MOR07547
Symposium 23, BLA07543

How rural education markets shape parental choice of schooling: an Australian case study

Paper presented at AARE 2007 Conference
Fremantle

Rosemary Morgan and Jill Blackmore
Deakin University
Geelong Victoria 3217
morgan.rosemary.l@edumail.vic.gov.au
jillb@deakin.edu.au
How rural education markets shape parental choice of schooling: an Australian case study

School choice and parental involvement policies have been a dominant feature of the past decades in Australia. But as with such travelling policies, there is little consideration about how they impact on the historical and cultural context, nor on the ways in which schooling and school systems and educational opportunities have been structured. A significant amount of international research, particularly in the UK, on school choice has been undertaken in large metropolitan cities. This study which draws on survey and interview data, investigates a regional rural market. The study explores how historical legacies, economic factors, distance and school provision produce a particular set of practices around school choice. The study draws on the field of social geographies and policy sociology to inform an analysis of how families living in rural regions experiencing greater employment precarity perceive and act upon their options.

Introduction: Defining the issues

Choice is a politically attractive and deceptively simple notion that is now deeply embedded in public sector practices in Australia, the UK, New Zealand and the USA (Wells et.al.2005). Research tells us that often simple policy concepts, in association with other policies such as devolution and privatisation, often have unexpected and untoward consequences with regard to the equitable distribution of school provision (Lamb et.al., 2004). Indeed, the research on parental choice in education has complex and ambiguous findings. While choice advocates present such policies on the basis of equity in that everyone will be ‘free to choose’ their child’s school, others see choice as being taken up unevenly across class groups because of the social and structural inequalities that frame individual and familial choices such as income, information and location. Ball (2003) has argued that choice policies in education favour middle class families who have the skills, the cultural resources and the money to be able to choose and move their children around the education system. Those who are information, resource and time ‘poor’ and who often rely on public transport are immediately disadvantaged or restricted. Policies driven by choice are therefore highly inequitable. Whereas school choice policies were originally the response to a specifically urban problem of educational provision, (Gewirtz, et.al., 1995), their transference to other national settings is now widespread as they become central features of policies from both sides of politics. In that sense, policy has created a discourse of parental choice that is difficult to change. Researchers continue to focus on choice effects in urban settings (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995; Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall, 2003; Ball, 2003; André-Bechely, 2005; Aitchison, 2006) where higher population density, transport links and a variety of schools present necessary preconditions for choice.

In the United Kingdom, in particular, there has been vigorous debate on what constitutes an appropriate focus and arena for meaningful study of the processes and effects of school choice, although there is a general acceptance that markets are themselves socio-cultural constructs. The differing research loci and methodologies of Gewirtz et. al. (1995) and
Gorard, Taylor and Fitz (2003) highlight this. Gewirtz et. al. (1995) have focused on the localised nature of markets, claiming the outcomes they generate are determined by interaction of the formal properties of legislation with informal arrangements created by people at the local level responding to them. Ball (2003) concurs ‘that it is only within these local, lived markets that choice is meaningful, either for actors or analysts.’ Gorard on the other hand, has justified his broader based national longitudinal study in terms of the need to separate the effect of changes arising from demographic shifts from the effects of market-based policies. In this study, Gorard concludes that the ‘spirals of decline’ (Whitty, Power and Halpin, 1998) commonly attributed to the intensification of market-orientated policies in education post 1988, is not the cause per se for segregation but rather, that non-educational factors play the largest part in the determination of patterns of school segregation. Among these, it is claimed the most important are geographical, including population density, the nature of local housing, the diversity of the local population, and local levels of residential segregation: ‘Once geographical and economic determinants are accounted for there is little variance left unaccounted for in our model… There is almost nothing left for marketisation to explain’ (Gorard, 2003:186).

School choice positions schools in competitive policy relationships. Such relationships are powerfully mediated by the intersection of other policies and local economic and social conditions linked to geographical setting. If, as Ball notes, (1992) the policy process is characterised by ‘messy realities’ of conflict, compromise, opposition and pragmatism, lived markets provide a clearer opportunity to examine its reception and the way it is inflected by previous policies, social conditions and the initiatives and accommodations of those implicated in it. However, there is some danger in extrapolating such findings. In the context of school marketisation policies, individual schools are differently situated and contextualised. Massey’s (1984) theorisation that the operation of social processes is framed by space, in terms of distance or closeness, of geographical variation between areas of the individual character and meaning of specific places and regions seems particularly apposite when local lived markets are being studied. As she says, ‘Geography matters!’

This paper, drawing from a larger doctoral study that identifies and explores the outcomes of state and federal government economic and social policies on local schools, describes the effects of these on parental choice and student movement and assesses the implications of high student mobility for schools, families and students within a rural farming region in rural Victoria. This is a region characterised by a strong historical legacy of private school provision and class differentiation deriving from earliest settlement in the nineteenth century. Atypical of most rural areas in Australia, patterns of settlement here have long been characterised by the presence of a ‘pastoral aristocracy’ or ‘squattocracy’. As a rural agricultural area, it is also however, vulnerable to demographic trends (ageing population; declining birth rate and changing farming practices) and the vagaries of climate, now exacerbated in the twenty-first century, which can spell prosperity or ruin.

