that sense. It doesn't really worry me as long as the focus is common with all the denominations with regards to all the Jesus, God and everybody getting to know that... I suppose I am not one who is strong in that sense [in relation to a commitment to a particular denominational school]. As long as that [Christianity] was instilled there and played an important part of the learning process... (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, ll.265-270).

For another parent, her connection with the Anglican Church was secondary to her child being exposed to certain religious values. In one sense, denominational affiliation was not important and the inculcation of universal Christian values was considered most significant:

> Well I'm Anglican because I went to a Catholic school myself. And I said oh well.. . I just told look, just continue on with her faith... I wanted to stay on the track because we all in that Christian... I wanted her to continue on with her belief and

> that. Cause when they, they stray away some time. I just wanted her to take it seriously, her Christian values you know (Madison, 1on1 ISSI, ll.170-173).

Again, there is an emphasis here on the 'foundational' dimension to religious belief and values. It was viewed by many participants that exposure to and experience of the particular values of the selected school would serve their children well in adult life:

> ...whether you're Christian, Catholic or whatever you are, you should... have compassion for others... those sort of values... we hold them [as important] and I don't think you have to be a certain religion to have those sorts of things. So we've always respected that. And we obviously believe in God and all that sort of stuff... (Kym, 1on1 ISSI, ll.418-421).

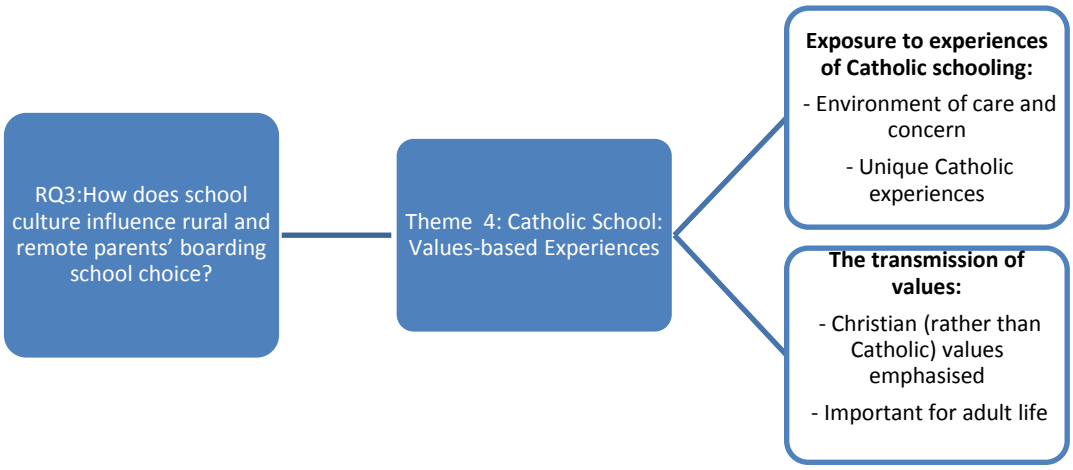
7.4.2 Conceptualisation of Findings from Research Question 3

The data suggested that denominational affiliation and, indeed, religious belief were not key aspects of the choice process. Moreover, religious education was either a secondary outcome for some participants, or entirely irrelevant for other participants. Indeed, there was relativistic view of religion in school, whereby many participants could neither identify the differences between a Catholic school and other denominational schools, nor could they highlight the unique benefits for their children in attending a Catholic school. Nevertheless, the data indicate a desire by parents for their children to have **experiences of Catholic schooling**. For some, this is expressed as **an experience of an environment of care and concern**, while for others there is a focus on **specific experiences of the Catholic religion**.

However, the majority or participants did highlight the importance of **exposure to certain values** which would support their child throughout their adult life. For most, **Christian values** were important and the strength of this importance was consistent across all the various denominations.

Figure 7.4 summarises the thematic development in relation to Research Question 3.

Figure 7.4 Thematic Development: Research Question 3



7.5 Research Question 4: How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

The theme in relation to Research Question Four is:

1. Racialised Thinking and School Choice

Indigenous parents consider the racial composition of a school when engaging in the school choice process. For the parent participants, the low numbers of Indigenous students at their selected school did not deter them from making the selection. However, large numbers of Indigenous students was an element that influenced deselection of particular schools.

7.5.1 Racialised Thinking and School Choice

Parents discussed the relevance of the number of Indigenous students when making school choices. Initially, the parent participants did not consider this to be a significant consideration, but this was expressed in relation to the school they had selected. Furthermore, the parents considered the school they selected had small numbers of Indigenous students and this was not a deterrent, though some did acknowledge it can be confronting for a young person entering the school from a small community: "But when one Indigenous kid goes to the school they sort of make friends with that Indigenous kid. That's how they get on"

(Indigenous Parents Focus Group, ll.381-382). One parent stated that even if their child was the only Indigenous student in the school this would not be a concern: "As long as they are doing well. I have no problem with that" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], l.376).

High numbers of Indigenous students exposed Indigenous participants' children to certain risks: "Well for example, [Indigenous College], it's an all Indigenous school. Well, same thing: bullying, family fighting, student against student, that what happens. That's how it is" (Ted, 1on1 ISSI, ll.308-309) Another parent stated:

> Because I think if there's too many Indigenous kids I think that it's harder for the teachers and your supervisors to maintain like a level of control over them, because you're not dealing with say one out of 10 kids, you're dealing with 5 out of 5 kids that are unruly compared with.... in comparison with kids who would be misbehaving (Lyn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.198-201).

The school's racial composition was only of no concern when the number of Indigenous students was low. Through further discussion, reference to another school with higher numbers of Indigenous students revealed the Indigenous parent participants' attitudes to higher concentrations of Indigenous students in relation to school selection. One parent stated that a particular secondary school in a larger regional centre is "...all Indigenous. They got thousands there" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group[a], ll.390). This hyperbolic remark suggests a negative perception surrounding this school because of its high numbers of Indigenous students.

The racial composition of schools was a reason for deselection and school avoidance by Indigenous parents. One ISP cited particular instances where parents explicitly requested that their child not be placed in schools where there were Indigenous people from the same community. It was suggested by these parents that this would be an unwanted distraction: "they want to go to school where there's bugger all black fellas... they don't want anyone distracting them or bringing them down" (ISP 2, ll.410-411). The experience of this participant in dealing with parents seeking placements for their children is that some want to actively avoid schools with high numbers of Indigenous students:

> Well their reasons have been they want them to have their own mind. They want them to find their own beliefs and make their own choices. Because these families, and one family in particular was a fanatic Indigenous activist, but she was the one who said straight out... no one from my community or from my family, because she said I will teach my child culture and all that stuff, I know all about that, I will teach them that, you give them an education. So it depends on what the family's focused on, but some have been like that, some have said that, not necessarily Indigenous kids from their community but some have said... I'm not about that school because they've got too many Indigenous kids there (ISP 2, ll.69-76).

The way in which schools 'manage' Indigenous numbers is an element of the choice process. It is clear that schools that enrol Indigenous students limit these enrolments to ensure a degree of racial balance. One Indigenous Support Personnel participant, in reference to a particular school in north Queensland, stated that reducing Indigenous numbers was an important strategic focus, and one which was supported by the community:

> A lot of our parents would like to see Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids go. The reason being they want to see their kids [on] the same par as any other kid, the only way you do that is if you have a non-Indigenous kid sitting beside them in a classroom. [School name] is not fully 100% [Indigenous] anymore, they are about 97% by the end of this year and next year it will go to 90%, and 80 and so forth (ISP 1, ll.172-176).

Therefore, for the parents who selected the school referred to above, to insure against a decline in quality required an increase in the intake of non-Indigenous students. This comment would suggest that there is a nexus between racialised choosing by parents and the strategic approach to enrolment at the system level. Moreover, this approach of 'capping' Indigenous numbers was promoted by schools as an equality movement:

> Yeah. They cap their numbers. At first I took it slightly offensive, but then they went on to explain.... that they put a cap on the Asian children too, they want the boarding to be full of 20% these guys, 20% those guys... so they can all mingle and there's no white kids ganging up and hassling Indigenous kids or Asian kids, everyone has to be equal (ISP 2, ll.343-346).

However, at another point in the interview this participant recalled a conversation he had with Indigenous students about the elite schools in which they were being enrolled, which reveals more depth of insight into the perceived risks of enrolling Indigenous students:

> And I tell them, that some people have a new born child, and within the first year of having that child they will book that kid into that school.... so I say there is a big line up and some schools like to get the champions in because it puts their schools at this status, so I explain to them that you come in a little behind but these guys are willing to sacrifice all their little personal sort of things to help you guys get up there. So I think some schools are getting more supportive and taking more risks (ISP 2, ll.371-376).

The implication of "... but these guys are willing to sacrifice all their little personal sort of things..." is that the enrolment of Indigenous students poses a risk to reputation and, subsequently, future enrolment stability. Such a comment unveils something of the motivation behind a school's enrolment policy which limits the number of Indigenous and foreign students. As a result, these schools position themselves as contributing to the common good, while managing their reputation. For those Indigenous parents who draw a positive relationship between quality schools and low Indigenous numbers, these schools become desirable.

The data indicated a relationship between high Indigenous enrolment and perceptions of poor quality schools. When parents were asked if they believed large numbers of Indigenous students would affect their child's ability to focus, all stated a resounding "yes" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, l.397). For these parents, there was a perceived relationship between Indigeneity and poor quality schools which were subsequently deselected by the parent participants during the choice process. One parent highlighted that, though there may be some socialisation advantages of higher numbers of Indigenous students, the quality of education is the most important aspect of schooling that cannot be disrupted, and disruption would be the case in a school with large cohorts of Indigenous students:

> It might have helped them too [higher numbers of Indigenous students]. From remote places like here, but I am just talking about the learning part. This kid might

> want to play up and wanna drag you away from the good things to do bad things (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, ll.399-401).

Another parent, when asked if she considered an Indigenous boarding school for her child, stated unequivocally:

> No, never. Because to me there's too many Indigenous kids, I think they the level of education wouldn't be as high because I'm pretty sure they just go along and play sports and climb the mountains, whatever they do. That's why (Lyn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.203-205)

The data indicated that Indigenous parents perceived that high numbers of Indigenous students eroded the quality of learning that would take place at the school. One parent stated: "Yeah, it would be a problem. They wouldn't all want to learn" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, l.376). Many of the parents used terms such as 'mainstream' in order to contrast between schools of high and low numbers of Indigenous students:

> But mainly giving them [access] to a mainstream education, or a mainstream environment. I suppose just coming from the local community, an all Indigenous community, we have that sense of you know too many family members around, they're not going to be focused, they're going to be influenced by family and friends at the same school. Therefore they would not concentrate on their school work. That's one of the reasons I didn't want my children going to a school that has a majority of Indigenous students there. I would prefer them going to a school with non-Indigenous students. Just so that they're more focussed on their work and they can move ahead and not to be distracted by family and friends (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, ll.305-312).

It is clear from this that the focus for these Indigenous parents is the quality of learning offered to their children. The implication, furthermore, is that high numbers of Indigenous students diminishes both the quality of learning and the learning environment. The Indigenous parent participants deselected certain schools on this basis.

The data indicate that schools with larger numbers of Indigenous students presented Indigenous participants' children with distractions which would shift their focus away from their educational ambitions. For some parent participants, this was the motivation in sending their children to schools outside of the community:

> Yeah I think a lot of it's sort of... we sent them at grade 8 out to [public school outside of community]...we wanted them to do grade 12. I suppose at the time there wasn't the push for kids to go to [public school outside of community] early in their, well early in their high school years. I suppose around about grade 8 and 9. But we found over time there was a great influx [of Indigenous students from the community]. I suppose it's got a lot to do with peer group, peer group not, I suppose ... being less supportive ... just too many distractions nowadays, and I think it's in any social grouping, but we tend to have more of a focus on education to give them more of a pathway (Chris, 1on1 ISSI).

This particular parent decided to move his child from the public school outside of the community to a boarding school on the basis that the public school was experiencing an influx of children from his community. For this parent, the implication was that his child would not be able to maintain her "focus on education".

Schools with high numbers of Indigenous students stymied Indigenous participants' children's access to a range of experiences. For this participant, his daughter's exposure to a range of opportunities would have been hindered in a school with a large proportion of Indigenous students:

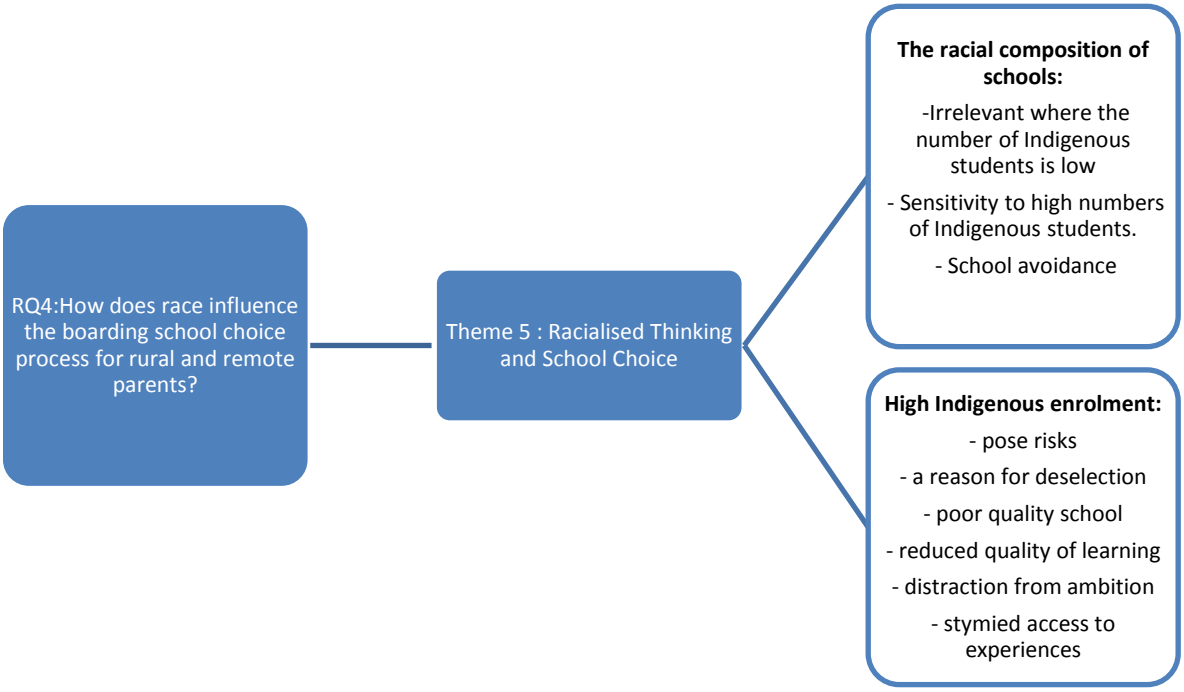
> It can sometimes be a negative all Indigenous, cause you don't see that other experience, you don't experience the other world, and that's what I was talking about earlier, about [daughter's name] having those a opportunities of life and that's part of it. It's actually having different cultures, and that's a life experience...That's a stepping stone into mainstream, too (Sam, 1on1 ISSI, ll.301-306).

7.5.2 Conceptualisation of Findings from Research Question 4

These data indicate that these Indigenous parents engage in **racialised thinking** processes by considering **the racial composition of schools** during the choice process. Moreover, it was determined by these participants that schools with **high Indigenous enrolment were poor quality,** offered **sub-standard education, and presented an environment that would stymie their child's academic and social progress.** These determinations were a justification for the deselection of particular schools.

Figure 7.5 summarises the thematic development in relation to Research Question Four.

Figure 7.5 Thematic Development: Research Question Four



7.6 Third-Order Data Interpretation: Contentions about Indigenous Parental Choice of School.

Consistent with the interactive process of data analysis (Section 4.6), a third order data interpretation process is undertaken in order to theorise about the interrelationships between categories. The following section outlines the contentions about the parental choice of school process for Indigenous participants. This selective coding process is informed by the literature (Chapter 3) around parental choice of school, as well as the symbolic interactionist conceptualisation of the parental choice of school process (Section 4.2.2.2). The contentions are theoretical statements about the ways in which Indigenous parents engage in the parental choice of school process. As previously stated, the fundaments of the contentions are the research questions and the emergent themes. These contentions are statements of assigned theoretical significance by the researcher. The following sections outline the development of the contentions which are the result of data analysis and subsequent thematic development.

7.6.1 Contention 1: Indigenous parents choose socially mobilising boarding schools that offer their children intellectual and social capital.

The data was clear in showing that Indigenous parents choose schools which are going to offer their children advancement beyond the disadvantage of their specific community. Therefore, these participants sought schools which were able to provide their children with the social and intellectual capital which, in turn would allow them to engage with the world of employment, education and social experience.

Participants were clear that access to a quality education was a requisite of escaping the disadvantage of community life and avoiding the dangerous cycles of unemployment, substance abuse, and the maladies of a destructive social life. Indeed, where there were local educational provisions, participants actively deselected these schools in favour of boarding schools, not only for the educational offerings but also for their geographical isolation from the community. The notion of 'quality education' was defined to include not only the intellectual domain, but the social and personal domains. For these participants, quality schools offered their children a degree of social capital which enabled them to fully participate in civic life outside of the local community.

7.6.2 Contention 2: Indigenous parents' definitions of 'quality' schools are constructed through familial relationships.

It was clear that the information gleaned by parents in relation to schools was confined to closed networks consisting mainly of family members and those in the local community. This information was cogent and trustworthy, and was used by participants to select, deselect and confirm their choices of schools.

Parents sought information that was going to give them an insight into the capacity of the school to provide opportunity for their children. Participants stated that they desired evidence that the school had had a positive impact on others, and where this was the case, their decision was confirmed. Conversely, the presence of negativity about the selected school from information sources prompted further investigation at best. However, when the informational networks reported negatively about other, non-selected schools, this served to confirm parents' selection.

These closed and trustworthy networks provided parents with some assurance that their child was going to be offered a 'quality' education. The notion of 'quality' was variously defined to include the academic dimension, but also schools that were able to personally develop their children in the areas of personal responsibility, independence and social competence.

7.6.3 Contention 3: The transmission of universal values, rather than parochial religion, is a feature of Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school.

The data indicate that the espousal of core values, not organised religion, is important for Indigenous parents when selecting a boarding school for their child. While there is a clear leaning towards Christian values, there was an evident ambivalence to the denominational affiliation of the school even where that affiliation was clearly different from their own. However, this is not to suggest that parents are blasé about their child's exposure to religious values. On the contrary, Indigenous parents were clear about the inherent worth of exposure to religious values, and in some cases these values were those of the family.

Parents who were committed to a non-Catholic denomination willingly set this aside during the choice process. These parents were able to recognise intra-Christian relationships and were confident that their children would be exposed to Christian values. For most participants, these universal values would serve as a touchstone for their children during their adult life. However, it was clear from the data that this was not a primary focus for Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school. The data suggest that experiences of religion and exposure to universal Christian values were a valuable addendum to the core business of school choice: gaining access to quality education.

7.6.4 Contention 4: The selection of a boarding school by Indigenous parents is a racially motivated choice.

The data suggest that Indigenous parents actively avoid and deselect schools with high concentration of Indigenous students. For most participants, the presence of high numbers of Indigenous students is tantamount to poor quality education. Indeed, these participants spoke of "mainstream schools" as a contrast to schools with high concentrations of Indigenous students.

For these participants, the hopeful outcome of their child's education was access to post-school opportunities. For them, this meant avoiding schools with large numbers of Indigenous students because such schools are replete with distractions. These schools are not consistent with these parents' aims for their children. Schools with a large proportion of Indigenous enrolment represent poor quality education and an environment which lacked aspiration. Furthermore, selected participants viewed such schools as restrictive in terms of the personal development of their children. These parents determined that schools with high concentrations of Indigenous students did not enable their children to see "the other world" and such comments often included a reference to "mainstream" schooling. The implication of these participants' views was that schools with large numbers of Indigenous students were socially immobilising and threatened to subject their children to 'the world' they so desired for them to escape.

Table 7.1 outlines the development of contentions and how these are related to the research questions and emergent themes.

Table 7.1 Development of Contentions

RESEARCH QUESTION	THEME(S)	CONTENTION(S)
How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?	Access to quality education Social Mobility	1. Indigenous parents choose socially mobilising boarding schools that offer their children intellectual and social capital.
How do parents living in rural and remote areas choose a boarding school for their child?	Informed Choosing	2. Indigenous parents' definitions of 'quality' schools are supported through their familial relationships.
How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?	Catholic School: Values-Based Experiences	3. The transmission of universal values, rather than parochial religion, is a feature of Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school.
How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?	Racialised Thinking and School Choice	4. The selection of a boarding school by Indigenous parents is a racially motivated choice.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings of the data gathered from Indigenous parents and Indigenous Support Personnel at the systemic/strategic level. These data were obtained through a focus group and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. A first- and second-order interpretation of the data showed that Indigenous parents engage in complex thinking during school choice process. This complexity was expressed as themes which emerged from the parent data.

A third-order analysis of the data was undertaken which resulted in the construction of contentions. These contentions are theoretical statements about the ways in which Indigenous parents engage in the school choice process. These contentions will form the basis of discussion in the following chapter. The findings are discussed in light of the research context, literature review and non-Indigenous findings.

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the previous chapters (Chapters 5 and 7) in light of the literature, and to synthesise these findings in order to develop a deeper understanding of the parental choice of school process for Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents. A distillation of the discussion of this chapter is shown by the development of conceptual frameworks of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parental choice of boarding school.

8.1 Introduction

The findings of this study showed that Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas engage in the boarding school choice process in a variety of ways. A third-order data interpretation process enabled the development of contentions, theoretical propositions about the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents choose a boarding school. It was found that there are divergences between the two groups in relation to the ways they choose a boarding school for their child. In addition there are also convergences between the boarding school choice making of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents, though there are evident nuanced differences. These contentions frame the discussion of the data. The themes which fundament these contentions are used to further focus the discussion. The contentions are outlined below in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Contentions: Convergences and Divergences

INDIGENOUS DATA: CONTENTIONS	*CONVERGENCE=✓ DIVERGENCE = X*	NON-INDIGENOUS DATA: CONTENTIONS	NEW CONTENTION
Indigenous parents choose socially mobilising boarding schools that offer their children intellectual and social capital.	✓ **x**	Non-Indigenous parents select boarding schools that will prepare their children for the post-school world.	
Indigenous parents' definitions of 'quality' boarding schools are supported through their familial relationships.	✓ **x**	Non-Indigenous parents' definitions of quality boarding schools are supported through their interactions with others.	
The transmission of universal values, rather than parochial religion, is a feature of Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school.	✓	The transmission of universal values, rather than parochial religion, is a feature of non-Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school.	*The transmission of universal values, rather than parochial religion, is a feature of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school.*
The selection of a boarding school by Indigenous parent is a racially motivated choice.	✓	Non-Indigenous parents engage in racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process.	*There is a racial dimension to the boarding school choice process for Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents.*

Table 8.1 indicates the divergence and convergence between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous contentions. In two instances, there was a clear convergence between contentions that necessitated a new theoretical expression that recognised the relationship in the data between Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents. However, while there was some intersection, there were still evident nuanced differences. These arose as a result of socio-cultural context and history, and ways of knowing peculiar to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. While there was a discernible relationship between the two remaining contentions, the data indicated substantial differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents. Thus, these contentions could not be re-expressed and are included in the discussion as discrete theoretical expressions.

8.2 Areas of Divergence

8.2.1 Indigenous Contention: Indigenous parents choose socially mobilising boarding schools that offer their children intellectual and social capital.

Social Mobility: School selection and de-selection

Indigenous parents had a strong desire for access to 'good' schools, and in this case 'good' boarding schools. They did not necessarily consider their location or isolation an insurmountable impediment to this desire. Indeed, these participants felt compelled to seek out the best possible options for their child. This, in some instances, was strongly foregrounded by a deselection of what could be considered "local" options, schools that required less travel and would have enabled more frequent access to the child by the parent. Ted expressed this very clearly by stating: "To me there was no option. I wasn't going to send her here. We got our own high school here..." (Ted,1on1 ISSI, ll.159-160). For this participant, the local school was facing social and educational issues which would, in his mind, substantially disadvantage his child. It was clear that those parents who had a school option in their local community deselected this school on the basis that it did not meet their personal education expectations in light of the social and economic challenges of the community at large (White & Wood, 2009). There was a degree of acknowledgement that to remain in the community to be educated was certain to lead to underachievement. While this is a reality explicated in the literature (Queensland Government, 2009), this finding represents a nuanced view of socio-economic disadvantage from educational and school choice perspectives.

Indigenous parents avoided and deselected "local" schools in favour of a more distant boarding school and it was contended by these Indigenous parents that the selected boarding school enabled their child to exit the dysfunctions and deleteriousness of their local communities: "Because of what's going on in the community and they can take it to the [local]school and I don't want that. And it's [research site school] a better learning environment where she can concentrate more on herself and not others" (Madison, 1on1 ISSI, ll.56-63). For this participant, there is both a social and educational advantage to leaving the community: the boarding school offers a "better learning environment" and her focus is on her own progress without the distraction of "others".

Social Mobility: Aspiration, educational quality, socio-cultural capacity

The Indigenous parent participants demonstrated an acute awareness of the socio-economic challenges of their local communities and made school choices to deliberately insulate their children from this possible outcome for their children. There was an implied acknowledgment among Indigenous participants that the post-school world is a competitive one and educational attainment is closely tied with civic success (Hunter & Schwab, 2003a). This is consistent with a 'logic of consumption' which suggests "that consumers (Indigenous parents) consume (choose) in ways that connect to social relationships, the key being the symbolism attached to the object" (Bowe et al., 1994, p. 44). Thus, it appears that these Indigenous parents chose a school which was consistent with their aspirations for their children and was likely to be connected to their relegated place in the social hierarchy (Collins & Snell, 2000).

Indigenous parents sought educational outcomes for their children which afforded them the capacity for social mobility and it was evident that Indigenous parents perceived they could achieve this by exposing their children to quality teaching and learning: "Well we always want the best for our children. And whatever opportunity we can grab for our children, we'll grab it. And I saw it there and you know I thought these are more elite schools too. I suppose to me I think they were like... teachers and principals sort of concentrate more on the students..." (Claire, 1on1 ISSI, ll.78-81). Whether or not these schools to which Claire refers are elite is less important than the implication that choosing a particular school is motivated by the avidity for good educational outcomes, increased intellectual capital and subsequent social mobility. Participants readily articulated this as "options" for their child. They had a strong desire that the selected boarding school would open up a variety of post-school possibilities. Kym expressed this succinctly when she suggested that: "It's going to give all of those choices. You've got to want to use that however you can. But at least you've got that. It's there in your pocket if you decide tomorrow you want to go to this place or you want to go to that place, you can go" (Kym, 1on1 ISSI, ll.400-402).

The concerted school choice by Indigenous parent participants of a school outside of the community is reflective of the literature around the relationship between Indigenous educational disadvantage and rural and remote geographies. The evidence suggests that

Indigenous people living in rural and remote locations are likely to have lower school completion rates and educational attainment (Gray & Beresford, 2008). This has clear implications for Indigenous people's participation in the civic and economic life of Australian society (Hunter & Schwab, 2003a). Thus, Indigenous parents sought out schools which would insulate their child from educational, and subsequent socio-economic disadvantages, and this finding adds to the literature by suggesting ways in which some Indigenous people respond to these circumstances through the school choice process.

There was a clear aspirational attitude communicated by these parents despite their personal circumstances of disadvantage. Indeed, there was a strong sense that the Indigenous parents were exercising concerted cultivation (Bodovski, 2010) which was directly influenced by their own educational and occupational experiences. Furthermore evidence suggests that those living in the most disadvantaged circumstances have high educational aspirations for their children (Maile, 2004; Spera et al., 2009). It is asserted that selecting 'good' schools enabled their children access to cultural codes essential to successful educational outcomes and, in turn the capacity to participate in civic and economic life. Indeed, a parent's own perception of their disadvantage can influence their choosing behaviour (Bunar, 2010) and the evidence of this study suggests that this is the case for these Indigenous parents.

The Indigenous parents of this study understood that their child's boarding school experience would equip them with essential tools required for negotiating the post-school world and life outside of the community (Sims et al., 2003). There was a clear sense that Indigenous parents held a desire for the holistic development of their child, but this desire was fundamentally prioritised. The first priority was quality education leading to outcomes. The second priority was social and personal development which would otherwise have not been possible in the local community. Chris articulated this duality with clarity: "...to me that's giving her a sense of accomplishment on her own in that environment. The rules and structure out there...that would give her a sense of knowing about her potential and being able to... developing that and sustaining that with that supportive structure out there.... she'll have her own little kit bag to go out there..." (Chris, 1on1 ISSI, ll.262-267). This was a reiteration of Indigenous parents' desire for social capital and mobility. These "experiences" represented a non-meritocratic advantage and would build their child's socio-cultural capacities and connect them, in meaningful and productive ways, to the functions of the dominant culture (Cookson, 1991).

Absent from the data was any reference to the preservation or advancement of Indigenous culture as a component of the educational process at school. Parents did not articulate the relevance of this in any way nor did it appear to factor into their choice-making. It could be suggested that education success at school as a requirement of post-school success foreshadowed the relevance of cultural education. Parents did not express a desire for a dual process of cultural-intellectual development in order to be confident that their child could "mix it in the wider society" (Sarra, 2006, p. 1). This finding is in contrast to some of the literature which posits that good educational outcomes are contingent on a strong sense of cultural identity (Sarra, 2005, 2006, 2007). While this may be good educational praxis, it was not acknowledged by the Indigenous participants. Furthermore, the finding that Indigenous parents emphasised access to quality education is discordant with some of the literature (Saporito & Lareau, 1999) which posits that Black parents look to school to offer their children an experience of racial and cultural diversity.

However, it may be the case that the Indigenous parents were satisfied that the Indigenous culture component of their child's bi-cultural capacity was satisfactorily developed (Pearson, 2011). This would account for the very explicit emphasis on quality education and 'good' schools. Parents had a strong desire that their children be able to orbit between two worlds: the one of their Indigenous culture and the other, Western culture. Evident in the data is Pearson's notion of "Class" as a component of educational reform for Indigenous people. Pearson suggests that the key to the attenuation of social and economic disadvantage as experienced by Indigenous people is contingent on the development of skills and knowledge that allow for full participation in Western culture (Pearson, 2011). This is a form of cultural capital which is understood to be essential if Indigenous people are to experience school and post-school success (White & Wood, 2009). The data from this study supports the assertion that Indigenous parents choose schools which enable the development of (Western) cultural capacity. This emphasis in the school choice process is a significant element in their desire for and contributes to the social mobility of their children.

School 'Chooser' Typologies: The Enfranchised 'Chooser'

It was acknowledged by all Indigenous participants that the availability of government funding and/or Indigenous scholarship programs broadened their school choice options. For the vast majority of participants, ineligibility for or the absence of funding sources would

have limited their capacity to engage in the school choice process. That is, their income was closely correlated to their choice of school (Crozier et al., 2008; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Maddaus, 1990). Nevertheless, these participants' capacity to define and articulate their understanding of quality education and their desires for their children's futures had no relationship to their access to funding sources. This therefore, makes them a unique group of 'school choosers' (Ball, et. al, 1996).

The literature posits that there are three distinct groups of school choosers, and these chooser groups are closely related to social class position. *Privileged/skilled choosers* are those with the educational, financial and social capital that allows them to engage in the choice process. This group of choosers engage in a process of child matching whereby they seek out schools which best suit the needs and interests of their child and there is a concern for the happiness and security of the child (Bagley et. al 2001). The second group of choosers, titled *semi-skilled choosers*, is characterised by their desire to engage with the educational market but lack the cultural capital to do so. These choosers do not seek any class or cultural reproduction for their child. The *disconnected choosers*, the third group of choosers, are faced with a variety of constraints which limit their choice. Happiness, rather than social and cultural reproduction, and academic outcomes, is prioritised.

The Indigenous participants do not neatly fit into any of these defined school choosers. It is clear that without the financial assistance from government and scholarship schemes, these participants would not have the financial capital to engage in the choice process to the extent that they did. However, this does not immediately define them as semi-skilled or disconnected choosers. Indeed, the data are clear that these participants did engage in child matching and a desire for, albeit different, social reproduction (privileged/skilled chooser). However, most of these participants have a level of education which is consistent with the disconnected chooser/working class. The literature defines these participants as unable to access the dominant culture (Marks, 2005) on account of their Indigeneity, but it is evident that these Indigenous parents engage in a form of school choosing which transcends their class position (DEST, 2009) and redefines the school chooser types as proposed by Ball et. al (1996).

Furthermore, Indigenous parents operated in a similar way to middle-class parents. The literature suggests that middle-class parents select and deselect schools on the basis of a

school's capacity to maintain or advance their child's position in the social strata (Reay, 2004). These middle-class choosers seek out schools that will confer certain social advantages to their children and this correlates with the social status of the student body (Cookson, 1991; Holme, 2002; Marks, 2005). The Indigenous parent participants actively deselected their "local" schools on grounds that these schools did not enable their child maximum educational advantage; indeed, their motivation was energised by an avoidance of an immobilising educational environment with a preference for one which could act as a seed bed for social production (Ladd & Fiske, 2001; Reay & Ball, 1998; Taylor Haynes et al.).

These Indigenous parents approached the boarding school choice process with a commitment to meritocratic ideology but also chose schools that insulated their children from poor academic results. That is, these participants selected a school for their child which they defined as 'better' and therefore offered their children the best opportunities for academic success (Lette, D'Espaignet, Slack-Smith, Hunt, & Nannup, 2009). In doing so, they offered their children greater opportunity for social mobility and this is the case because education features strongly in these families' "projects" (Connell, 2003, p.239).