The global spread of policy results in different realisations of the market form. In Australia in the 1990s, the Victorian Kennett Coalition Government went further than most to implement neo-liberal reform, simultaneously legislating to reduce public expenditure in health and transport and deregulate labour markets. For schools in the state sector, the impact was strongly felt in a reduction of public expenditure, (inter alia the closure or merger of schools which has the power to significantly reconfigure markets, and the consequent reduction of transport routes) and the recasting of relationships that constituted the system of schooling: between the school and parents, between the school and other schools, and between the school and the machinery of the state (Blackmore, 1999b, 2000). Parents were now positioned as consumers of the individual school rather than citizen-members of a common system of schools with a shared interest in everyone else’s welfare (Blackmore, 2005). Other schools, public and private, were seen as competitors.
Policy initiatives circulating between Australia, the UK, New Zealand and the USA have resonated with the neo-liberal economic and social philosophies adopted at the federal level by the Howard Government that came into power in 1996. In Australia, state school education is funded from State and Territory coffers, following disbursement of funds from the Federal Government through negotiated arrangements with the state, while private schools are funded directly from the Federal Government. Australia’s historical legacy from the colonial period was a large private sector (on average 70% of Australian students were in state schools, 22% in Catholic systemic schools and 8 – 10% in elite and increasingly small faith-based schools). Religious schools had not been funded by government until 1975, when the Schools Commission and a Federal Labor government commenced state aid to private schools on the basis of need of the students and resources of the school to support the rapidly declining Catholic sector based on equity of provision to all students (Connors, 2000). The passing of the States Grants (Assistance) Bill in 2000 altered the historical balance of sectoral funding to one based on postcodes not need, as well as transferring commonwealth funds with any movement from state to private schools at a higher funding level, while other legislation was altered that stopped small private schools being established to compete with public schools in a region and acquiring commonwealth funding. This federal legislation has had major implications for the provision of state and non-government schooling as state schools lost disproportionate levels of funds for students moving to the private sector and small private schools being allowed to compete with public schools (Morrow, 2004). This intersection of policies - changed funding arrangements at the federal level, with radical restructuring of educational provision and governance, and school bus transport funding at the state level - has had the potential to recast the activities of schools and exert new possibilities for school choice within local rural areas. This study clearly demonstrates the complex interplay of ‘planned, political, historical, spatial, producer and consumer factors’ Gewirtz et.al. (1995:87) define as constituting the education market.

This paper presents a snapshot of the context of the study and a brief examination of choice data. The key questions guiding this discussion include:

- How have successive economic and social policies informed and inflected school and parental responses in a lived local market?
- How are these policy effects mediated by historical and social conditions?
- To what extent do these responses mirror policy effects recorded in other studies?

The way a local market compels the implication of smaller, outlying secondary schools in this education market is also examined. A comparison with the findings of urban studies and a discussion of how this study informs wider sociological debates over school choice concludes the discussion.

The Study: Lived experience of education markets

Educational research will often derive from personal and professional experience of the particular contradictions and disjunctions of policy. The decision to apply for the position of Vice Principal at my former secondary school in Dartford in 1991 set in train my return to a region that was about to experience profound change economically, politically and socially. By 1992, victory in the state election had provided the mandate for the Kennett Liberal Coalition to embark on an ambitious program of public sector restructuring justified as cost-cutting to offset the state debt, improve efficiencies and eliminate ‘provider capture’ by public sector professionals such as teachers and nurses; a discourse inherited from New Zealand and United Kingdom policy agendas around the new public sector administration. Risk and responsibility for student outcomes were devolved to self-managing schools now funded on the basis of enrolment with an equity index for schools with high levels of Non English
Speaking Background students and Education Maintenance Allowance families as proxies for socio-economic and cultural diversity and need. Schools were targeted to adopt small business principles; one of the strategies included the closure and amalgamation of a significant number of schools, many of them in rural Victoria. At the same time, the 1993 rural recession and the collapse of the Geelong-based Pyramid Building Society, Geelong being the largest regional city and port near to Dartford, contributed to significant social upheaval, resulting in mass migrations from country Victoria and Victoria itself.

By the end of 1993, the merger of Dartford High School and Dartford Technical School had taken effect. Parental choice in local state schooling had been effectively removed. The political aim of the education reforms, known as ‘Schools of the Future’, was the recasting of relationships between schools and government as one based on education as a consumer good and parents and students as clients. The local effect was a reconfiguration of the education market in Dartford which intensified the phenomenon of ‘middle class decampment’ from the state sector to the already well established private sector (Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall, 2003). A significant part of my administrative work as Assistant Principal in this newly merged school therefore, was framed by the need to promote and market the school: this took the form of preparation of publicity materials and articles for a weekly newspaper column and the development and implementation of school policies which reflected the new identity of the school. This work and my daily contact with colleagues, parents and students informed my understandings of the inherently political and value-laden nature of the policy process, as well as the disjunctions, oppositions and resistances it inspired.

It is this ‘lived experience’ of the reforms that has consequently powerfully shaped my understandings and work role. The sociological analysis of policy provided by Ball (1992) and his writings on the micro-politics of schools (1987) provided timely reading and the means to understand the ‘awkward realities’ of policy implementation, and the ‘ad hocery’ of policy decisions, particularly in relation to school closures and the lack of route planning for transportation of students following these. Ball’s framework for policy analysis has provided a useful theoretical tool with which to identify the economic, political and discursive levels of policy making and the ways they simultaneously construct possibilities and constraints on action.

Within the period 1994 – 1996 I attended a series of Summer and Winter Schools for administrators conducted by the Victorian Ministry of Education and Training in conjunction with the University of Melbourne. These courses, co-ordinated by Professor Brian Caldwell, one of the architects of the Victorian reforms, in focusing on the theoretical and practical underpinnings of ‘school re-engineering’ also provided a means of promoting the political discourses of the Kennett Government. Subsequent related study tours to the United Kingdom in 1994 and 1996 provided opportunities for further understanding of the context that inspired policy borrowing. Throughout 2005, as an exchange teacher to West Sussex, I was able to experience for myself the longer term impact of school marketisation policies in terms of over-subscription and the imposition of a competitive academic regime on children through the national curriculum and testing.

A further dimension of my orientation as a researcher stems from my own upbringing within the rural setting in which I now work. Having spent all my childhood in this rural environment, I bring particular values and understandings of the ways demographic, historical, economic, geographical and social issues have influenced values and attitudes to education. As a result, in this sense, my position is one of ‘insider.’ However it is also one of an ‘outsider’ in several senses. As Massey states, place is not ‘bounded… singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity.’(1994:5).

Ball has previously drawn attention to the local and specific dynamics of choice and market relations being attributable to local conditions, possibilities and histories. In terms of the
interviews, my locus as researcher again influenced responses; being ‘outside’ the private sector dispelled any fears that the findings would benefit the ‘competition’, since the private schools did not consider the state sector as competition. This concern, later voiced in interviews with Business Managers of the private schools who provided student numbers on their privately operated bus transport services, certainly suggests perceptions of the existence of a competitive market culture.

Gorard (2003:98) has stated that the ‘spatial unit is a key aspect of all research.’ The focus of this study on a local, lived market raises the question: how is the ‘market’ to be defined? The market could be conceptualised as a school, a neighbourhood, a town, a geographical region, a local government area, a regional administrative area or even more broadly. Writing about the English context where there is high population density, a highly urbanised society and good transport links, Gorard (2003:100) has defined the difficulties of defining ‘competition spaces’ for schools in relation to student movement: ‘To help identify competition spaces, schools themselves can state what they believe are the other schools they compete with, but competition between schools is often not spatially confined. An individual school may be able to define all of the schools it competes with, but it has been shown that some of these competitor schools themselves compete with a different set of schools.’ The same phenomenon of differing competition spaces between schools occurs in Australia, although rural areas, with their smaller populations and greater distances allow for clearer demarcation between markets.