"Projects" are defined as the ways families think and act, which links their current reality with an imagined future. Connell (2003) suggests that when the project is shared among the family, the child will identify the parents' intention and this will produce an educational effect. For working-class and low-SES families – and by all definitions the class with which these participants most closely align – education may be a feature of the family project but is not closely aligned to personal success and advancement. However, these participants made clear that an education was closely related to their child's success and advancement in life: "Education is definitely the key and the focus and to get her exposed to many many other opportunities…" (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, l.212). This is consistent with some literature which asserts that Indigenous people have future orientated aspirations for their children where education is central to same (Lette et al., 2009). Furthermore, these parents' views on education are not directly related to their class position in that they demonstrated a degree of conformity to the merits of education despite many of the participants not possessing either or both of the two key measures of success in a capitalist society: education credentials and status of occupation (Gorman, 1998). This further asserts these Indigenous parents as unique school choosers with no misapprehensions which purportedly arise as a result of their

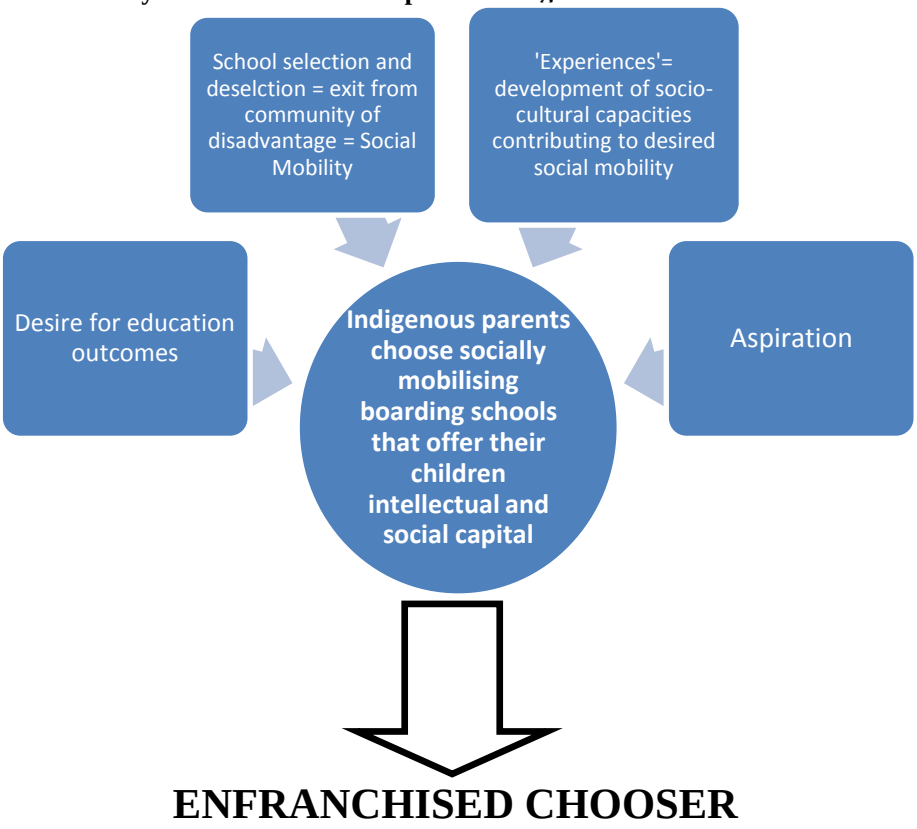
engagement with a Eurocentric model of education with its emphasis on white, middle-class values (Burgess & Berwick, 2009).

The Indigenous parents are unique choosers in that they have middle-class financial resources (government funding) but possess the cultural and social capital characteristic of low-SES people. This therefore permits the proposition of a new school chooser typology, thus adding to the literature on parental choice of school. The new chooser typology, entitled the 'Enfranchised Chooser', has the following characteristics:

- Cultural/ethnic minority
- Socio-economic disadvantage (low-SES)
- Access to governmental and/or private funding which facilitates increased school choice
- Emphasises cultural and intellectual capital, and social mobility in the school choice process.

In summary, the Indigenous parent data suggest that these Indigenous parents are a unique group of choosers not apparent in the literature. While there is some intersection of chooser modalities evident in the data, there is sufficient divergence to propose that Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas chose a boarding school for their child in ways which transcended their social class position. Quality education, outcomes and the socially mobilising effect of same are key dimensions of their construction of their understanding of education which in turn informed their engagement in the choice process (Spera et al., 2009). That is, the imperative of their choosing was clearly instrumental-academic (Freund, 2001). They sought schools that offer their children opportunities not readily available in their local communities, and actively avoided schools that may have a socially demobilising effect on their children. This enables the proposition of a new school 'chooser' typology, the Enfranchised Chooser. A summary of Indigenous parental choice of boarding school is presented in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1Summary of Theoretical Development: Indigenous Parental Choice of Boarding School



8.2.2 Non-Indigenous Contention: Non-Indigenous parents select boarding schools that will prepare their children for the post-school world.

Access to 'experiences' is vital

The non-Indigenous parents in this study had a strong desire for access to 'good' schools. This notion of access was broadly defined in two ways: access to education and access to experiences. The latter was given most emphasis, with the former not given the same level of explicit attention by the participants.

For these participants, the quality of education with respect to teaching, learning and academic outcomes was less important than exposure to experiences afforded to their child by the school (Independent Schools Queensland, 2011). There was an evident desire by participants to have their children experience things that would not ordinarily be available to them living at home. This desire tended to supersede the expectation for good academic outcomes: "there's just so much more to it than just academic results" (Louise, 1on1 NISSI, l.39).

The boarding school environment offered their children opportunities to experience the complexities of peer-to-peer interaction, problem solving, independence and to develop a sense of responsibility. For these parents, their rurality and/or remoteness limited their children's scope for personal and social development (King & Bond, 2000; Stevens, 1995). Moreover, these participants selected the school which was rurally situated in order to offer their children some degree of contextual familiarity. They perceived that this familiarity better facilitated their transition to boarding school. All of this was part of the broader project of social preparation of their child for the post-school world:

> …at some point we all know that children have to learn to live in the world and that's the best way she can get that. Because we're isolated you can't give children all of those experiences unless they go to boarding school (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.149-152).

Therefore, these parents were cognisant of the limitations of their home contexts and made choices for their children that were perceived to 'broaden their horizons' (Principal 1, l.52), develop them personally and equip them with all the tools necessary to engage in adult life:

> It's already showing with [child's name], you know gaining the confidence to be with other people. I mean she went out and got a job at Christmas time and worked through at Kmart, got herself ready, I mean I wasn't there to help her out with anything. She'd stay with her grandmother and aunty. And you know I definitely think it's a positive experience for her... (Laura, NISSI, ll.210-213).

Another of the key consideration of the non-Indigenous participants was the capacity of the school to offer extra-educational experiences to their children. Again, such experiences were not possible at home and boarding school enabled their children to engage in activities that would have been otherwise unavailable to them. This was another offering which contributed to their child's social and personal development. These parents were seeking opportunities for their children that would enrich their lives.

In essence, the non-Indigenous data suggest that these parents desired non-educational goods for their children from the selected school. The data also suggest that these participants did not consider important or took for granted the academic dimension of their child's education.

Indeed, there is a conspicuous absence of consistent references to the relationship between school education, employment and/or further education. While the literature suggests that academic outcomes of students are not a core criterion of choice (Independent Schools Queensland, 2011; Bosetti, 2004; Bagley et. al, 2001; Weston, 1998; Coldron & Boulton, 1991,), it nevertheless remains a feature of the school choice process. However, the evidence suggests that these parents engaged in a form of child matching whereby they emphasised the intrinsic/personal elements of the school (Bagley at. al, 2001). This is a feature of the privileged/skilled, middle-class chooser in the literature (Ball et al., 1996) though the vast majority of the participants did not have extensive wealth, nor were they highly educated. However, what differentiated these participants from the privileged/skilled chooser was their emphasis on non-educational outcomes of school. Social preparation for the post-school world was the desired outcome of their child's schooling, but this preparation had as a key dimension their capacity to "cope" with the outside world vis-a-vis the relative isolation of their home contexts. This then speaks to the desire of parents for their child's personal security and happiness (Reay & Ball, 1998), which is further elucidated in the following section.

School must be a place of 'safety'

The data indicated that parents notion of 'safety' was multivalent. Parents were clear that the physical, psychological and emotional safety of their children were an important aspect of their decision-making around boarding school. Some participants chose schools which offered familiarity to their children by way of surrounds (i.e. rural location) as well as the composition of students at the school. Parents sought out schools where there were other children with similar backgrounds and interests: "Also I think..... being with their friends.... not necessarily their best friends or whatever, but families from the same area or lifestyle" (Non-Indigenous Parent Focus Group, l.51). These participants desired schools that were composed of students 'like us', pointing towards the importance placed by parents on the emotional wellbeing and social connectedness of their children as opposed to social class maintenance and reproduction as reflected in the literature (Collins & Snell, 2000; Gorman, 1998). For these participants, familiarity equated to both physical and psychological security and safety, and this in turn enabled their children to experience social connection and engagement (Reay & Ball, 1998).

Moreover, these parents emphasised the happiness of their child. A child's happiness as part of the choice process is a feature of the literature (Coldron & Boulton, 1991; English, 2004; Independent Schools Queensland, 2007). The 'happiness' of the participants' children was a corollary of their notion of safety and it was evident in the data that 'happiness' contributed to their child's emotional safety. This aspect was emphasised over and above academic aspirations:

> I mean you send your children to boarding school and you have two main focuses. You want your children to be happy and you want them to be safe. If that can't work out... Not every kid's good academically and not every kid is going to play top grade sport. But if they are happy then they lead a good life; if they are safe then as a parent and if the boarding school is taking on the role of protecting your children then they're the two main focuses (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.233-238).

School 'Chooser' Typologies: The Rural/Remote 'Chooser'

The literature asserts that middle-class parents are future-orientated in their decision-making and work to ensure the long-term happiness of their children. Working-class families look to the shorter term happiness of their child and do not actively seek out schools which socially mobilise their children (Bagley et al., 2001; Schneider et al., 1998). Therefore, a 'good' school for these participants was one that enabled their children to be happy and to lead a good life. There was little requirement for their child to attain certain social goods, but the personal security of the child was favoured (Taylor Haynes et. al, 2010; Coldron & Boulton, 1991).

These parent participants demonstrated little interest in securing social class positions for their children; indeed, they understood that success at school was measured by the extent to which their children were personally content, fulfilled and happy. Such an attitude is consistent with a working-class approach to school choice engagement (Connell, 2003), yet these participants cannot be defined strictly into these class stratifications. Indeed, the majority of these participants would have been considered 'old middle class' on account of their ownership of rural property (Campbell, 2007, p.1). Prior to the education reforms of the 1960s, the members of the 'old middle class' had no need for formal education as their livelihoods were conferred on them by their parents. However, with the discernible 'urban

drift' and declining numbers of young people operating rural properties, this is no longer as relevant as it once was (Alston & Kent, 2006).

Elements of both assertions of the literature in the area of social class and choice are apparent in the non-Indigenous parent data. While these participants certainly emphasised the happiness of their child at school (working-class characteristic), the future and long-term contentment of their children were also a feature (middle-class characteristic). What is clear is that these parents did not make comments in relation to their own personal desires or aspirations for their children's careers and/or further education, nor did they cite the academic capacities or records of the selected school.

Thus, these parents did not express the same level of concern for their own child's civic success as they did for their children's social preparedness for the post-school world; a world in which they desired them to 'happy'. The school had a role in engendering this happiness, as well as providing their children with experiences that would develop them personally and socially, and would thus establish a foundation from which they could operate successfully in the post-school world. This points to an emphasis on the wellbeing of the child and while not readily identifiable as closely related to socio-economic participation and success, there is evidence to suggest that there is a relationship (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002). It is suggested that the non-Indigenous parent participants' emphasis on the wellbeing of their children was directly related to their child's success in the post-school world.

Evident in the data is that the mechanisms of social class cease to operate in the [boarding] school choice process for non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas. There was a degree of class interfusion whereby it was observed that parents living in these areas constructed understandings of education and quality schools which were a response to their geographic context and the breadth of opportunity available to their children. It was a personal development dimension, rather than social class position, which was the clearest feature of their engagement in the school choice process. Indeed, this chooser modality is consistent with low-SES families which is characterised by the socialisation of children according to the opportunities available to them (Bodovski, 2010). Fewer meaningful opportunities for their children in their home contexts shaped the way they chose a boarding school, which would, more broadly, contribute to the socialisation of their children. Nevertheless, there were features of their school choosing which were identifiable along class

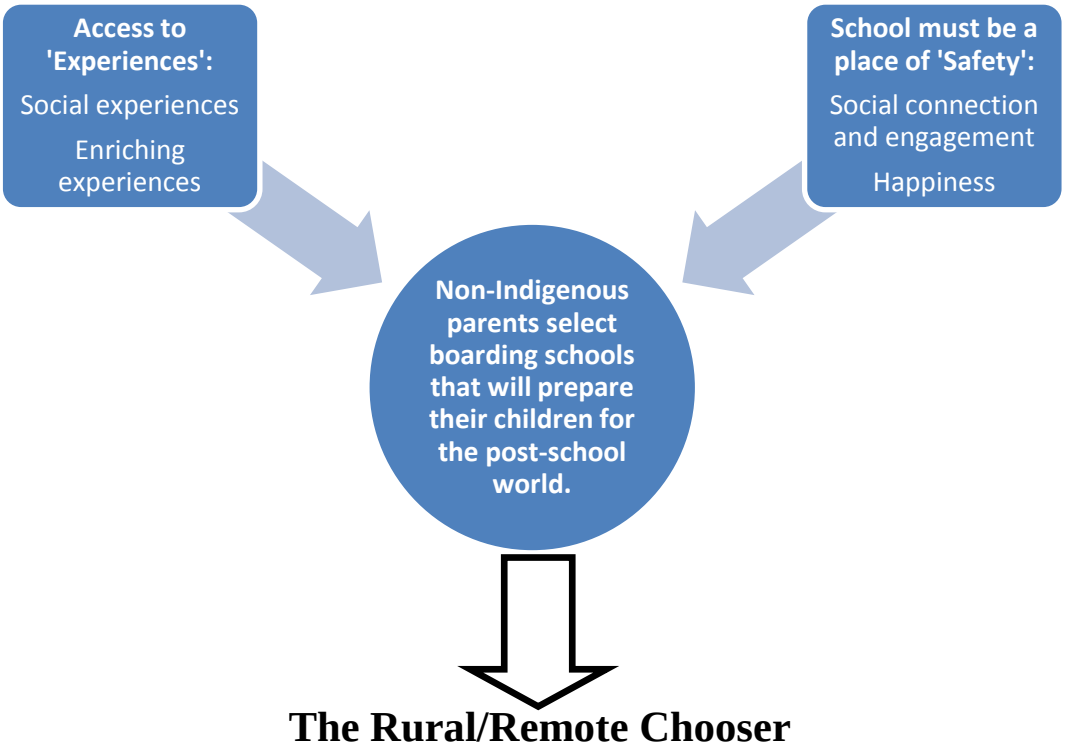
lines, but there was no consistent commitment of particular social class thinking, nor could these parents be definitively classified into a specific chooser type as elucidated in the literature (Ball et. al, 1996).

This therefore permits the proposition of a new school chooser typology which adds to the current set of typologies apparent in the literature (Ball et al., 1996). These non-Indigenous participants represent a unique group of school choosers on account of their geographic location (rural/remote). Their geography transforms and, at times, suspends the operations of social class during the school choice process as elucidated in the literature. This new school chooser typology, entitled the Rural/Remote Chooser, has the following characteristics:

- White and/or non-minority
- Rurally and/or remotely located
- Possess the financial capital to enable consideration of a boarding school choice
- Limited secondary education options locally

A summary of non-Indigenous parental choice of boarding school is presented in Figure 8.2

Figure 8.2 Summary of Theoretical Development: Non-Indigenous Parental Choice of Boarding School



8.2.3 Boarding School Choice – A Summary of the Divergences between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Parents

There are clear divergences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants of this study in terms of how they select boarding schools for their children. The Indigenous parents were focused on schools that could socially mobilise their children by offering them access to quality education. These parents, most of who resided in communities of distinct disadvantage, clearly expressed their aspirations for their children. While they wanted their children to have an experience that was not available to them at home, these were peripheral to their desire to have social advantages conferred on their child through access to quality education. It was this opportunity for education that would enable them to mobilise beyond the disadvantaged circumstances of their respective communities and allow them to engage with 'mainstream' society and the dominant White culture. These parents did not underestimate the educational possibilities of their children and they engaged in the school choice process in a way which was discordant with their SES (Robert, 2010).

The non-Indigenous parent data clearly suggested that these parents also sought 'good' schools with a desire that their children be granted access to experiences otherwise unavailable to them. While a quality education was evident in the data, this was inferior to the requirement that the selected school offer their children both extra-educational and personal development experiences. The data indicated that the geographic isolation of these families played a key part in what they valued in the boarding school choice process. It was less about good academic outcomes (and subsequent tertiary entrance/employment), and more about socially preparing their children for the post- school, adult world. These parents wanted their children to be offered experiences which would enable them to be civically prepared. Thus, for these participants, there was a strong personal development dimension to their school choosing, whereby their children would be 'happy' and socially connected. This was facilitated by a school environment which offered their children physical, psychological and emotional safety. They achieved this by selecting a school which offered contextual familiarity to their children, as well as one which enabled their children to develop the qualities required for positive adulthood. These non-Indigenous parents were hopeful that the school they selected for their children would establish in them the foundations for leading a good life.

8.3 Areas of Convergence

8.3.1 Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents' definitions of 'quality' schools are supported through their interaction with the 'grapevine'.

The Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents of this study sought to make informed choices about the boarding school selected for their child. In doing so, these participants sought out a variety of sources of information during the school choice process. It was clear from the data that these sources were prioritised in terms of the cogency of the information provided by these sources.

Both sets of parents consulted "cold knowledge" (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p.377) sources, which included informational materials provided by the school as well as information offered by school personnel. The participants initiated contact with *Framed* schools and cited conversations with the Principal as helpful. However, these sources of information were not given the highest priority in the choice making process. One non-Indigenous participant noted that the information provided by the school was "...very overwhelming" (Non-Indigenous Parents Focus Group, l.658) while another suggested that the school prospectus was a "skite magazine" (Non-Indigenous Parents Focus Group, l.656). This suspicion of and lack of priority given to 'cold knowledge' information is consistent with the literature (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Oplatka, 2007).

Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants engaged with informal networks of information that provided them with the most cogent sources of information about *Framed* schools. This is termed in the literature as "hot knowledge" where information is transmitted along the "grapevine" (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p.377) and points to the information sought by parent choosers that provides a useful degree of insight into a school's under-life.

Engagement with the 'grapevine': Indigenous parents

For Indigenous participants, their information networks were closed, in that they were confined to "other parents and families" (Indigenous Parents Focus Group, l.163). The type of information they were seeking was around what the school was able to offer their children in terms of activities which were unavailable to them in their local community. Intriguingly,

the participants did not seek out information around the academic qualities of the school, nor did they question their networks about the capacity of *Framed* schools to provide post-school opportunities (employment and further education) for their children. Indeed, there was no evidence in the data to suggest that Indigenous parents sought this information from their networks. What was most important for them was the ability of the school to expose their children to experiences that would have otherwise been unavailable in their home communities. They were seeking confirmation and reassurance that this would be the case. This suggests that the Indigenous participants had constructed their notion of 'quality' schools prior to engaging with their information networks, rather than the network influencing this construction (Holme, 2002). This also suggests that Indigenous parents had previously determined and perhaps intuitively understood that the *Framed* schools would offer their children educational advantages on account of its perceived quality (Ahmavaara & Houston, 2007; Spera et al., 2009). As a result, Indigenous parents did not require this kind of information from the 'grapevine'.

Also providing selection and deselection confirmation for Indigenous parents were the experiences of family members at *Framed* schools. It was these same family members which constituted the majority of the information network ('grapevine'). Thus there was close relationship between family member experiences and school selection. This vicarious experience (Bast & Walberg, 2004) was a most determinative source of information and was used to confirm and affirm their selection, rather than define their notion of a 'good' school. Again, this confirms that these Indigenous parents engaged with the 'grapevine' with a predefined notion of what a quality school was and looked like; they had an appreciation of the schools available to them and asked questions of the network in order to confirm their selection and to determine deselection. Indeed, as illustrative of this, when the 'grapevine' issued something negative about the selected school, these participants stated that they would investigate this further: "I'd probably still do my own research. Check it out for myself again" (Wilma, 1on1 NISSI, l.150). Therefore, for Indigenous parents, the network functioned efficiently when it reported positively about *Framed* schools, but needed to be filtered when it reported negatively about same.

However, the 'grapevine' also functioned as a way of eliminating certain schools by way of negative reporting. This reinforces the assertion that Indigenous parents engaged with the 'grapevine' and sought out 'hot knowledge' after they had constructed their notion of quality

schools. It is clear that these parents made decisions about the choice of school based upon the grapevine (Baker, 1991; DEST, 2007; Goh, 2007; Groundwater-Smith, 2001), but only insofar as it offered additional information to that which they have already gleaned from other sources and, most importantly, supported their constructed understanding of a 'good' school (Holme, 2002). Moreover, the 'grapevine' also served the purpose of assisting deselection by offering the Indigenous participants information which was consistent with their pre-constructed notion of a 'bad' school. While this function of the 'grapevine' is apparent in the literature, it is asserted that this particular type of 'grapevine' access is consistent with middle-class parents (Ball et. al , 1996; Ball & Vincent, 1998).

Engagement with the 'grapevine': Non-Indigenous parents

The 'grapevine' for non-Indigenous parents consisted of three main informational groupings. The first consisted of parents who had selected or were in the process of selecting a boarding school for their child. These networks emerged from a common educational setting, like School of the Air, for example. The second and third sources of information were family and friends associated with the *Distinguished* school, and key people in rural feeder towns. The non-Indigenous participants sought information that gave them an otherwise undiscoverable insight into the research site school. They were seeking information about the under-life of the school (Ball & Vincent, 1998) as this comment from Laura illustrates: "For example, I heard of one parent who had pulled her child out of a boarding school mostly because of the bullying issue that they hadn't dealt with" (Laura, 1on1, NISSI, ll.95-96). This also suggests that the 'grapevine' enabled the non-Indigenous participants to confirm their deselections as well as their selections through vicarious experience (Bast & Walberg, 2004).

For the non-Indigenous participants, the 'grapevine' was utilised to confirm particular choices, as opposed to framing particular schools (Ball et.a l, 1996). As one participant noted, the information received from the 'grapevine' did not present any "red flags" (Non-Indigenous Parent Focus Group, l.623). Therefore, the non-Indigenous participants were not seeking specific items of information (i.e. academic record, behavioural information), but rather desired to elicit general information which would either confirm or bring in to question the selected school. Not dissimilar to the Indigenous participants, the filtering of the 'grapevine' was required when it reported negatively. Moreover, the non-Indigenous parents suggested that they would investigate these negative reports further in order to establish the

validity of the information. This suggests that these non-Indigenous parents approached the 'grapevine' with a particular school in mind and sought information with a high degree of specificity.

Nuanced engagement with the 'grapevine'

While Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants desired access to 'hot knowledge' via the 'grapevine' the nature and function of their information networks were different. Indigenous participants' networks essentially consisted of close family and relatives, extending to members of community. These participants utilised the 'grapevine' as their primary source of information about *Framed* schools, and was the most influential in their decision-making. However, while the 'grapevine' assisted the Indigenous participants in their choice making, they engaged with the information with a previously constructed notion of 'good' and 'bad' schools (Lette et al., 2009). The data suggests that the Indigenous participants engaged with the 'grapevine' with particular schools in mind in order to proceed to definitive choice-making and de-selection. Indigenous parents were specific about the kinds of information they were seeking from their networks. For instance, information about the capacity of the school to offer their children extra-curricular experiences and access to activities which would personally develop their children was desirable. The experiences (both negative and positive) of family members were particularly powerful, such that it could result in school deselection:

> Well it changed my mind about [school name]... We knew [school name] before and it was a no-no for me... she had cousins going to [school name] in 2003, and I said I don't want it happening to her (Madison, 1ono1, ISSI, ll.96-99).

Non-Indigenous parents engaged with the 'grapevine' at a different stage of the choice process to Indigenous participants. The non-Indigenous parents had already distinguished schools from one another and sought out information specific to a particular school. However, they did not seek specific information about the selected school, but instead sought only general information which either confirmed the school as 'good' or raised doubts (Ball et al., 1996; Ball & Vincent, 1998). For these participants, the 'grapevine' was not a wholly trustworthy source of information and negative information gleaned from their networks needed to be validated through further investigation. Thus the 'grapevine' was not used for

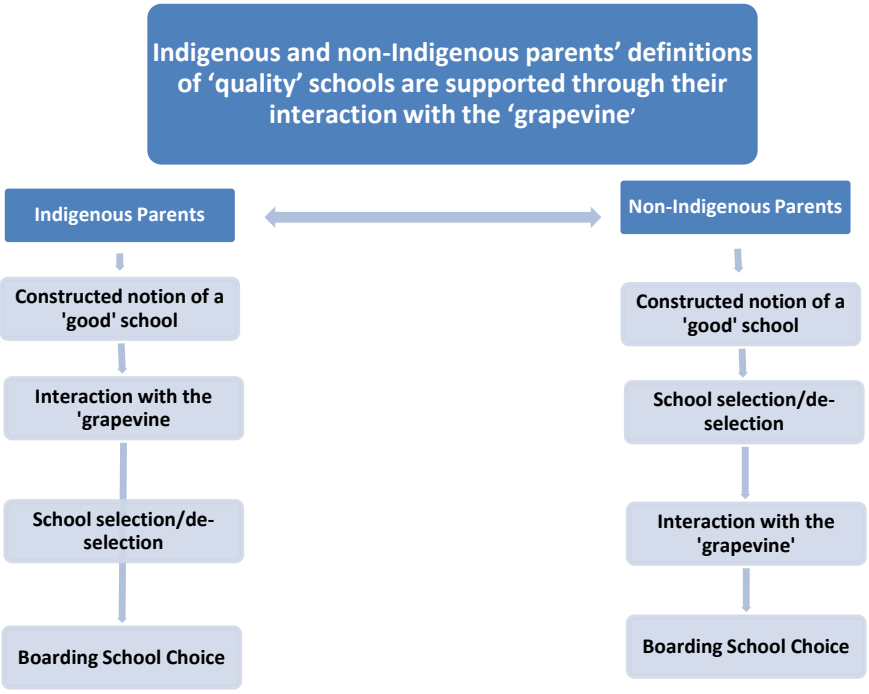
the purposes of school deselection. Further to this, there was evidence of a hierarchy of source validity in the non-Indigenous parent data whereby those who offered information and had high status in the social network could be trusted (Holme, 2002). Conversely, the information offered by those of low status needed to be questioned: "Depends who it was. And if I knew the child" (Frances, Non-Indigenous Parent Focus Group, l.630).

Intersections of Indigenous and non-Indigenous engagement with the 'grapevine'

Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engaged with the 'grapevine' in order to seek information that would inform their selection of school for their child. It is evident that the information networks of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents were different, with the former consisting of family members and members of the local community, and the latter demonstrating a broader cross-section of individuals and groups. Nonetheless, the information gleaned from these networks offered parents important insights into selected schools. Moreover, Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents did not approach the 'grapevine' as a singularly reliable information source. Indeed, both sets of parents would seek to validate negative reporting by the 'grapevine'. However, Indigenous parents were more likely to utilise this information to deselect particular schools.

It is suggested in the literature that parents utilise the 'grapevine' to make their choice of school (Baker, 1991; DEST, 2007; English, 2006; Freund, 2001; Hunter, 1991; Independent Schools Queensland, 2007; Jackson & Bisset, 2005). This implies that parents use their social networks to construct their understanding of a 'quality' school. The data from this study adds to this body of literature by suggesting that Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas engaged with the 'grapevine' with a constructed notion of a 'good' school. While Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents sought out the 'grapevine' at different stages of the school choice process and for different reasons, what is clear is that the information received from the 'grapevine' was most cogent where there was intersection with their own defined understandings of a 'quality' school. This therefore permits the proposition of a more nuanced function of 'hot knowledge' and the 'grapevine' for parents living in rural/remote locations.

Figure 8.3 Summary of Theoretical Development: Rural/Remote Parent Engagement with the 'grapevine'



8.3.2 The transmission of universal values, rather than parochial religion, is a feature of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents' selection of boarding school.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents in this study expressed in a variety of ways that the culture of the selected Catholic school would enable the transmission of useful values which would shape the personal development of their children. For most of the participants, these values were non-denominational and most implied that these values were universal and/or Christian in nature.

The data suggest that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents considered important that the school they selected for their child would offer a school culture that would inculcate particular values which could have life-long implications for their children. This was articulated in a variety of ways, but was crystallised in comments such as "...good grounding" (Barb, 1on1 NISSI, l.43) and "...just knowing fundamentally, the rights and wrongs..." (Chris, 1on1 ISSI, l.117). This was a most valued dimension of what the school could offer their children and, indeed, was considered an enhancement of the personal development opportunities afforded to their children: "Believe it or not, but your school tends to allow

students to grow in themselves without, I don't know how to put this, but without holding a big stick over their heads" (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, ll.169-171). Further, this inculcation of values was understood to contribute to their child's civic preparedness and contributed to their children becoming productive adults in the post-school world (Dronkers, 1995; Maddaus, 1990). It could be suggested that the Catholic school offered the participants' children opportunities for social capital (Ahmavaara & Houston, 2007; Coleman, 1988; Robert, 2010).

Moreover, there was the implication that exposure to the Catholic school culture, insofar as it offered an experience of faith and values transmission, had an inoculating effect on their children, whereby they would be afforded protection from some of the hardships of adult life: "I want my kids to think for themselves, and I also know that when the chips are down that strong faith and support then... I get so concerned is that why the suicide rate is increasing, because people have nothing on which to hang" (Angela, 1on1 NISSI, ll.227-229). This was also articulated in the Indigenous data: "... because I reckon the way today is, you need that in the kids, to instil some religion in them" (Dawn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.2990-291).

What was evident from the data was that denominational religion was unimportant in the selection of school for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents (Flynn, 1993; Freund, 2001; Kennedy et al., 2011; Sultmann et al., 2003). Both sets of parents made it clear that the Catholic affiliation and identity of the school was not strongly considered in their choice of school. Indeed there was ambivalence on the part of parents towards Catholic religious education and liturgical participation. Parents expressed their child's exposure to religious experiences (liturgy, prayer and other ritual) as useful experiences, but there was vagueness around how they understood their child would benefit: "It's hard to know if they've benefitted. But I don't think it did them any harm" (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, l.190).

In addition, some parents were able to suspend their own Christian denominational affiliation: "Whatever she can get, well the bible. The King James Bible version is our church as well as Catholics... no I think that's good for her, there's some good values" (Claire, 1on1 ISSI, ll.264-266).

There is a religious relativism which runs through the data, whereby parents were able to set aside their own personal religious affiliations and doctrinal conflicts in order to prioritise other dimensions of the choice process (Flynn & Mok, 2002). This suggests that parents were

more focused on the moral dimension that the Catholic school could offer their children, as opposed to religiosity (Dronkers, 1995; Oplatka, 2007). This is reinforced in the data where Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents asserted that, regardless of their own Christian affiliation, they wanted a 'religious' school for their child because it was considered that these schools offered their children worthwhile education in values:

> Interviewer: Why did you select a Catholic school?
> Dawn: It would have been Anglican or Catholic
> Chris: I have a grandmother. She comes from the dormitory system, the mission days. They used to say, even though it was hard, it instilled in them, you know some things like respect... having some respect for each other, having some respect for authority, humility, family stuff, sharing among your family...(1on1 ISSI, ll.293-298).

For these parents, the school they selected acted as an agent of the family and it was desired by parents that the values of the home were conspicuous in the operation of the school (Coleman, 1988; DEST, 2005; Wilkins, 2011).

The data further reinforced the assertion that Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents sought out schools where there was consonance between the values of the home and those espoused by the school (Dronkers, 1995; Maddaus, 1990). One parent clearly articulated this when she stated: "We want to know what we have taught them is carried on through the day" (Non-Indigenous Parent Focus Group, l.741). However, there was some variability in the data around the motivations of parents' choice of a Catholic school. For some, there was no question about a Catholic school choice. For most of these participants, this choice was less about 'learning the faith' than it was morally motivated: "The moral upbringing. That's terribly important to me. I am quite at odds with the modern day thinking and the way relationships happen these days..." (Angela, 1on1 NISSI, ll.222-224). This was echoed in the Indigenous parent data where there was a clear morally motivated desire to have their children exposed to certain values: "It's like the values they get from the Church...they come out and they have some values and some morals and some sort of standing on how they should live" (Lyn, 1on1 ISSI, ll.184-186). For others, it was a sense of the familiar, in that they had an understanding of Catholic culture, and it was a matter of "what you know. Stay with what you know" (Barb, 1on1 NISSI, ll.160-161). These intimations are consistent with the literature which posits that Catholic schools offer parents the benefits of a school climate

(sometimes expressed as "feel") where the moral self can be cultivated (McLaughlin, 2000b) and their children can participate in a functional community (Coleman, 1988)

Parents expressed hopefulness that their child would be held in good stead by their exposure to certain universal values at school. However, there was no similar expression in relation to their child's post-school participation in the life of their particular denomination. One parent expressed this by suggesting that religion is a 'life tool' of sorts that can be accessed by their children if required in later life: "I think all children need an exposure to religion because they have the opportunity later in life if they need it it's there" (Louise, 1on1 NISSI, ll.121-122). Another participant implied that the experience of religion (as opposed to religious experience) was a useful life experience that would enable her son access to "... christening things, and wedding things and things like that..." (Barb, 1on1 NISSI, ll.178-179). This reinforces the assertion that the Catholic school offered the participants' children something other than religiosity, namely a form of cultural and social capital (Robert, 2010; Spera et al., 2009).