At the same time, however, it is possible to incorporate Massey’s (1997:5) idea that ‘the identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple’; ‘…the particularity of any place is…constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that beyond. Places viewed this way are open and porous… in this way, the spatial can be conceptualised in terms of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales, from the global reach of finance and telecommunications, through the geography of the tentacles of national political power, to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace.’ Such a view of the operations of social processes as dynamic, multiple and changing, immanent in, but also stretching beyond a particular defined physical region allows for an exploration of the ways wider economic, political and social conditions impact on and are taken up by people. This simultaneous perspective also allows inclusion of the part unique historical and geographical conditions play in modifying or enabling school market effects on a defined population.

The local government administrative region which is the focus of this study comprises the area known as Sangster Shire. Located in rural Victoria, it covers 6,700 square kilometres and has a population of 16,606 inhabitants (2001 Census). The major city is Dartford (population 9,250). Outlying townships include Dewrang, Crater Valley, John Bull Creek, Muntham, Blackwood, Leura, Napier and Rossiter.

Today the Shire accommodates four secondary schools in Dartford, and one at Dewrang. The legacy of private schooling in Dartford endures in three private schools – Uniting Church (Cranbrook College), Catholic (Fleetwood College) and Lutheran (Wordsworth College). Dartford’s reputation for the provision of private and state education is to a large extent, historically and geographically determined. High rates of student mobility and strong private school enrolment make this region an intrinsically interesting and useful referent against which the impact of recent market reforms can be judged.

This study draws on interviews conducted with parents of government and non-government secondary-aged children travelling on government-funded bus routes in Sangster Shire to Dartford over a period of three months in 2006. Over five hundred surveys, for completion by parents, had previously been disseminated to secondary-aged bus travellers on all 21 routes. A
A response rate of 43% was recorded. Included in the survey was an invitation to parents to participate in one extended semi-structured interview of one and a half hour’s duration. Fifty-three parents consented to be interviewed and 29 were selected. These represented all four government and non-government school constituencies and a range of routes; they lived varying distances outside of Dartford ranging from four kilometres to 90 kilometres. Particularly high concentrations of respondents along some routes meant they were similarly proportionately represented in the interview sample. Overall, the participants represented twelve of the routes.

The remaining four interviewees making up the study included business managers of the three Dartford private schools and one government school secondary principal from a smaller secondary school outside Dartford. The Business Managers’ interviews provide information and perspectives on their schools’ private charter transport operations from other larger towns within the region, while the interview with the principal allows us to gauge the impact of these operations within the broader context of school choice on a smaller, more distant school at Dewrang.

The survey comprised a series of questions about parental school and occupational backgrounds, potential school choices, factors influencing choice of school, transport routes and forms of travel, travel times and distances, and provided the opportunity for families to identify any issues in choosing schools away from their nearest local secondary school and prima facie reasons for this. It also enabled responses to issues or anomalies associated with bus travel. The checklist of choice factors was adapted from previous choice studies undertaken by Cuttance and Stokes (DETYA, 2000), Bagley, Woods and Woods (2001) and The Australian Government (DEST, 2007). Tabulated data enabled a loose ranking of factors of importance according to school/sector which was then interpreted following interview, where respondents could elaborate. Whereas some researchers have eschewed the use of school choice checklists (Gewirtz et.al. 1995; Ball, 2003:183), they proved to be a helpful means of structuring subsequent interviews, and a useful point of embarkation into broader discussions about schooling (processes of choice, reasons, constraints, sources of information, influences, the nature of their decision making with the family and so on).

Interviews were taped, transcribed and hand coded using pens, highlighter and notebook. Thematic headings (such as methods of information gathering; attitudes to educational provision in Dartford; attitudes to schools’ marketing practices) allowed for some thematisation of interview content and consequently an analysis of relationships within the policy contexts.

Although it is outside the ambit of this study (which concentrates on the transportation of students on government-contracted bus routes), there is a need to explore in more detail, aspects of privately operated school bus travel, given the encouragement of this trend by state government policy as a consequence of its Bus Transportation Review. As marketing practices intensify, this is becoming widespread across diverse rural regions.

As a researcher, my professional position and location in the state sector of schooling has presented particular issues. In relation to the dissemination of the initial surveys, there was a clear outcome: being known in the school and local community encouraged a relatively high response rate. A second aspect of my location as researcher related to the fact that the school I work at is the co-ordinating school for government funded school bus transport for children from all Dartford schools: the survey questions which sought opinions on, and perceptions of bus travel were sometimes construed as providing the opportunity to address these, and this encouraged parents to respond. Alternatively, this fact could have been counter-productive in situation where children’s continuing access to funded bus transport was under some threat. The power relations inherent in my role as an Assistant Principal, however, certainly had the
capacity to influence respondents, despite attention to the ethical dimensions of managing power relations in the research project.

My decision to conduct semi-structured interviews enabled me to capture the heterogeneous character of individuals ‘with different attributes, abilities, aptitudes, aims, values, perspectives, needs’ (Sikes 1999: xi). In this way, I have drawn on qualitative research as it has enabled study within a ‘natural setting’, while ‘attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin, N., and Lincoln, Y., 1998:3). Routine and problematic moments in people’s lives can be described through the deployment of a wide range of interconnected methods as a means of ‘get[ting] a better fix on the subject matter at hand.’