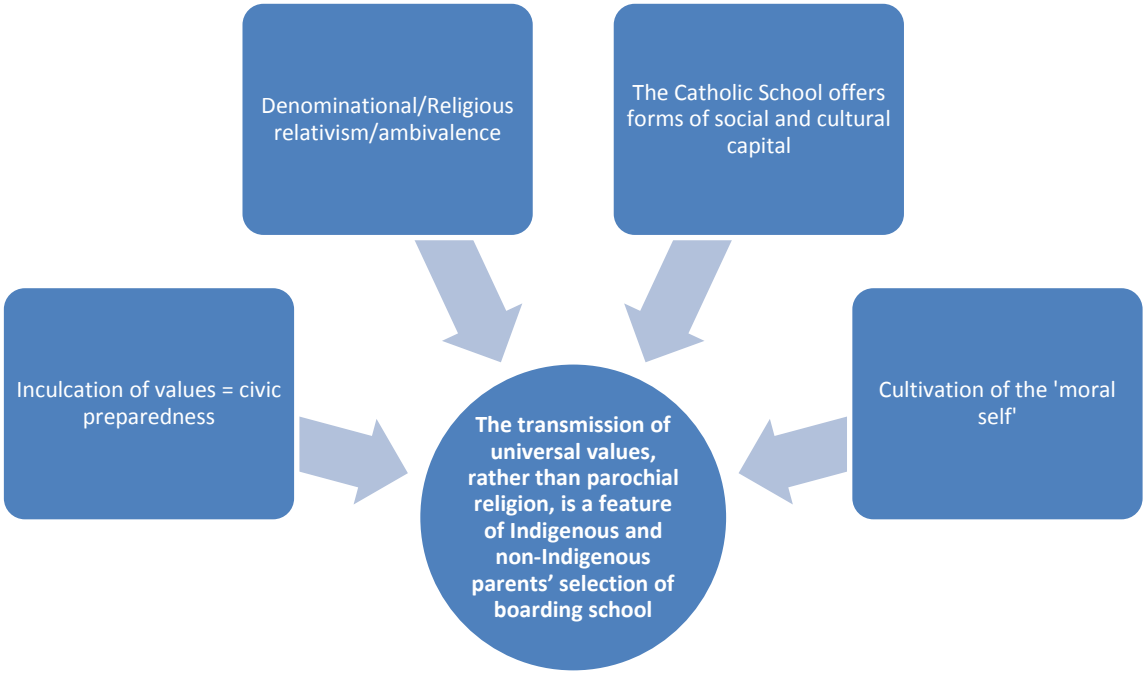
It is clear that parents in this study did not place any degree of importance on the denominational identity of the selected school. While it could be suggested that religion is a taken-for-granted aspect of the school choice process (Flynn, 1993), there is evidence to assert that morality, rather than religiosity, was most significant to these parents. Indeed, this is most apparent in the data where parents set aside potential denominational conflict in order to identify commonalities and congruencies in relation to values. It was the transmission of values to their children that Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents most readily identified as the hopeful outcome of their child's participation in a Catholic school. This is consistent with the assertion that parents desire that their children obtain self-goods (Freund, 2001). Moreover, there are implications in the data that the exposure to religion has an indecipherable impact on their children which may have an immunizing effect against the challenges of post-school life. Indeed, this may be related to an inherent understanding by parents that the Catholic school afforded their children social and cultural capital (Robert, 2010; Wilkins, 2011), which contributed to their civic preparedness (Flynn, 1993).

Thus, the parents in this study did not select the Catholic school for its evangelical culture, where it is understood that the purpose of the Catholic school is to proclaim the kingdom of

God (McLaughlin, 2000a). However, they were selecting into another aspect of the Catholic school culture which promotes the integrated life and the formation of the moral self (McLaughlin, 2000b). For these parents, the Catholic school performed the same civic function as other schools, but this was "configured in the perspective of the Catholic faith" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 16) which provided these parents with additional benefits. That is, these parents considered, in varying degrees, the culture of the school insofar as they expressed their awareness of the values and beliefs of the school [organisation] into which they immersed their child (Geertz, 1993; O'Donnell, 2001).

A summary of parental choice of Catholic boarding school is presented in Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4 Summary of Theoretical Development: Parental Choice of Catholic Boarding School



8.3.3 There is a racial dimension to the boarding school choice process for Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents.

The Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents of this study engaged in racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process. However, while there are clear intersections in the racialised thinking of both sets of participants, there are evident nuanced differences between the ways in which non-Indigenous and Indigenous parents engaged in racialised thinking. Therefore, discussion of the data will be specific to each set of parent participants in order to

highlight these nuanced differences. The ways in which this racial dimension intersects for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents is discussed in the final section.

8.3.3.1 Non-Indigenous parents

The racialised dimension of the non-Indigenous parents' boarding school choice can be categorised into three areas of thinking: erosion of school culture; advantage/disadvantage; and decline in 'quality' education.

Indigeneity and the erosion of school culture

The enrolment of Indigenous students directly resulted in the erosion of school culture for the non-Indigenous parent participants. This particular perspective was predicated on the participants' personal views about Indigenous people generally. For the most part, participants explicitly stated their negative perceptions of Indigenous people which helped to shape their racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process: "[Indigenous people] Caused a lot of problems, they were hard to live with, I'm sure you know what they're like" (Betty, 1on1 NISSI, ll.186-187). For these parents, the enrolment of Indigenous people was concomitant with problems associated with behaviour and a general decline in students' demeanour (Evans & Schwab, 1995; Sultmann et al., 2003).

This apparent erosion of school culture represented a threat to their children, and the safety of their children was often raised by the participants: "A girl took a pair of scissors and threatened another girl, but nothing was actually done about that... I was concerned for [daughter's name] safety" (Angela, 1on1 NISSI, ll.244-245). It is clear in the data that this erosion of school culture as a result of Indigenous enrolment threatened the safety and happiness of their children: "Well he grew up in [name of township] and there was a lot of Indigenous kids there and they were always the worst bullies. They were always the ones to do all the fighting and all that" (Jennifer, 1on1 NISSI, ll.211-213).

While all the non-Indigenous parent participants did not deselect the research site school on the basis of the level of its Indigenous enrolment, it was considered during the choice process. Furthermore, for these participants, any increase above their personal tolerable levels

of Indigenous enrolment would prompt them to reconsider their selection. One parent stated that she believed the research site school had "the pick of the bunch" (Pat, 1on1 NISSI, l.198), and it was therefore a non-issue. This also implied that there were undesirable Indigenous enrolments that the school had managed to avoid. This suggests that there was a tipping point of Indigenous enrolment which, when reached, influenced the way these parents think about the selected school (Brama, 2005). This racial tipping point is a focus, which places on the periphery other indicators of school quality where, all things being equal, might prompt a parent to think differently (Saporito & Lareau, 1999). That is, a number of the non-Indigenous participants' responses indicated that the racial composition of the school to a certain level would result in deselection of the selected school despite other areas of the school that demonstrated quality. 'Quality' in this instance may refer to that which would allow these parents to avoid perceived social disadvantages (de Plevitz, 2007)

Indigenous advantage = Non-Indigenous disadvantage

There was a perception among a number of the non-Indigenous parents that the Indigenous students enrolled at the school were advantaged over their own children. This advantage may have come to the Indigenous students in the form of specialised programs, differential treatment in behavioural matters, or the ways that Indigenous people were funded to support their education. What was clear in the data was that this perceived preferential treatment was a source of resentment: "... they can get resentful because they know that their friends who live in the same area get flown home every holiday because they're on Abstudy" (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, ll.212-213).

It was also evident that these parent participants felt that their own children experienced disadvantage because they were not allowed access to the same programs and resources. The support offered to Indigenous students was considered to be misplaced and not appropriate for 'mainstream' schools. This support was viewed as establishing "two lots of rules" (Non-Indigenous Parent Focus Group, l.970): one set for non-Indigenous students and another which advantaged Indigenous students such that the 'mainstream' rules did not apply to them: "If you're non-Indigenous and you're on your second or third offence, you're out of the school. If you're Indigenous and you're on your 14th offence you're still at the school somehow" (Non-Indigenous Parent Focus Group, ll.971-973).

This perception of an inverse relationship of Indigenous advantage-non-Indigenous disadvantage was grounded in these parents' experiences of hardship and sacrifice. For many of these parents, gaining a living from agriculture, particular in circumstances of drought and flood, meant that their children "only get what mum and dad can give them" (Sandy, 1on1 NISSI, l.214). The experience of having limited educational offerings for their child except for relatively expensive boarding schools and having to pay school fees, alongside an enduring perception that Indigenous people were being subsidised, heightened their notion of disadvantage. However, there was either a failure to recognise or a misunderstanding of the financial support offered to non-Indigenous people in similar circumstances (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008a; Pedersen et al., 2006); and it is this which validated their discontent.

Indigeneity and the decline in school 'quality'

The quality of the school was also considered to be at the mercy of Indigenous enrolment. Parents contended that with increases in Indigenous student enrolments came a decline in the quality of education afforded their children. The notion of 'quality' was variously understood by parents and articulated in a variety of ways. For some, the decline in quality was most evident in student behaviour. It was suggested by one parent that "the behaviour was allowed to go way down with... the more Indigenous children that came... the loudness, the lack of dress, the yelling out" (Non-Indigenous Parent Focus Group, ll.907-908; 912). This was also expressed in terms of values; that Indigenous students would naturally introduce something of a moral debasement which might have adverse effects: "...just their lack of respect for adults. You know they just don't seem to have respect... and they just treat you, like you're dirt, so to speak" (Mal, 1on1 NISSI, ll.200-203). For others there was the implication that Indigenous enrolment reduced the quality of instruction, with one parent stating "... my kids are going to stay behind because of that" (Laura, 1on1 NISSI, 262-263).

Racialised Thinking and Choice of School: Non-Indigenous Parents

While all of the participants selected the research site school for their children despite the presence of Indigenous enrolments, it can be asserted that there was a racial dimension to their thinking. Indeed, some did suggest that they would withdraw their enrolment if the numbers of Indigenous students at the school increased, and this was closely related to school quality. For some, this would be the result based on an increase of pure numbers; for others it

was a combination of numbers and the emergence of certain undesirable qualities. This reasserts the notion of a 'tipping point' of Indigenous enrolment which would prompt reconsideration of their choice of school. The data suggest that this 'tipping point' represented a decline in the capacity of the school to offer parents the kinds of social reproduction they desire (Schaverien, 2004; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008; Theobold, 2005). This social reproduction is best achieved in schools where there is race narrowing (Gulson, 2006) and is an important indicator of school quality.

The racial dimension of the non-Indigenous parents' boarding school choice was further highlighted by the Principal participants. It was clear that they had adopted enrolment strategies which were a direct response to this racialised choosing. The Principal participants suggested that there needed to be careful discernment of enrolments to ensure that the racial balance of the school was not disrupted. To do so would have a deleterious effect on the school's enrolment: "...if you're not very, very careful you can turn it into an Indigenous boarding school and that's certainly not what we want" (Principal 2, ll.209-211). There was a perception – at times both implicit and explicit – that judicious enrolment of Indigenous students was required in order to attract families that were looking for schools that would enable social class maintenance: "...And if you go to school with black kids you're going to be diminished in the social rung" (Principal 1, l.313). This suggests that the school, as an institution, understood itself to be a place that could offer parents opportunities for social reproduction for their children, and in order to achieve an environment conducive to this required careful consideration of student demographics. As a result, there is a reinforcement of the contention that cultural homogeneity is a proxy for school quality (Karsten et al., 2003; Ladd & Fiske, 2001): "And because [research site school] has Indigenous kids, that diminishes you on the social scale" (Principal 1, l.379).

8.3.3.2 Indigenous Parents

The data suggests that Indigenous parents of this study exercised racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process. It was clear that these participants considered schools with large numbers of Indigenous students, including Indigenous schools and colleges, as deficient in a number of areas.

For some parents, the greater the number of Indigenous students, the greater the threat to their children's safety: "bullying, fighting, student against student...That's how it is" (Ted, 1on1 ISSI, ll.308-309). This was a concern for parents insomuch as it affected the quality of education, and was often expressed with reference to unsatisfactory living and learning environments: "It can sometimes be a negative, all Indigenous" (Sam, 1on1 ISSI, l.306). For other parents, enrolment in culturally heterogeneous schools offered their children an experience of "the world out there" (Dawn, 1on1 ISSI, l.90). For one parent, the selected school allowed his child to see that "...there's more to life [than] falling into the cycle, falling pregnant, having a baby" (Ted, 1on1 ISSI, ll.251-252).

For other parents, the quality of education was closely related to the number of Indigenous students enrolled at the school. This was a focus of many Indigenous participants' concerns in that schools with a large number of Indigenous students would not allow their child to access to a "mainstream education" (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, l.305). What this implies is that these Indigenous parents understood that there was a relationship between school quality and the racial composition of the school. Schools with fewer Indigenous students were considered to be offering a mainstream education; those schools which either had a large cohort of Indigenous students and those that claimed to cater for Indigenous students (Indigenous colleges) only offered a specialised and reduced form of education.

For all the Indigenous participants in this study, their focus for their children in the boarding school choice process was on access to quality education. It was clear that these educational opportunities would socially mobilise their children and lay the foundations for civic success. It was also clear that schools with large numbers of Indigenous students threatened this and these participants deselected schools on this basis: "...and it's near enough is good enough.; it's having that sort of attitude" (Sam, 1on1 ISSI, ll.327-328). For the most part, the educational offerings in the home communities of the participants were deselected, precipitating a selection of school outside of the community. For many of the participants, this enabled their children to escape the negative influences of life in community which, in the mind of these parents, inevitably would have distracted their children from "a focus on education to give them more of a pathway" (Chris, 1on1 ISSI, ll.27-28).

This reinforces the assertion of this study that Indigenous people sought educational settings for their children which were conducive to social mobility. Schools with a saturation of

Indigenous students were considered to have a demobilising effect: “Because a lot of them would give up and go back home, back to their communities” (Dawn, 1on1 ISSI, ll. 340-341). For these participants, giving their child access to ‘mainstream’ education was the key to giving their children options outside of their communities (Bagley, 1996; Brama, 2005; George, 2007; Haviland, 2008; McDonald, 1997; Orfield, 2001; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). To remain or to attend schools with large numbers of Indigenous students posed risks to their academic and social progress.

The Indigenous parents of this study selected a boarding school for their children which had a pre-existing Indigenous enrolment. Thus, for these participants, there was a tolerable level of Indigenous enrolment which, in their minds, did not affect the quality of education offered to their children. Moreover, it could also be asserted that the level of Indigenous enrolment at the research site school afforded the participants some confidence that the selected school could offer their children quality education. Therefore, this suggests that there was a tipping point for these Indigenous parents which, when reached, would have had an erosive effect on the learning of their children: “and if there be a major change [in Indigenous enrolment] and I see a drop in her academic...then I would raise some concerns there and probably would relate to the increase in the number of Indigenous students, that they may contribute to her lack of scores or level of education” (Wilma, 1on1 ISSI, ll.333-335).

The Indigenous support personnel (ISP) of this study, both of whom work at the systemic level of Indigenous education, made it clear in implicit and explicit ways that there was a direct relationship between school quality and the racial composition of schools. One of these participants has a role where the main focus is gaining enrolment for Indigenous students in to elite, predominantly non-Indigenous schools. The fundamental principle of this program is that matriculation to university by Indigenous students is best made possible by enrolment in ‘white’ schools. The underlying and tacit proposition of this initiative is that schools with large numbers of Indigenous students are substandard and deficient: “they say they aren’t good enough” (ISP 2, l.245). This suggests that some Indigenous parents seek opportunities which allow them to deselect schools with large numbers of Indigenous students:

> A lot of our parents would like to see Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids go. The reason being they want to see their kids [on] the same par as any other kid, the only

> way you do that is if you have a non-Indigenous kid sitting beside them in a classroom (ISP 1, ll.172-174).

Thus, it was clear from the data that the Indigenous parent participants engaged in deselection and avoidance of schools with high Indigenous enrolment on the basis that such schools do not offer mainstream education. The literature around parental choice of school and race, particularly in relation to deselection and avoidance in the choice process, is focused on white, middle class, parents. Indeed, the literature which focuses on the school choice behaviours of Black people suggests that race does not feature in the parental choice of school process (Saporito & Lareau, 1999).

This particular set of Indigenous parents engage in racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process, which is consistent with White, middle class parental choosing (Bagley, 1996; Denessen et al., 2005; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). It could be asserted that this was possible given that these Indigenous participants had access to a similar degree of material resources which allowed them to exercise a degree of choice. Furthermore, homogenous Indigenous schools were considered to be unsuitable by these Indigenous participants because they had clear aspirations for their children which compelled them to look for the best alternatives (Gulson, 2006). It was evident that these participants undertook a process of cultural affiliation which allowed their children access to opportunities for social advantage (George, 2007). Conversely, schools that were unable to confer social advantage were those with a dominant Indigenous population and were defined by the Indigenous participants as disadvantaged (Schneider & Buckley, 2002), expressed in terms like ‘not mainstream’.

8.3.4 Convergences and Divergence: A Summary

The data support the contention that there was a racial dimension to the boarding school choice process for Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents. Both sets of participants considered, to varying degrees, the racial composition of *Framed* and the selected schools. There was a clear sensitivity to a large enrolment of Indigenous students, and both sets of parents implied a ‘tipping point’ of Indigenous enrolment which would result in deselection.

However, there were differences in the racialised thinking of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants.

Non-Indigenous parents expressed a relationship of concern about the erosion of school culture and the enrolment of Indigenous students. This was often expressed as a decline in student behaviour and demeanour which indicated a deterioration of the school environment. The non-Indigenous parent data also indicated that their children experienced a certain disadvantage because of the enrolment of Indigenous students. These participants made reference to government funding and school programs for Indigenous students as creating a perceived two-tiered school sub-culture, where Indigenous students received advantages (educational, financial, behavioural) that were not accessible to their children. Furthermore, the non-Indigenous parent data showed that there was a perception that over-enrolment of Indigenous students was concomitant with declines in school quality. However, this was readily expressed in behavioural rather than educational terms. Indeed, there was little evidence to show that the non-Indigenous participants considered academic disadvantage as being associated with Indigenous enrolment (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). This further reinforces the assertion of this study that non-Indigenous parents were less concerned with academic outcomes than they were the physical, psychological and emotional safety (expressed as 'happiness) of their children. Certain levels of Indigenous enrolment posed a threat to their child's 'safety'.

The Indigenous parent data showed that there was a perceived relationship between high Indigenous enrolment and decline in school quality. Indeed, the Indigenous participants were adamant that schools with a dominant Indigenous enrolment were not 'mainstream'. It was clear that the Indigenous parents of this study sought out schools which delivered a standard of education which would allow their children access to the post-school world. Furthermore, these parents were seeking educational opportunities for their children that offered them social advantages and mobility. This was made apparent in light of the parents' home contexts where their communities are plagued by disadvantage and social decline.

A safe environment which allowed their children the prospect for social development was also a feature of the parental choice of boarding school for the Indigenous participants. The safety of their children was assured by deselecting schools with a high Indigenous enrolment and, for some, particularly avoiding schools where there were members of their own

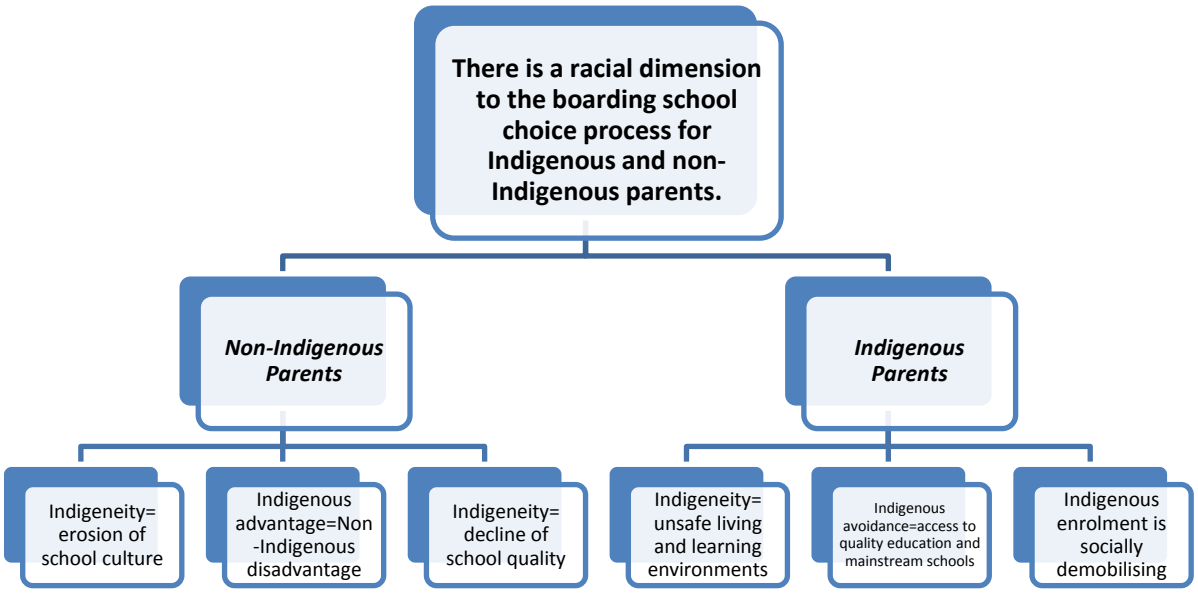
community. The participants were clear that schools with large numbers of Indigenous students were not environments conducive to learning, and could be a source of distraction for their children. Furthermore, the Indigenous participants suggested that they desired their children be exposed to a broader perspective of the world, and a culturally heterogeneous school gave scope for this (Saporito & Lareau, 1999).

Both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents of this study selected the research site school. However, the data suggest that the implications of avoidance of schools with large numbers of Indigenous students were far greater for the Indigenous participants than for the non-Indigenous. The non-Indigenous participants showed concern about Indigenous students insofar as they posed a threat to the culture of the school. It was suggested that a deterioration of this culture, replete with its values and standards, may lead to both a conflict with family-based values and potentially result in their child's unhappiness.

Indigenous parents, however, exercised stronger avoidance tendencies in order to secure certain social advantages for their children. These participants deselected Indigenous schools and colleges in particular on the basis that these were not consistent with their social mobility project. Indeed, the higher the number of Indigenous students, the greater the dysfunction and the increased likelihood of a decline in quality education. In turn, it was understood that this would lead to a debilitation of their and their child's aspirations for civic success and social mobility (Lette et al., 2009). While this is commensurate with literature in relation to White people, this finding adds to the body of research in relation to parental choice of school by Black people. This finding is consistent with the chooser typology of Enfranchised Chooser as proposed by this study.

A summary of the racial dimension of parental boarding school choice is summarised in Figure 8.5.

Figure 8.5 Summary of Theoretical Development: Racial Dimension of Parental Boarding School Choice



8.4 A Conceptual View of Non-Indigenous and Indigenous Parental Choice of Boarding School.

The discussion of the findings of this study has shown that there are a number of similarities between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous parents' engagement in the boarding school choice. The evidence suggests that the parental choice of school process is not linear in nature, but rather a confluence of particular psychical constructions and rationalities. This underscores the assertion of this study that the parental choice of school is a complex phenomenon, rather than a negotiation of factors of choice and market forces.

The findings of this study contribute new knowledge to and confirm some elements the body of research on parental choice of school. In order to highlight these contributions and confirmations, the conceptual framework which directed the review of the literature (Figure 3.1) will be used as a point of reference.

As a final justification for the new conceptualisations of parental choice of school, an outline will be presented of the ways in which symbolic interactionism illuminates the complexity of the parental choice of boarding school for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in rural and remote locations.

8.4.1 The literature and the findings of the Study

The conceptual framework (Figure 3.1) as a synthesis of the literature on parental choice of school suggested a particular form of choice 'process'. That is, as purported in the literature, the ways in which parents engage in the choice 'process' has a certain linearity, whereby parents engage with and are influenced by a series of factors at particular stages with the final concluding stage resulting in school selection. Furthermore, the literature suggests that there are salient influencing factors at each stage which shape the way in which parents engage in the school choice process. The findings of this study suggest that the boarding school choice process for parents living in rural and remote locations is a confluence of psychic processes and rationalities, rather than a staged 'process' whereby engagement in it is shaped primarily by social class and levels of social and cultural capital. Indeed, it is the contention of this study that geographical context most powerfully defines the ways in which parents living in rural and remote locations engage in boarding school choice. It is this finding from which emerges a theoretical proposition of this study of a new chooser typology, the Rural/Remote Chooser.

The findings in relation to the ways in which Indigenous parents make boarding school choices represent a further differentiation from the literature as reflected in Figure 3.1. A theoretical proposal of this study of a new school chooser typology, the Enfranchised Chooser, represents an addition to the literature but also gives rise to a new conceptualisation of parental choice of school for Indigenous people living in rural and remote locations.

Furthermore, the literature indicates that parents distinguish between school options through a process of considering the 'tangible artifacts' of schools: academic standards, facilities and resources, and educational offerings. The findings of this study do not support this aspect of the literature on parental choice of school. Indeed, these did not feature in the boarding school choice-making of parent participants of this study. This reinforces and further justifies the necessity for and relevance of new conceptualisations of parental choice of school from a rural and remote perspective.

8.4.2 Symbolic interactionism and parental choice of boarding school

The theoretical perspective of this study, symbolic interactionism, was used as a way to conceptualise the parental choice of school process as presented in the literature (see Figure

4.1). This conceptual framework utilised the root images of symbolic interactionism in order to elucidate the ways in which parents construct and interpret understandings of education and schools, and how these constructions and interpretations influence their engagement in the school choice process. In order to maintain consistency of reference, the following section will be framed using the root images – the interdependent characteristics of symbolic interactionism.

1. Symbols

Symbolic interactionism contends that symbols allow humans to assign and communicate meaning to certain objects ('things') and in the case of this study, education and school. Symbols, in the form of language, give insight into the way human beings have constructed ascribed meaning to certain objects. It is from this understanding of symbols that a comprehensive understanding emerges of the way in which the parents of this study constructed their notions of and assigned meaning to education and school.

The Indigenous parent data showed that there was strong desire for 'good' schools which enabled their child to be socially mobile, prepared for civic life and offered their children opportunity for personal development (social capital). These represent particular understandings of what the participants understood about education and what it should mean for their children. Expressions such as 'mainstream' suggest that these parents had constructed understandings of education which were a direct result of their interaction with their particular socio-cultural contexts. It was these experiences, which for many of the participants included social dysfunction and deterioration that shaped their constructed meanings around education and schooling. This, in turn, shaped what they desired for their own children's education. Furthermore, the parents' constructed meanings of education helped to shape their children's understandings of same (Charon, 2004).

Similarly, the non-Indigenous parents' language around 'good' schools is clearly linked with their own personal contexts. Their relative isolation and the seeming social disconnection moulded an understanding of 'good' schools as those that offered their children a breadth of social experiences which would enable them to participate in the post-school world. Further, the non-Indigenous parents used words such as "happiness" which defined what they desired as an outcome of their child's education.

It is this language which enables some insight into the constructions of education and 'good' schools by Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents.

2. Self, Role-Making & Role Taking

The Self in symbolic interactionism refers to the ways individuals view themselves in relation to other individuals. It is a multifaceted concept which includes the various roles and identities that a person possesses in social life. In this study, the identity of the Self most evident is that of *parent*. However, it is clear from the data there may be more than one identity in operation for parents engaging in the school choice process.

What emerged from the data is that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents want the best for their children, and attendance at a 'good' school is one way of achieving this. However, it is asserted that the identity of *parent* is not the only identity in operation during the school choice process because there is more than one interactional context for all participants.

For non-Indigenous parents, there is a clear awareness of their child's relative social disconnection which necessitates access to particular contexts which enable social learning. That is, the parents' own interactive contexts help to define what they want for their child's education, and they do this through a process of identity salience (Stryker, 1981). The non-Indigenous parent data indicate two salient identities: one of these is parent; the other is an adult social being whereby they give consideration to what it means to live successfully in the adult world. This is a form of role-taking, a reflexive process whereby these parents take on the role of the socially participative adult in order to define the key components of the boarding school choice process. This is particularly relevant given their geographical isolation and rurality. All of this contributes to their constructed meanings of 'good' schools and quality education (role-making) enabling them to choose in particular ways.

For Indigenous parents, the disadvantage of their core interactive context indicates the salient identity in operation during the school choice process. Again, these participants understand education to be the key social and civic enabler for their children (role-making). The data make it clear that these parents want their children to be socially mobile and to be able to access all that is on offer in adult life; it is central to success as an adult. The majority of

these participants want more for their children than the opportunities afforded to them. So, not only is there a salient parent identity evident, there is also that of an Indigenous person experiencing disenfranchisement and it is these two identities that are most apparent in the interactive context of the school choice process.

There is a self-conscious process on the part of the Indigenous participants to achieve particular goals for their children: social advantage and civic success (Hewitt, 2003). In order to construct this particular understanding of a 'good' education, they look to interact with social meanings around civic success, social advantage and mobility (role-taking).

3. Human Conduct

Human conduct involves both the interaction with the Self and with others. There are two streams of action for human begins. The first is overt action. This is the action that can be clearly seen in the interaction between two or more people. The other is covert action. This is the interaction which takes place as an interior process which is called on-going mind action (Charon, 2004). What this suggests is that human beings are not simply responders to an external environment, but are able to step back, as it were, to see things as they are, cogitate these things and determine a course of action. It is understood that the objects that humans come into contact with that have meaning for them are interiorised and defined, which then gives way to certain types of behaviour.

As it has been made clear thus far, the defining of certain objects is a dual process of interaction: with others and the Self. In the context of the parental choice of school process, parents are not simply engaging in a market, nor are they involuntary responders to this market. Parents are defining schools through a process of on-going mind action (interaction with Self) and interaction with others. Parents are engaging in a process of problem solving. According to symbolic interactionism, humans act when there are problems to be solved, or there is something to be gained, overcome or reached (Charon, 2004).

For the Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents alike, there are problems to be solved and goals to be attained for their children through the school choice process. Though there are differences, both sets of parent participants had clear ideas about 'good' schools which were shaped by their own circumstances and place (interaction with the Self), and their perceptions

about what their child needed to be equipped with in order to be successful (variously defined). They consulted the views, and put themselves in the place of others (interacting with others) in order to construct meaning around school and education. This, in turn, influenced the way in which they engaged in the school choice process.

4. Social Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interactionists hold that society functions because there are shared meanings which have been derived over time through an on-going process of interaction. This is what is meant by the expression social symbolic interaction. It is this on-going interaction 'that establishes and portrays structure or organisation' (Blumer, 1989, p.7). As humans continue to interact in society they interiorise the salient aspects of society, which is termed the "generalised other". The *generalised other* allows humans to 'come into a fully socialised awareness of the social milieu in which they are placed' (Atkinson & Housley, 2003, p. 6). Therefore, as humans conduct themselves in society, they do so from the basis of their definition for the *generalised other*.

This *generalised other* is defined and redefined through humans' interaction with others over time.

The notion of the *generalised other* is an important aspect of the parental choice of school process insofar as parents' definitions of education generally, and certain schools in particular, are shaped by their "socialised awareness of the social milieu in which they are placed" (Atkinson & Housley, 2003, p. 6).
Over time and because of their interactions, these parent participants have constructed their definitions of 'good schools' and who the 'good students' are. This, in turn, has shaped the ways in which they have engaged in the boarding school choice process. In some ways the constructed understandings of school and education of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants reflected shared consensus and agreed upon perspectives in relation to education.

However, other views of the participants, in particular those related with the racialised thinking dimension of the choice process, introduce a conflicting set of norms (Stryker & Vryan, 2006). It could be suggested that the unique personal contexts of the participants – isolation and rurality for non-Indigenous participants; isolation and disadvantage for

Indigenous participants – and their self-reflexivity in relation to the *generalised other* gives rise to these conflictions.

The parental choice of boarding school process is a complex one, consisting of a number of rationalities and psychic processes. It cannot be simplified to mere factors of choice, such as academic standards, cost or facilities; nor can it be considered as a linear process of staged choice-making. Rather, parents choose schools based upon constructed meanings of education which are emergent from interaction with the Self and social structure (Stryker & Vryan, 2006).

The data has also indicated that, while there are similarities, the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in the boarding school choice process are discernibly different. Figures 8.1 and 8.2 show a conceptual view of the boarding school choice process for non-Indigenous and Indigenous parents.

8.4.3 Conceptual views of Non-Indigenous and Indigenous parental choice of boarding school

Figures 8.1 and 8.2 present a conceptual view of the parental choice of boarding school by non-Indigenous and Indigenous parents living in rural and remote locations. Each figure represents a synthesis of the findings of this study.

Non-Indigenous Parental Choice of Boarding School – Conceptual View

Figure 8.6 details the complexity of the parental choice of boarding school for rural and remote non-Indigenous parents.

Central to this choice process is the home context of the parent and child which is characterised by both social and geographical isolation. It is this context that shapes the ways in which parents engage in the choice process and gives rise to a new chooser typology: the Rural/Remote Chooser. Specifically, parents in rural and remote areas choose schools for their children that will broaden the social horizons, offer physical, psychological and emotional safety, and prepare their children for participation in the post-school world. The psychic functions of this process are identified as ‘on-going mind action’ or the interaction with the Self. Parents are covertly interacting with the Self in order to solve a ‘problem’. This

interactive process continues but includes overt interactions with others (the grapevine) and this is a dual process of defining schools. The definition of a good school also includes ones which offer their children extra-educational experiences, as well as provide opportunities for the transmission of universal values. Moreover, this definition of a good school was also constructed through a form of racialised thinking. Parents expressed a perception that high numbers of Indigenous enrolment was concomitant with an erosion of school culture, experiences of disadvantage for their own children and a decline in school quality.

Indigenous Parental Choice of Boarding School – Conceptual View

Figure 8.7 illustrates the unique way in which Indigenous parents living in rural and remote locations choose a boarding school for their children.

Not dissimilar to non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote locations, the interactional contexts of Indigenous parents shape and influence the ways in which they engage in the choice process. It is this context, which is characterised by social and economic disadvantage that gives rise to a new chooser typology: the Enfranchised Chooser. The Enfranchised Chooser typology highlights the aspirational attitudes of Indigenous parents as they seek social mobility and advantages for their children through the school choice process. Indigenous parents' definitions of 'good' schools are initially shaped through their interaction with their informational networks (the grapevine). The aspiration they have for their children is facilitated by access to government financial assistance, but does not fundament their desire for access to quality education. In turn, Indigenous parents living in rural and remote locations choose schools that socially mobilise their children, offer their children access to mainstream experiences (both educational and social), transmit universal values and prepare them for successful civic participation. School selection is shaped by racialised thinking, whereby Indigenous parents expressed sensitivity to large numbers of Indigenous student enrolment on account of a perceived lack of safety, reduced access to quality education and the possibility for social demobilisation.