Themes of qualitative inquiry therefore additionally present possibilities for the examination of theories informing the particular policy claims of government. In terms of education, it is claimed by market advocates such as Chubb and Moe (1990) and Tooley (1997) that market pressures will bring about an improved system of provision. However, as Woods, Bagley and Glatter (1998) claim, the incentives of the market cannot of themselves account for what occurs in schools and families in response to market reforms: ‘This is because these incentives only come to have an effect through their incorporation in people’s meanings and understandings of the world and in their day-to-day lives.’ (1996:641). Gewirtz et. al. (1995:5) likewise, have acknowledged there is a whole range of intricate variations in the operation of markets within and across nation states that reflect the struggles and negotiations people make as they live and work around and within ‘lived markets.’ In this sense, the adoption of qualitative themes of inquiry best show how such struggles and negotiations are played out. They provide an opportunity to acknowledge real-world situations, allow for a sensitivity to context and foster an understanding of the whole phenomenon as a complex system. They focus on complex interdependencies, through direct contact, the contribution of personal experiences and insights of the researcher, and allow for the capture of detailed description. The interviews also enabled the opportunity to offer a corrective to earlier responses indicated in the surveys. The parent interviews, which were conducted individually in the majority of cases (six couples participated), and lasting one and a half hours on average, allowed for more detailed exchanges and enabled a greater degree of flexibility time-wise. The majority of interviewees responding to this invitation were mothers, which tends to support earlier research categorising processes of school choice and responsibility for schooling within the family as feminised. (Aitchison, 2006; Ball 2003:24; Wilkinson, 1996)

A salient feature of this research project has been the marked level of participation in interviews by parents (mostly mothers) whose school choice was the most expensive private school in Dartford (Kenway et.al.1996; Aitchison, 2006). A high correlation between these parents’ own private schooling, occupational background and/or level of education and cultural capital supports the findings of Ball (1999:411) and others in earlier studies; ‘that middle class choosers are much more active in the education marketplace’. As Ball states, ‘The opportunity to act is related to capacity… Capacities vary in relation to the assets and other relevant resources available to families. Capacities also change over time as resources are accumulated and as strategies are refined or learned.’ (2003:24) In his discussion of the relationships between social class and education policy, Ball (2003:24) presents two arguments: that in developed societies around the world, education policies ‘…are primarily aimed at satisfying the concerns and interests of the middle class. This classed nature of policy thinking presents the middle class with strategic advantages in education;’ and that ‘the middle class is active in various ways in influencing and effecting education policies in their own interests.’ Ball’s and others’ research and theoretical analysis on school choice and class has enabled the examination of ways in which the middle class families in this study have mobilised around system contradictions, particularly in terms of legislation and implementation of transport funding. (André-Bechely 2005; Bagley et.al. 2005; Brantlinger 2003; Whitty et.al.1998; Woods et.al. 1998)
Perspectives on choice studies: an overview of international research

Significant international studies on the impact of local market policies on education and the capacity of such policies to influence parental choice have been undertaken by Gewirtz et al. (1995), Ball (1994; 2003), Whitty et al. (1999), Wells (2006), Wylie (1998), André-Becheley (2005), Bagley et al. (2005), Brantlinger (2003) and Woods et al. (1998). Gorard, Taylor and Fitz (2003) have also conducted a longitudinal national study to measure segregation levels in schools post-ERA. Defining segregation as ‘a measure of the unevenness in the distribution of individual characteristics between organisational units’ (2003:34), Gorard et al. investigate the extent to which changes in the social composition of schools have occurred in the period after markets were introduced. These UK studies have respectively examined the impact of school market reform in England, including open enrolment and per capita funding in the wake of the Education Reform Act, 1988.

Electoral change, cross-national policy borrowing and economic policy shifts have led to similar market-oriented assumptions in Australia. In Victoria, research studies charting the impact of systemic and structural change on school communities and education relationships have been undertaken by Blackmore et al., (1996) and Townsend (1996). This work has been supported by the education policy research of Marginson (1997) and of Kenway (1996) on the marketisation of education.

International research has also focused on the specific ways marketisation of education and competitive relationships have affected communities. Foskett (1998) and Foskett and Lumby (1999) have examined marketing cultures in the United Kingdom; Kenway and Epstein (1996), Blackmore (2000) and Ball and Gewirtz (1997) also argue that education markets as socio-economic constructs are gendered. The class-bound character of markets in relation to parental choice has come under scrutiny in international studies undertaken by Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall (2003); Brantlinger (2003); Ball (2003); André-Bechely (2005) and Aitchison (2006).

Commenting on the implementation of school marketisation policy in the United Kingdom, Ball (2003: 31) observes, ‘At the practical level, it is very much an urban policy, an example of metropolitan concerns driving national policy outcomes.’ Indeed, the research emphasis to date has concentrated on urban settings where higher population concentrations, transport links and the existence of more than one school may more strongly reflect the impact of competition and parental choice. (Gewirtz, 1995; Ball, 2003)

Australian studies by Teese and Polesel (2003) and Davidoff and Leigh (2006) have also focused on residential and school segregation as a choice effect in urban settings. There are significant gaps in the Australian and international literature however, in consideration of the operation, responses to, and the effects of markets in rural settings in relation to these issues. There has been surprisingly little Australian research on the impact of markets and school choice policies, with some exceptions (for example, Aitchison 2006).

Shaping parental orientations to choice: the role of school funding and transport policies

As Ball (2003:27) has noted ‘Policy is almost always, to some extent, messy, incoherent, and ad hoc, as the state responds to different sorts of problems and contradictions and interests, and new policies are sedimented into a history of previous policies which may be superseded but not necessarily expunged.’ It is such policy interactions and their working out on the ground that this study hopes to explore. Marginson’s reference to education debate in this
country as ‘a series of ritualised combats from entrenched positions’, (1993:xiii) acknowledges the contestation, negotiation and compromise inherent in the processes of policy production. The public campaigns and legal action taken by the Council for Defence of Government Schools in the eastern states against state aid to ‘religious’ schools throughout the 1960s and 1970s provides a potent example of the politicisation of schooling in Australia. Policy production therefore, is not linear and straightforward: struggles occur over policy in various contexts such as the education bureaucracy and school sites. Reid (1998) draws attention to the fact that as state apparatuses, education systems and schools will be expected to act in ways consistent with the prevailing educational settlement – ‘a settlement which the state brokers with capital in seeking to fulfil its major roles of supporting accumulation and legitimation.’ The policy effects of such agreements can be characterised as interventions which change practices ‘often in quite visible ways, and as a consequence, maintain, enhance, or disturb social patterns of access, participation, opportunity or social justice.’(Reid, 1998:xii) The education policies of contemporary federal and state governments have reshaped or redefined the post-war education settlement about the role, nature and purpose of public education.