Figure 8.6 A conceptual view of non-Indigenous parental choice of boarding school

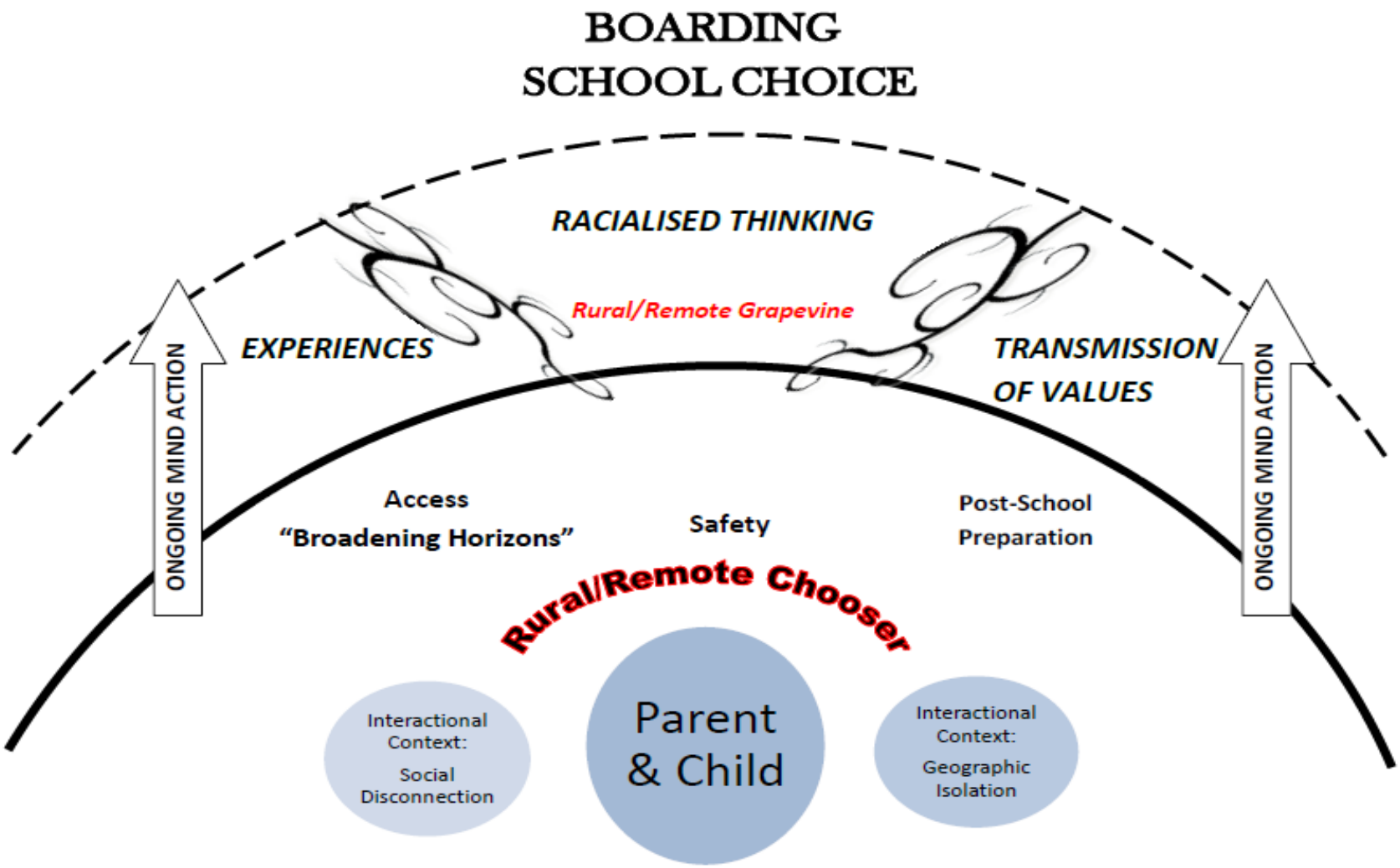
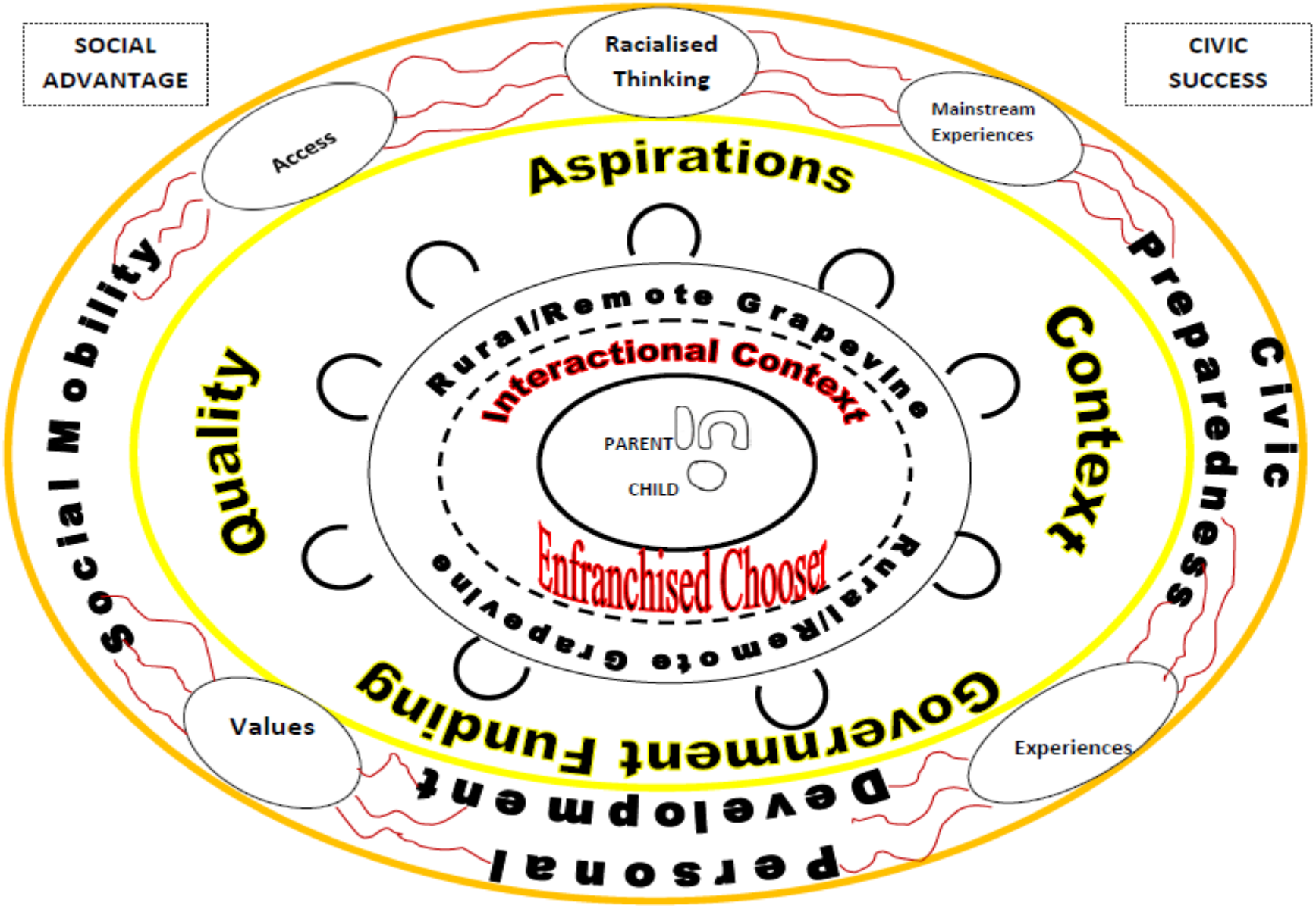


Figure 8.7 A conceptual view of Indigenous parental choice of boarding school



CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions and recommendations of this study.

9.1 The Purpose of the Study

This study explored the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in the boarding school choice process as a result of observed changes in enrolment patterns at the research site school.

An examination of the literature in relation to parental choice of school, rural and Indigenous education, and trends in Australian boarding school enrolment elucidated the complexities of school choice by parents. The research data confirmed this complexity, highlighting that the parental choice of boarding school involves the confluence of a number of rationalities and psychic processes. The research suggests that the parental choice of boarding school process is not merely a procedure of discerning between school 'factors' nor is it a market-driven project.

9.2 Research Design

The study contributes to the discussion around parental choice of school, in particular those discussions focused on the internal processes in which parents engage in making the selection of school for their child. It is evident that parental choice of school has parents engage in symbolic interaction in order to construct and define understandings of quality schooling. It is this symbolic interaction which shapes the way in which they choose schools for their children.

The research design was focused by the following research questions:

1. How does rurality/remoteness influence parental choice of boarding school?
2. How do parents living in rural and remote areas inform their choice of a boarding school for their child?
3. How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?

4. How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

A constructionist epistemology underpinned the study. The emphasis of constructionism on reality as a result of social interaction enabled a deeper understanding of the way in which participants developed subjective meanings in relation to schools and education.

This study focused on the ways in which parents engaged in the school choice process. Symbolic interactionism was adopted as the theoretical perspective of the study which emphasises that meaning is central to the behaviours of human beings (Harris, 2001). The root images of symbolic interactionism were utilised to determine the ways in which parents construct understandings of education and schools, and the extent to which this shapes the way in which they engage in the school choice process.

This study considered the ways in which Indigenous parents engage in the boarding school choice process, which therefore necessitated the adoption of the second theoretical perspective entitled Indigenous Perspectives. The inclusion of this methodology enabled the study to highlight cultural nuances in the boarding school choice process by Indigenous participants, particularly in light of the researcher's cultural positionality. The adoption of this theoretical perspective enabled the research to honour the unique and culturally rich ways in which Indigenous participants constructed notions of education, and engaged in the school choice process.

Given that the purpose of the study was to explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents choose a boarding school, the case study was considered the most appropriate methodology. As an interpretive approach, the case study methodology allowed for an in-depth analysis of the ways in which parents choose a boarding school for their children and the extent to which the confluences of context, class, race and school culture shaped their engagement with the choice process.

Participants were purposively selected based upon the boundaries of the case. The study was bounded to include Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents of enrolled

boarding students at the research site school that lived in rural, remote and/or isolated areas. This selection of participants allowed for nuanced insights into the school choice process from the perspectives of race and culture. In addition, the current and previous Principals were selected in order to gain a school-level perspective on the ways in which parents make choices, and the extent to which the school shaped and were shaped by the choice process. Finally, two (2) Indigenous Support Personnel (ISP) were selected so that a broader understanding could be gained of Indigenous issues relating to school choice. This purposive sampling of participants provided rich and thick descriptions of the phenomenon being studied and allowed for the investigation of complex social units (Merriam, 1998).

The data gathering strategies were:

- Focus group interviews with Indigenous (n= 6) and non-Indigenous (n=6) participants;
- One-on-one semi-structured interviews:
  - Principals (n=2)
  - Indigenous Support Personnel (n=2)
  - Indigenous Parents (n=10)
  - Non-Indigenous Parents (n=10)

9.3 Limitations of the Study

This study focused on a particular Catholic boarding school in north-west Queensland with a small participant sample. The study is therefore susceptible to questions around the generalisability of the findings. However, as a qualitative study, the transferability of findings is the responsibility of the reader and the study provides scope for readers to vicariously generalise findings (Guba, 1989; Stake, 2005). The aim of this case study was to explore the reasons for changes to enrolment patterns through an examination of the parental choice of school process. The study is suggestive rather than conclusive about the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote locations engage in the boarding school choice process.

A second limitation of the study is the perceived positional power of the researcher. During the course of the research, the researcher was the Deputy Principal at the

research school and this reality may bring into to question the honesty of participants' responses and, thus, the vividness of descriptions. The researcher is acutely aware of the potential for bias in the research findings. However, the combination of the professionalism of the researcher and the use of multiple data gathering techniques goes some way to addressing this limitation.

A third limitation of the research is in relation to a non-Indigenous researcher engaging in research involving Indigenous participants. The cautions around this are centred on the potential for cultural bias of the dominant culture. This study has attempted to address this limitation by engaging in critical self-reflection on the cultural assumptions of the both research design and the researcher. Furthermore, a reflection on the Indigenous participants allowed for the recognition of the identities and multiple roles, identities and belief
s of these people (Milner, 2007).

9.4 Research Questions Addressed

This section addresses each of the research questions which guided this study.

9.4.1 Research Question One

How does rurality/remoteness influence the parental choice of boarding school?

There were clear differences in the findings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents. Each will be considered separately.

Indigenous Participants

Indigenous parents sought out schools that were going to provide their children with access to quality education. It was evident, that their home contexts (rural and remote Indigenous communities) were not an impediment, but rather functioned as a motivator. Participants indicated that the provisions of schools in their local communities were sub-standard and did not meet the standards of education that they clearly desired for their children.

The desire for access to quality education was closely tied in with the desire for social mobility for the Indigenous participants' children. Participants selected schools which they believed were able to offer their children intellectual and social capital, which in turn socially mobilised their children. This desire was often contrasted with their personal and community experiences of disadvantage and disenfranchisement, and they wanted to be able to access opportunities for their children which would provide an escape from such experiences.

Indigenous participants' access to government funding, combined with their experience of disadvantage enabled these parents to engage with the choice process in the same way as a middle-class chooser. They were committed to selecting schools which would confer social advantages to their children which gave their children the best chance of civic success. This gives rise to a new school chooser typology not apparent in the literature entitled the Enfranchised Chooser.

Non-Indigenous Participants

Non-Indigenous parents living in rural and remote areas emphasised access to experiences and safety as key considerations in the boarding school choice process. In light of their isolation and home contexts, non-Indigenous parents wanted their children to be exposed to a variety of experiences and opportunities which would essentially broaden their 'horizons'. They also desired that their children be afforded opportunities for social-skilling as part of their project of ensuring their child's preparedness for the post-school world. It was clear that these participants prioritised this over academic aspiration.

The safety of the non-Indigenous participants' children was also emphasised. The tyranny of distance meant that these parents wanted to be certain that their children would be physically 'safe'. Parents ensured this by inspecting the boarding facilities and staff. Furthermore, the non-Indigenous participants also emphasised the emotional safety of their children and articulated this as 'happiness'. Indeed, they prioritised the personal contentment of their child over the attainment of certain social goods, including increased prospects for employment or further education. Finally,

these participants also selected a school that provided their children with a degree of contextual familiarity, where their children were among students “like us” which ensured their child’s psychological safety.

Finally, despite the struggles of rural life, declines in commodity prices and agricultural production, the non-Indigenous parents did not indicate any social class aspirations. It was clear that the ‘happiness’ and contentment of their child was of greater value to them then their child’s post-school successes. This gives rise to a new chooser typology not apparent in the literature entitled the Rural/Remote Chooser.

9.4.2 Research Question Two

How do parents living in rural and remote locations inform their choice of a boarding school for their child?

Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents make boarding school choices based upon pre-constructed notions of a ‘good’ school which is reinforced through access to their informational networks, otherwise known as the ‘grapevine’.

The parent participants approached the ‘grapevine’ with a predetermined definition of a quality school. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents considered valid the information from the ‘grapevine’ when there was consonance with their defined notion of a ‘good’ school. While there were differences in the composition and breadth of their informational networks, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents utilised the ‘grapevine’ to confirm rather than direct their school selections.

However, the ‘grapevine’ was not wholly reliable. Indeed, the information received from the ‘grapevine’ needed to be filtered, particularly when it reported negatively. Moreover, where negative information emerged about their selected school, the reliability of the ‘grapevine’ was brought into further question, prompting further investigation and validation of the information received. This gave rise to a nuanced, rural/remote version of ‘grapevine’ function in the boarding school choice process, which represents an extension of that which exists in the current literature.

9.4.3 Research Question Three

How does school culture influence rural and remote parents' boarding school choice?
Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents understood that the personal benefit to their children of attendance at a Catholic school was primarily the transmission of universal values. References to faith formation, religious education or the spiritual life were conspicuously absent from the data. This desire for the inculcation of values was indicative of parents' desire for the integrated life and the formation of the moral self, rather than development in faith. It was expressed by some parent participants that these values would hold their children in good stead during their post-school lives in the adult world.

However, parent participants did suggest that the experiences of religion while at school were essentially harmless. Exposure to religion at school had the potential to have a medicinal effect on their children, but few of the parents were able to articulate what this effect might be. The implied perception from parent participants was that, at best, this exposure may inoculate their children from some of the vagaries of adult life or, at worst, do no harm at all.

9.4.4 Research Question Four

How does race influence the boarding school choice process for rural and remote parents?

Given that the research site school had an Indigenous boarding population of approximately 30%, an exploration of race as a component contributing to the changes in enrolment patterns was relevant.

It was found that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants exercised racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process. Both sets of participants considered the racial composition of the schools under consideration and expressed sensitivity to schools with large enrolment of Indigenous students. While the findings point to racialised thinking by Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents, the reasons for their concerns were different.

Non-Indigenous participants expressed concerns in relation to certain levels of Indigenous enrolment in three areas: erosion of school culture; disadvantage of their own children; and decline in school 'quality'.

Non-Indigenous parents suggested that large numbers of Indigenous students in the school eroded school culture. In this case, parents referred to negative changes in student behaviour and demeanour which they perceived to indelibly shift the culture of the school. Parents also suggested that their own children experience disadvantage which arose from their perception that Indigenous students received favourable differential treatment at the exclusion of non-Indigenous students. Finally, the non-Indigenous parents posited that with large enrolment of Indigenous students comes a decline in school 'quality'. 'Quality', in this instance, referred to student behaviour, school values, and the quality of instruction, albeit to a lesser extent.

Indigenous parents exercised racialised thinking during the school choice process, expressing concern about the potential for threats to their children's safety as well as decline in the quality of education.

Indigenous parents expressed concerns that schools with large cohorts of Indigenous students posed potential threats to the safety of their children. This concern was expressed in light of their and their children's experiences of instability and danger in their local communities. The Indigenous participants selected schools with fewer Indigenous students in order to insure against these negative experiences.

The decline in the quality of education was the primary concern of Indigenous parents in relation to the number of enrolled Indigenous students. It was unequivocally stated that large cohort of Indigenous students resulted in the delivery of non-mainstream education. This is contrasted with the clear desire of these Indigenous participants for quality education and outcomes. Therefore, for these participants, large numbers of Indigenous students creates a school environment which is not consistent with the aspirations they have for their children. In particular, such schools have the potential to have a socially stultifying and demobilising effect on their children. Therefore,

these parents selected a school with tolerable levels of Indigenous enrolment which would not disrupt the conferring of social advantages to their children.

These findings represent a new contribution to the Australian literature on parental choice of school. There are numerous studies internationally of the racial dimension of school selection by parents but, for social and cultural reasons, there is limited transferability of this research into the Australian context. This study offers a starting point for further discussion in relation to the extent to which race influences the school choice decision-making of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents.

9.5 Conclusions of the Study

9.5.1 Conclusion 1

This study concludes that rurality, remoteness and local context shape the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in the boarding school choice process. The geographical location and personal and community circumstances of parents influence their priorities in the process of choosing a boarding school for their child. Experiences of isolation, disadvantage and social disconnection shape parents' constructed notion of a 'good' school. Parents approach the boarding school choice process with this preconceived understanding of a quality school and then seek to align schools accordingly. Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents consult their relevant informational networks (the 'grapevine') in order to validate their school selection.

9.5.2 Conclusion 2

This study concludes that social class typologies are reshaped by Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents during the boarding school choice process. It was evident that Indigenous parents operate similarly to middle-class, White school choosers. This phenomenon arises on account of both the parents' access to government funding (financial resources), their very strong educational aspirations for their children, and their desire for social reproduction. From this emerges a new chooser typology: the Enfranchised Chooser.

Non-Indigenous parents demonstrated a form of social-class interfusion. Non-Indigenous parents demonstrated choosing behaviours which were characteristic of both working-class and middle-class choosers. It is the assertion of this study that this phenomenon is the result of the non-Indigenous parents' geographical contexts (rurality/remoteness) and their and their children's experiences in these contexts. As a result, a new chooser typology emerges: the Rural/Remote Chooser.

9.5.3 Conclusion 3

This study concludes that Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents select boarding schools for their children for different reasons.

Indigenous parents select boarding schools that will give their children access to quality education which will lead to positive educational outcomes. Indigenous parents have social aspirations for their children and select schools that have the capacity to socially mobilise their children and confer on them particular social advantages. This contests popular thinking which positions Indigenous people as hopelessly disenfranchised and lacking the capability to make positive educational choices for their children.

Non-Indigenous parents select boarding schools that will offer their children opportunities for personal development, social skilling and experiences which may broaden their understanding of the world. These parents desire that their children are happy, well-adjusted individuals who, as a result of their boarding school experience, will be able to function in the post-school, adult world.

9.5.4 Conclusion 4

This study concludes that Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents choose Catholic boarding schools for their capacity to transmit universal values, as opposed to education in the faith. Parents are seeking Catholic schools because they are "functional communit[ies]" (Coleman, 1988, p.6) which offer their children opportunities for moral development. Faith formation and immersion in religious tradition was not emphasised by parents. Parents desired that their children become

productive adults, and the Catholic school culture which emphasises particular moral beliefs and the espousal of clear values, contributes to this in an important way (Flynn, 1993; Dronkers, 1995; Maadaus, 1990).

9.5.5 Conclusion 5

This study concludes that Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents engage in racialised thinking during the boarding school choice process. It was evident that the racial composition of the selected school was considered during the choice process. Parents avoided or eliminated from their thinking particular schools on the basis that these schools over-enrolled Indigenous students. However, Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents cited different reasons for their sensitivity to the racial (Indigenous) composition of schools.

Indigenous parents intimated that large numbers of Indigenous students erode the quality of education offered to their children. It was posited by these parents that high levels of Indigenous enrolment resulted in the reduction of quality curriculum and created barriers to their child's access to a mainstream education. For these Indigenous parents, access to quality teaching and learning, leading to good educational outcomes, was central to their desire for social mobility for their children.

For non-Indigenous parents, increases in the enrolment of Indigenous students would naturally result in the decline of school culture and in school 'quality' (school climate), and an increase in disadvantage for their own children.

9.6 Recommendations

The following recommendations emerge from the conclusions of this study, which seek to highlight areas for consideration in relation to the parental choice of (boarding) school process for parents living in rural and remote areas. There are three categories of recommendation: (i) Policy, (ii) System and (iii) School.

Policy Recommendations

1. *Consideration to be given to the challenges of education provision for rural and remote areas, with careful attention to the complexities and impediments for people living in these areas.* This study has highlighted the geographical, psychological and emotional confrontations of the school choice process for these parents; and schools, school systems and governments should seek to address these. This is particularly significant for the inclusion of Year 7 into Secondary school in Queensland for the first time in 2015.

2. *Attention to be given to access to quality schools by Indigenous people living in rural and remote communities.* This research has shown that Indigenous parents are interested in the quality of education for their children. Furthermore, these Indigenous parents are very aspirational on behalf of their children, seeking out educational opportunity which positions them positively for civic success and social mobility. It is strongly recommended that government funding initiatives which facilitate this continue.

3. *Government funding to Indigenous people to support the provision of education be continued.* This research has reinforced that the funding of Indigenous people to access boarding schools supports Indigenous parents' engagement in school choice. Government funding for the provision of education for Indigenous people contributes to the reduction of influence of socio-economic status in the school choice process.

System Recommendations

4. *Education jurisdictions further investigate the ways in which schools meet the needs of children from rural and remote locations.* This research has shown that Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents from rural and remote locations choose schools in nuanced ways, which necessarily differ from parents living in larger regional and metropolitan centres. It is necessary that education jurisdictions to come to a deeper awareness of the ways in which rural and remote parents construct notions of a 'good' school in order to meet their unique needs.

5. *Education jurisdictions that cater for Indigenous students review the principles underpinning the establishment of new secondary schools, the formation of school identity, and enrolment policies*. This research has demonstrated that there is a racialised dimension to the school choice process for Indigenous parents. This racialised thinking shapes and influences the ways in which Indigenous parents construct notions of a 'good' school. In particular, racially homogenous schools (i.e. Indigenous Colleges) were problematic for Indigenous parents. Furthermore, there was an evident sensitivity to a certain level of Indigenous student enrolment among Indigenous parents.

6. *Education jurisdictions consisting of racially heterogeneous schools consider the extent to which notions of 'race' influence the ways in which parents select schools for their children.* This research has shown that there is a racial dimension to the school choice process for Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents and, in different ways and for different reasons, this is an indicator of school 'quality'. A consideration of the racialised thinking of parents during the school choice process will enable a strategic focus on how to meet the needs of students and parents of racially heterogeneous schools.

School Recommendations

7. *Catholic schools need to give careful consideration to the changing nature of their clientele and the demand-side factors for Catholic school enrolment.* This research has shown that parents are less interested in the ecclesial culture of the Catholic school but rather emphasise the inculcation of universal values. It is clear that Catholic schools are becoming increasingly popular with non-Catholics, non-denominational-Christians and non-religious families. The pluralistic nature of Catholic schools must be reconciled with the mission and purpose of Catholic education.

8. *Catholic schools must be attentive to the complexity of the parental choice of school process in order to inform their marketing strategies.* This research has shown that the parental choice of boarding school process for parents living in rural and remote locations is a confluence of psychic processes and rationalities.

The parents of this study constructed their understandings of a 'good' school in complex and sophisticated ways, and this challenges rationalist approaches to marketing favoured by many Catholic schools.

9. *The research site school needs to explore opportunities for engagement with its feeder Indigenous communities in the spirit of reconciliation*. This research has shown that the research site school has a strategic approach to the enrolment of Indigenous students which focuses on the maintenance of so-called racial balance. Increased engagement by the research site school with Indigenous families may deepen the research site school's perspective on the enrolment of Indigenous students vis-a-vis the aspirational attitudes of Indigenous parents.

9.7 Concluding Remarks

The impetus for this study arose from my observations of the changing enrolment patterns at a Catholic boarding school in north-west Queensland. An exploration of the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents select a boarding school for their child, uncovered that this process is a complex one and significantly shaped by parents' home contexts and geographical lives. Furthermore, Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents approach the boarding school choice process with different motivations and hopes for their children which, again, there is evidence for within their own personal, lived experiences. This study highlights the need for on-going reflection about how schools meet the needs of parents and children from rural and remote locations. In particular, this study underscores the nuanced ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents construct their understandings about education and schools, and the complex and sophisticated ways in which they engage in the school choice process.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Human Research Ethics Approval Letter

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

ACU National

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Professor Elizabeth Warren Brisbane Campus

Co-Investigators: Associate Professor Nereda White Brisbane Campus

Student Researcher: Mr Michael McCarthy Brisbane Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:
Changing Enrolment Demographics: A Study of Parental Choice of School.

for the period: 3 December 2009 to 31 December 2011

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: Q2009 41

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (2007) apply:

(i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

(ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

K. Pashley.

Signed: Date: 3 December 2009
(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

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APPENDIX B: Information Letter and Consent Form for Participants: Focus Group Interview

ACU National

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS (Parents [a])

TITLE OF PROJECT: **Changing enrolment demographics: A study of parental choice of school.**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Professor Elizabeth Warren; Associate Professor Nereda White.

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Michael McCarthy.

Dear _____,

I am writing to you to invite you to participate in a research project which will explore the reasons for the changes in rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous enrolments at [Research Site School]. This research will be conducted as part of studies by Mr. Michael McCarthy in the Doctor of Education (EdD) program at ACU.

This study is looking at the reasons parents give for selecting a boarding a school for their child/ren and, in particular, the reasons parents selected Columba Catholic College as a boarding school for their child.

The interviews will take the form of a focus group consisting of approximately six (6) parents who currently have or previously had their child enrolled at [. The interview should not exceed 90 minutes.

At any time during the project you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation without giving any reason. Confidentiality will be protected during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from the research.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Supervisor, Professor Elizabeth Warren (telephone 07 3623 7128) in the School of Education, McAuley Campus, Banyo. Results of the project will be provided on request.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University and permission to conduct the project has been received.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Investigator has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit.

QLD
Chair, HREC
C/o Research Services
Australian Catholic University
PO Box 456
VIRGINIA QLD 4014
Tel: 07 3623 7429
Fax: 07 3623 7328

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, could you please sign both attached copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to Michael McCarthy in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

Yours sincerely

Prof Elizabeth Warren
Associate Dean of Research,
Research Training and Partnerships
Australian Catholic University

Mr. Michael McCarthy
Student Researcher
Australian Catholic University

ACU National

PARENT CONSENT FORM

(Researchers' Copy)

TITLE OF PROJECT: Changing enrolment demographics: A study of parental choice of school.

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:

Professor Elizabeth Warren; Associate Professor Nereda White.

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Michael McCarthy

I ..... have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Parents. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that confidentiality will be protected during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from the research. I agree that the research data collected for this study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way and I realise I can withdraw at any time.

Please tick ☑ the following indicating your consent:

□ I agree to participate in a focus group interview for duration of approximately 90 minutes at a time and venue to be determined.

□ I give permission for my interview responses to be audio-taped.

NAME OF PARENT: .....

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR .....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER .....

DATE: .....

OFFICE OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
PO Box 456 Virginia Q 4014
TELEPHONE (61 + 7) 3623 7148 FACSIMILE (61 + 7) 3623 7247
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY LIMITED A.C.N. 050 192 660

APPENDIX C: Information Letter and Consent Form for Parent Participants: One-on-One Semi-structured Interview

ACU National

PARENT _____ **CONSENT FORM**

(Researchers' Copy)

TITLE OF PROJECT: Changing enrolment demographics: A study of parental choice of school.

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:

Professor Elizabeth Warren; Associate Professor Nereda White.

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR:

Michael McCarthy

I ..... have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Parents. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that confidentiality will be protected during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from the research. I agree that the research data collected for this study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way and I realise I can withdraw at any time.

Please tick ☑ the following indicating your consent:

□ I agree to participate in a focus group interview for duration of approximately 90 minutes at a time and venue to be determined.

□ I give permission for my interview responses to be audio-taped.

NAME OF PARENT: .....

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR .....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER .....

DATE: .....

OFFICE OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
PO Box 456 Virginia Q 4014
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AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY LIMITED A.C.N. 050 192 660

APPENDIX D: Information Letter and Consent Form for Principal Participants: One-on-One Semi-structured Interview.

ACU National

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS (Principal)

TITLE OF PROJECT: **Changing enrolment demographics: A study of parental choice of school.**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Professor Elizabeth Warren; Associate Professor Nereda White.

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Michael McCarthy.

Dear _,

I am writing to you to invite participate in a research project which will explore the reasons for the changes in rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous enrolments at [Research Site School]. This research will be conducted as part of studies by Mr. Michael McCarthy in the Doctor of Education (EdD) program at ACU.

The project involves interviewing and surveying school stakeholders in order to explore the confluence of factors which include race, class position and school culture in the parental choice of school process. The research aims to uncover the reasons for the changes in enrolment demographics at the College.

To undertake the project, Michael will be interviewing the current and former College principals in order to determine the perspectives of respondents on the reasons for the changes in enrolment demographics. As a former principal of the College, Michael would like to interview you at a time and venue convenient to you. The interview should not exceed 60 minutes.

Following this, Michael will be interviewing key Indigenous personnel at a systems level, and rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents who are or were previously enrolled at the College. In addition, interviews will be conducted with parents who enrolled their child/ren in alternative boarding schools. The final stage of the data gathering will involve a questionnaire which will be distributed to selected parents.

At any time during the project you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation without giving any reason. Confidentiality will be protected during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from the research.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Supervisor, Professor Elizabeth Warren (telephone 07 3623 7128) in the School of Education, McAuley Campus, Banyo. Results of the project will be provided on request.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University and permission to conduct the project has been received.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Investigator has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit.

QLD
Chair, HREC
C/o Research Services
Australian Catholic University
PO Box 456
VIRGINIA QLD 4014
Tel: 07 3623 7429
Fax: 07 3623 7328

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, could you please sign both attached copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to Michael McCarthy in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

Yours sincerely

Prof Elizabeth Warren
Associate Dean of Research,
Research Training and Partnerships
Australian Catholic University

Mr. Michael McCarthy
Student Researcher
Australian Catholic University

ACU National

FORMER PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

(Researchers' Copy)

TITLE OF PROJECT: Changing enrolment demographics: A study of parental choice of school.

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:

Professor Elizabeth Warren; Associate Professor Nereda White.

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Michael McCarthy

I ..... have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Principals. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that confidentiality will be protected during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from the research. I agree that the research data collected for this study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way and I realise I can withdraw at any time.

Please tick ☑ the following indicating your consent:

□ I agree to participate in a focus group interview for duration of approximately 60 minutes at a venue and time to be determined.

□ I give permission for my interview responses to be audio-taped.

NAME OF PRINCIPAL: .....

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR .....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER .....

DATE: .....

OFFICE OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION:
PO Box 456 Virginia Q 4014
TELEPHONE (61 + 7) 3623 7148 FACSIMILE (61 + 7) 3623 7247
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY LIMITED A.C.N. 050 192 660

APPENDIX E: Information Letter and Consent Form for Principal Participants: One-on-One Semi-structured Interview.

ACU National

INDIGENOUS SUPPORT STAFF CONSENT FORM

(Researchers' Copy)

TITLE OF PROJECT: Changing enrolment demographics: A study of parental choice of school.

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:

Professor Elizabeth Warren; Associate Professor Nereda White.

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR:

Michael McCarthy

I ..... have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that confidentiality will be protected during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from the research. I agree that the research data collected for this study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way and I realise I can withdraw at any time.

Please tick ☑ the following indicating your consent:

□ I agree to participate in a one-on-one interview for duration of approximately 60 minutes at a time and venue to be determined.

□ I give permission for my interview responses to be audio-taped.

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER .....

DATE: .....

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APPENDIX F: Summary of Research Design

Timeline	Interpretive Process	Data Gathering	Data Analysis
January 2008-December 2008	• Identification of research problem • Literature review • Development of research questions • Research design determined		
January 2009-November 2009	• Completion of research design. • Data gathering instruments designed. • Submission of Ethical Approval Application.		
November 2009	• Boundaries for case defined • Purposive sampling of participants	• Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents who had children enrolled at the research site school in between 2005-2009 are selected from the school's database using the MCEETYA parameters (SES), and according to rurality, remoteness and cultural background. • Key personnel - current and previous principal; Indigenous Support Personnel (ISP) – are issued a letter invitation to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews	
April –July 2010	Exploratory Phase • Identification and validation of themes in light of research questions	• One-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted with Principals and Indigenous Support Personnel.	• Preliminary exploratory analysis (content analysis) of responses. Data categorised and tentative themes emerge. Emergent themes will direct focus group questions.
July 2010	Exploratory Phase • Identification and validation of themes in light of research questions	• Letters of invitation to participate in focus group issued to selected parents • First round of focus groups conducted (Non-Indigenous parents). Responses digitally recorded and transcribed. • Snowball sample.	• Preliminary exploratory analysis (content analysis) of responses. Data categorised and tentative themes emerge. Member Check and Peer Debrief of data analysis.

Timeline	Interpretive Process	Data Gathering	Data Analysis
November 2010		• Focus Group 2 (Indigenous Parents) conducted. Responses digitally recorded and transcribed. • Snowball sample.	
January 2011	• Purposive selection of participants for Phase 2 of data gathering.	• Parents are purposively selected according to cultural background, rurality/remoteness, SES and snowball sample. Letters of invitation are issued to selected parents to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview.	
March -May 2011	Inspection Phase • Identification and validation of themes in light of research questions	• One-on-one interviews are conducted.	• Constant comparative analysis of responses. Tentative themes emerge and are confirmed/ discarded. Member check and Peer Debrief of data analysis.
May -December 2011	• Validation of data. • Revisit literature review to confirm themes		• Analysis and synthesis of data.
January -December 2012	• Report findings in Chapters 5&7. • With the use of identified and confirmed themes, develop discussion chapter.		