Adoption of the Karmel Inquiry’s report, ‘Schools in Australia’ (1973), by the Whitlam Labor Government in 1973 that led to state funding of private schools secured an economic settlement as much as an educational one, by modernising public education and saving much of catholic education from financial collapse. The principle was that of equity and funding was based on need (Connors, 2000). This agreement also epitomised sedimentation within existing policy texts (between 1964 and 1970, Commonwealth support to schools had been motivated by electoral advantage as the Catholic sector had significant electoral clout) and also reflected appropriation of the policy process and discourses of choice by different interest groups. Ball (1994) has described the reading of policy texts as legitimating certain truths – ‘they construct the actors, legitimate some voices and silence others, and determine the possibilities for thought and action through ‘regimes of truth’ which privilege dominant discourses.’ Funding policies have since 1974 helped the private schools prosper, with the Catholic sector expanding initially. Moreover the Karmel inquiry had also tapped into the ‘individual rights’ movement. Originally cast as the ‘rights of the child’ or the ‘rights of the student' in education, it was appropriated by more conservative thought to become the ‘rights of parents’ to select the school of their choice for their children. The schools chosen would be subsidised by public funds. Subsequently, as Spaull (1998) observes, ‘the [Fraser Liberal Coalition] Government adopted the notion of choice in schooling to shift Commonwealth recurrent funds away from the states’ public education systems to both the poorer Catholic schools and the better resourced other private schools. It also added ‘excellence’ to its strategy for encouraging choice, not only as a way of justifying the transfer of federal funds away from public education but to re-establish the supremacy of the academic curriculum in secondary schooling. This notion of excellence was developed, it seems, in response to a manufactured concern about the decline in standards or basic skills in public education, although Australia’s ranking in international testing regimes has been upward and at a high average level (McCollow, 2006).

The positions taken in response to changed federal funding arrangements for education introduced by the Howard Government reflect the inherently pragmatic and interest-driven nature of the policy process and the key part ideological discourses play in its realisation. They illustrate the way policy and particular class interests intersect to create particular possibilities and reduce others; that is, the expansion of the rights discourse to the detriment of the equity discourse. They also reflect the dynamic nature of policy production. As Spaull (1998:8) remarks, ‘Public education has been reshaped a number of times over the past 150 years or more in response to the prevailing social, political and economic environments.’ The $22 billion States Grants Act, which came into effect in 2001, replaced the Education Resources Index model which, since 1985, had been calculated on the basis of a school’s income (including assets), represented by the school’s average in their area. The new funding
model calculated the socio-economic status of a school’s community by using residential postcodes, with parents deemed to earn an income equal to the average in their area. In what is significant for the local context – Sangster Shire – Maiden (2003) claims this model of funding benefits regional private schools with boarders, because the country regions they come from have lower SES scores than the city, despite often charging higher tuition fees.

The initial decision of the catholic system to remain outside the SES was a tactical move to keep a measure of school resources in the funding model as conceived in the Whitlam era. (Morrow, 2004) This subsequently changed in 2003 when, after protracted negotiations with the Howard Government, the Catholics accepted the SES model in the second quadrennium 2005 – 2008, although they distribute their funds more equitably within the sector. For the first time, all sectors were included in the funding arrangement. The policy has consequently initiated a growth rate in private school enrolments which saw private school enrolments Australia-wide, accounting for 30 per cent of all students – even higher for the senior high school years. As funding per capita for state schools reduced (for example, in Victoria) or did not increase at the same rate, state schools were not as attractive. In the Sangster Shire, where private school enrolments already account for 52% of all secondary enrolments, the policy implications for the public sector are increasingly significant.

Defence of government funding policies and justification for the ensuing drift of students from government schools has been explained by the Howard Government in terms of their ‘political correctness’; their being ‘out of step with mainstream views’ or, paradoxically, ‘values-neutral.’ (Blackmore, 2006) These claims which sparked a national debate throughout 2004, were strongly challenged by educationists as being much more complex in reality, and as having a limited view of ‘values’ and ‘equity’. Morrow, Blackburn and Gill (1998:12) allude to the powerful way such discourses shape movement: ‘The more pronounced ‘the drift’ to non-government schools, the stronger the perception of deteriorating quality’ in government schools. Teese (2003) for example, primarily attributes the drivers of private school choice to increased affordability and resourcing of private schools: ‘On average, private schools received about $3,000 a student more than public schools, meaning smaller classes, more specialist teachers and better facilities.’ (The Age, 24.01.04). Ball (2003:25) sees policy as classed and a product of ‘class action’: at national, local and institutional levels the middle class becomes active in influencing and effecting educational policies in their own interests. The ways government policies ‘call up’ the middle class as ‘choosers’ and ‘active consumers’ of school choice and the extent to which the middle class families respond at the local level is later explored in this paper.

The idea of the relationship between perceptions of, and anxieties about government schooling, is fostered in large part by the media. (Blackmore and Thorpe,2003). Here, ‘parental ambivalence about government schools is often based on the belief that public schools are under such pressure that their quality of education is likely to be jeopardised.’(Tomazin, The Age, 26.08.04). In their consideration of why and how particular issues become media issues, Blackmore and Thorpe (2003) examine dominant modes of accountability – including mobilisation of parental choice – which depend on ‘increased information upon which systems and parents can judge teachers, principals and schools.’ The role of the media in relation to policy targeting and co-ordination, and its associated accountability mechanisms has been described as a ‘loose cannon’ in that it is implicated in the flow of information informing the policy process. It does so in an over-simplified way, ‘constructing and depicting myths’ which are an over-simplified version of a more complex reality. The media therefore ‘shapes the discursive terrain which creates the need for policy and interprets policy, once produced, and as such, plays a significant role in symbolic control by the performative state’(Blackmore and Thorpe,2003). In the context of federal funding policy, dominant discourses operate through the construction of a public-private divide. In this study, there is evidence that respondents’ opinions and prejudices – and choices - are legitimated and informed by these simplified positions and arguments.
Within the region under study here, the new funding arrangements post-2000 have enabled the consolidation and expansion of Cranbrook College and Fleetwood College. But they must be read in conjunction with local social processes which operate beyond the geographical spaces of this area. The appointment of new principals to each of these schools in 1999 was premised on criteria that would allow demonstration of their capacity to take these schools forward following the downturn in enrolments—a consequence of the rural recession in the early 1990s. Their ability to do so has, to a large extent, been governed by improved economic conditions in this region which translated into confidence and private spending. At Fleetwood, the launch of a capital appeal for $3.5 million by its Foundation received $1.5 million through donations of which $1 million was donated by one family; the Lutheran community has received substantial bequests of prime farming land on the outskirts of Dartford; Cranbrook has also received large family donations. Along with these financial injections, these schools have benefited from inclusion in systemic alliances, both pre- and post-2000. Additionally, donations are no longer counted in Commonwealth funding calculations. These advantages have been realised as building projects and improved resourcing, additional staffing, smaller class sizes and the development of co-curricular programs: all are manifestations of ‘opportunities’ that resonate strongly with the aspirations of many middle class families in this district to retain their traditional positional advantage. As Ball notes, (2003:7), ‘Class positions and perspectives are produced from and invested with the traces of earlier choices, improvisations and opportunities, as well as being inflected by chance.’ At the state level, policy change in regard to school transport—a significant factor in rural areas in a largely dispersed country like Australia—has interacted powerfully with federal policy to encourage student movement to the non-government sector. The consequence of schools now being funded to operate/own their own buses or enter into private contracts is incremental expansion into other (government) schools’ traditional catchments. Increases for private conveyance (private car travel)—which traditionally favours those with the time and capital resources to privately transport—have also influenced this trend. This example of policy conjuncture—whereby state policies sanction privately subsidised travel and federal policies reward targeting of lower income postcode destinations enabling higher school SES scores—works strongly in favour of middle class interests (Preston, 2000). Locally this is played out in the example where student enrolments towns north of Dartford—Dewrang, Red Gum Plains, Yabby Creek and River Junction—which sat at the bottom of the ATO Tax Income Table in this Shire in 2003–2004 are increasingly targeted by the non-government schools.

In policy terms, the history of conveyancing in Victoria reflects the contingencies of local conditions intersecting with local and wider economic, political and ideological orientations of government: it also illustrates the ways in which previous policies have the power to inflect subsequent policy production. The gaps, omissions or contradictions arising from successive policy-making in this area have enabled mobilisations by particular interest groups. It is an ongoing process. The earliest recorded provision of a conveyance allowance in Victoria was in the 1890s during the Great Depression when slashing of government expenditure on education resulted in school amalgamations and closures. Ironically, conveyance was proposed as a cost-cutting solution. Despite improved financial conditions later in the 1890s, the conveyance system did not disappear. Now firmly entrenched in policy, it supplied a reasonably economic solution to the problem of educating children in remote areas. As Ball (2003:21) notes, ‘new policies are sedimented into a history of previous policies which may be superseded but not necessarily expunged.’ The free school contract bus service scheme introduced in 1944 following a Government decision that it was not feasible to develop secondary schools in all country areas, particularly isolated towns, was a policy that married welfarist and egalitarian concerns with the economic.
The School Bus Transportation Review undertaken in 1993 by the Kennett Government in Victoria reflected its neo-liberal orientation. This review formed part of a process of system-wide rationalisation and cost-cutting in State public services, and all options centred on cost reductions to the Government through withdrawal or limitation of services, the imposition of new systemic barriers, the introduction of the ‘user pays’ principle or devolution of financial responsibility to local communities. Policy texts provided opportunities to simultaneously rationalise and reorganise school transportation to conceal and distract from the social dislocation created by school closures and amalgamations. At the same time the policy process reflected the contingent, sometimes illogical and contradictory nature of policy making. As late as October 1993, there were still no estimates of how many children would have to change schools as a result of the closures; how many would be forced to use school buses and how much this would cost taxpayers. As Colebatch (The Age, 19.10.1993:14) states, ‘… in all its consultations, the Government never made cost-benefit calculations to find out whether it was cheaper to educate children at local schools or bus them to schools further away.’ The incoherence that characterises the policy making process is clearly apparent here.

In terms of the contingent nature of policy making, the idea of ‘conjuncture’ is significant. Adeptness and strategy at mobilising around system contradictions varies in importance over time, in relation to changes in socio-economic conditions. In Victoria, where change was simultaneously taking place on all fronts, widespread social and economic dislocation and exclusionary practices of government (‘producer capture’) tended to minimise struggles between groups for control over policy formulation. Failure of this review to make significant changes to existing policy can perhaps be conceptualised as non-decision making, ‘in which decisions are prevented from being taken on potential issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests.’ (Lukes, cited in Ball, 2003:25).

The interim period between the 1993 School Bus Transportation Review and the 2000 Review of School Bus Services had seen profound changes in Victoria. Devolution had been reworked from the centre, with tighter accountability and a reduction in public resourcing. There was widespread disquiet about the growth of competition between public schools and real doubts about the Government’s commitment to the public sector, particularly in rural electorates, resulted in a surprise electoral loss to Kennett in 1999 due to the rural vote. A Labor party review of bus services and the Ministerial Review, Public Education: The Next Generation were designed to restore public confidence in public education. The effects of bus funding arrangements have been most marked in terms of sector enrolments, increasing mobilisation of school choice (or privileging of choosers) in non-government secondary schooling in this first decade of twenty-first century Victoria.

In the case of parental choice and conveyancing funding, while ‘cracks, fissures and contradictions’ (Ball, 1990:16) inhere in the policy process, occasionally there is an articulation of policy intent between different agencies of the state: if the state is seen as a constellation of sites whose determination by the economy is both general and varied. Ironically, the policy intent of the State Labor Government articulated with that of the Federal Liberal Government. The 2000 – 2001 State Labor Government Review of School Bus Services refers to the ‘continuing pressure to address more fundamental equity issues… the non-government sector in particular, has continued to highlight what they see as discrimination in the system, while many parents sending their children to government schools have also highlighted perceived inequities.’ (Theophanous, 2001:19). Since 1990, more than 250 school bus contracts had been cancelled as a result of a program of review and rationalisation resulting in considerable dislocation in some communities as the result of past school closures which in turn increased time and distance travelled on some school buses. It also reflected the increasingly choice-driven mindset fostered by ideological and political orientations of the previous State Liberal Government that were now entrenched, thus facilitating the re-positioning of interest groups, particularly those concerned to extend
funding to the private sector. This was fuelled by significant economic recovery in wool and new industries slowing the population drift. Thus global, national and state policy discourses intersected to create the space for particular groups to mobilise demands for free bus transportation. The 2003 review recommended restructure of the car allowance to be distance-based and not a flat rate, and the creation of a school-based bus travel allowance which would allow a large number of non-government schools currently transporting their own students to retain and improve their own bus system. The aim was to ‘significantly improve equity by reducing costs to students who fit the criteria but are not being transported on government buses.’ (Theophanous, 2001:52). That is, the notion of equity was now equated to government funding of individual choice of public or private schooling. Discursive practices thus pre-empt meaning and the ways they can be deployed (Ball 1992). Hence such terms as ‘equity’ and ‘fairness’ reflect this change from an egalitarian ideal to one specific to a particular class or group – in this case, non-government students.

This is a significant departure from the original intention of the 1944 Regulations, where in the initial stages, services were to transport children to State secondary (high and technical) and consolidated and group schools only. Non-government students, as well as government students would, in future, be considered on a case by case basis in these regions. In 2005, pre-Prep to Year 12, government and non-government fare-paying and non-fare-paying students travel on government buses and private school chartered buses co-operatively work to transport government and non-government students to the different schools in Dartford. They are supported in this by a complex system of car pooling and shuttle buses taking students to any one of twelve educational institutions in the Dartford area. In providing additional choice to government school students, the implications for smaller schools would be clear: the viability of some small rural schools has been undermined, confirming many of the Public Education Review submissions indicating disquiet about the growth of competition between public schools (2001:17). Previous DEET policy guidelines allowed only students attending government schools to be taken into account for the establishment or extension of a new service. Now increased numbers of students in the non-government sector – 25% of students in rural Victoria – challenged this rule. Closure of routes occurred when numbers dropped below seven, with considerable impact on the school and its surrounding community; a form of ‘creative destruction’ of the market. ‘Those parents with the time and money and ability to move their children to schools in the leafy suburbs will do so. Those parents who work long hours, who do not own cars, who don’t want their children undertaking long journeys on costly, dwindling, unsafe public transport will be left with the choice of declining schools until they have no choice at all.’ (Ball, 1992:66)

Ball alerts us to the way policy can be understood as discourse: policies are ‘read in different ways by different actors in different sites. As discourse, policies exercise power through the production of ‘truth’. That is, they construct the actors, legitimate some voices and silence others, and determine the possibilities for thought and action through ‘regimes of truth’ which privilege dominant discourses.’ (Ball cited in Reid, 1998: xii). Control of policy discourses of ‘equity’ is clearly apparent in the debates surrounding the inclusion of non-government school students in conveyancing allowances. Inclusion of the 25% of non-government students was based on a discourse of equity. With any fifteen students required to create a new route, four of these could now be from the non-government sector. Parents, positioned as consumers within a neo-liberal frame of choice, have become active in both policy production and also its effects. New economic, social and demographic trends emerging in regional and rural Victoria were also increasing the strength of the non-government sector, which continued to present a robust case for the consideration of perceived ‘inequities’ in the transportation of non-government school students. Equity was now equated to choice. While cost issues have reduced the unfettered provision of transportation to government school students, the 2001 legislation created gaps in routes and services which have now enabled substitution with non-government sector services. In 1982, buses travelling on 28 routes delivered students to five secondary and seven primary schools in Dartford (Garden,
By 2007, government-funded bus transport travelled to Dartford along 21 routes.* School-operated buses now operate in more remote areas as well as existing government-funded routes, drawing students away to larger regional centres.

A rural/regional education study of choice: where the market meets socio-cultural and historical influences

In their analysis of schooling in the marketplace, Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) refer to the constitution of a major cultural transformation within English education, deriving from the 1988 Education Reform Act legislation which devolved management through open enrolment and capita funding. Trans-national policy borrowings combined with the historical roles education has played within national and state cultures and power relations, and state approaches to social policy generally, have created the conditions for a shift to an intensified market mode in Australia. Australia has now one of the highest levels of familial investment in education in the OECD countries, close to the USA and Mexico (McCollow, 2006). In Victoria, moves to self-management – devolution and deregulation of financial control – have recast relationships between consumers and producers: ‘Having an immediate interface between producers and consumers is seen to ensure the identification and gratification of needs in an efficient way which leads to improved quality.’ (Kenway, 1995:16) Schools are however, contextualised and situated differently in relation to social and spatial factors; they have differing capacities to refract or inflect policies, and mediate the effects of wider social conditions such as demographic and labour market shifts. In rural areas, the vagaries of climate add to the mix.

As Gewirtz (1995) argues, the spatial location of schools is itself important to enrolment. Dartford’s geographic centrality in the region and historically determined transport links have privileged the development of services and schools. Within Sangster Shire, four of the five secondary schools are located in Dartford; the fifth situated eighty kilometres to the north. In 2001 (Prospero Research: 2003: 23) approximately one quarter of the total Sangster Shire population of 16,106 were attending educational institutions. Of these, 35% attended secondary schools in Dartford and Dewrang. With respect to the secondary education figures, striking contrasts can be identified between the proportion of non-government students enrolled in this municipality (52%) and the rest of Victoria (35%). Education is therefore a key sector of the economy, earning an estimated $21 million and generating employment of close to 500 people, including 300 teachers. The four schools include Cranbrook College (established 1871); Fleetwood College (1952); Wordsworth College (1983) and Amberley College (1916). Over one thousand children travel daily into Dartford on government funded buses; approximately another three hundred travel on privately-operated buses. The fact that these schools also interact with other markets enables consideration of the multiplicity of social relations that occur through a mix of links and interconnections beyond the physical region.

It is tempting to attribute recent policy legislation as creating the conditions for schools’ recent entry into the education market. In her discussion of the English context, Power comments, ‘The education market… stems from the long standing relationship between education and stratified social structure.’ (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995:123) A historical perspective of early settlement by wealthy English and Scottish pastoralists in this region of rural Victoria clearly shows the replication of these class structures in the early establishment of private schools for the landed gentry, the degree of social differentiation in the provision of schooling and the ways it has been taken up. To quote a description of education in Dartford in the nineteenth century,
‘The history of education in [Dartford] had been one of periods of progress interspersed with periods of division and decline. There were periods of amalgamation and separation, poaching of students, resignations of principals and company members, financial disasters, changes in operating companies … The Academy was closed and reopened, closed again in 1900, and passed to the Loreto Catholic nuns who opened a ladies’ college in 1905. The Good Samaritan Sisters took charge of this college from 1924…’ [Franzmann, J., 2004:3]

In this sense, the struggle for market share has also long characterised the provision of schooling in this area. But a century on, demographic change in rural localities, intersecting with the economic and social policies of state and federal governments has intensified school engagement in markets, either directly or by default. By virtue of their location, all four Dartford schools are compelled to sustain a market relationship, although the extent of their responses varies. The key forms include:

- constructing new markets locally, nationally and internationally
- balancing differentiation with conformity in terms of curriculum
- managing symbolic production of the market
- commodifying students

**Constructing new markets locally, nationally and internationally:**

The lack of availability of daily funded transport between Dartford and its outlying towns previously meant families’ choices were largely confined to attendance locally at government schools, smaller private or catholic day schools in their own township, or more distant boarding. With term boarding in progressive decline throughout the 1990s on account of the rural recession and demographic change and changing family priorities, the three private schools had to recruit students more directly from further afield or introduce weekly boarding with the provision of weekend transport connections to students’ home destinations. Changes to bus funding legislation in 2002 strengthened the development of transport infrastructure by enabling schools to operate privately chartered bus or car transport and the pro rata payment of conveyance allowances for family travel. This, together with media constructions of a ‘crisis’ in public education, has subsequently encouraged schools’ engagement in more distant rural markets and shaped parental orientations to choice.

Private schools have been able to construct new markets incrementally; first, a scheduled visit to an area by the Principal or members of the leadership team, director of boarding, and promotions officer to conduct an information session; then the offer of a guaranteed service contingent on the promise of enrolment. A car service then commences, which, as enrolments grow, a small bus is replaced with a 15 seater bus and then a larger bus. Currently, Fleetwood has weekly services going to Kenworth (north), and Grenache, South Australia (west); daily services to Hillview (north west) and Windy Cove and Rosemount (south west) Cranbrook College operates daily services to Windy Cove and Flagstaff in a shared arrangement with the third private school, Wordsworth College. The impact of these daily and weekly transport arrangements has been longer travel (average trip is 90 kilometres each way), increased use of private cars to access bus pick-up points and the reconfiguration of bus routes. The decline in government funded bus routes therefore can be seen as an effect rather than a cause of the introduction of private services in the sense that rationalisation of government-provided services was a necessary pre-condition of their reconstitution as privatised services. Demographic shifts, school closures and changing patterns of land use, together with the performance of the local economy (local and international markets), itself a function of other policy ensembles, all continue to influence private school enrolments.

Geographical proximity to the South Australian border and to the north of the Peak Ranges has encouraged Dartford private schools to market themselves against government schools in these areas. Relatively low population density and distance between townships could be
considered to delineate competition spaces, however these areas also constitute markets for schools in metropolitan and larger regional centres. Dartford’s private schools also have historically acted as feeder schools for the Geelong, Ballarat and Melbourne markets where elite schools are located. The Dartford schools are less engaged in national school markets, although some enrolments derive from tradition and prior association. Fleetwood for example, draws on its religious tradition to promote mission experiences on Kiribati and Bathurst Island. A benefactor sponsors students from Kalumburu, in north-western Australia. Promotional material constructs these relationships as dimensions of a social/religious mission and in terms of ‘opportunity’ and ‘experience’ - advantages which seem to be designed primarily for local markets rather than for the people in the areas themselves.

Discourses of globalisation and themes of internationalisation evince particular marketing advantages for schools which highlight overseas tours, internationalisation of student enrolments (notably Asia) and the establishment of twin school arrangements. Cranbrook College markets itself in Hong Kong and has negotiated an annual exchange program with Chongqing Middle School in Chongqing Province, People’s Republic of China, which simultaneously taps into discourses of ‘opportunity’ as well as current pedagogical concerns about the preparation of Year Nine students, in terms of developing independence, resilience and broadening of perspectives for later years. Amberley College and Wordsworth College in contrast, do not market experience in this form. High costs and small school size prohibit this form of marketing. Although Amberley College has organised student cultural tours to Italy, Egypt and Indonesia in the past, these have been taken up only by those who can afford them. Such tours have nevertheless formed part of the school’s marketing and promotion.

**Balancing differentiation with conformity in terms of curriculum**

This study revealed an unsurprising degree of conformity in respondents’ perceptions of the Dartford schools’ characteristics, specialisations and social segregation: to a large extent this reflects the effectiveness of marketing and promotions work undertaken by these schools within the local community; a consequence of the need for these schools to differentiate themselves in a small but competitive market through the development of niche markets. Irrespective of their commitment to marketing approaches, all schools are implicated.

Whereas the provision of gifted education programs is seen as a ‘good marketing tool’ (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995:169), special needs programs are downplayed because of the negative perceptions such provision generates. In the literature of all four schools, special needs provision is only cursorily mentioned; integration programs not at all. While funding is available for integration in the catholic system, the local comprehensive school conducts a leading program for integration students, yet even so, it is unwilling to publicise this, fearing labelling as an ‘integration school.’ Many local families who educate their children at Cranbrook College have opted to send a sibling requiring integration support to Amberley College.

Cranbrook College and Fleetwood College have drawn on different understandings about the effectiveness of teaching and its relationship to class size as marketing tools. In the case of Cranbrook, small class sizes with a guarantee of individual attention are promoted as essential to individual success. This personalised concentration on individual achievement feeds in to the promotional activity of the school as an academic institution geared to university entrance and an emphasis on examination results. Subject choice (two compulsory languages at Year Seven) and upper-school subjects and courses offered (no VCAL) are structured to encourage self-selection (Lamb, Rumberger, Jesson and Teese, 2004:31). Gewirtz (1995) and Aitchison (2006) have noted the associated promotion of homework and discipline as another form of distinction in the market.
Taking a different approach, Fleetwood stresses the innovative nature of its Excel program at Year Seven, which features an open plan approach to learning in two hour blocks conducted by two teachers at a time who are responsible for instruction and support. It is possible that this pedagogical decision has its basis in cost-cutting, (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995:170). In terms of curriculum provision, Amberley College, by virtue of its size and broader socio-economic clientele, offers the widest curriculum choices of the four schools. VCE, VCAL and School-Based Apprenticeships and the Commonwealth funded ATC now compensate for the loss of the technical system (a consequence of the Kennett Government amalgamations of the 1990s), which originally characterised choice for supporters of state education. Fleetwood, as a catholic comprehensive school, also offers VCAL and VCE. In contrast, the narrow academic focus of Cranbrook College acts as a filtering device in the upper levels and there is some encouragement of cross-school movement when students cannot get their courses. Schools offering these courses are quick to seize the opportunity to enrol such students.

It is possible, as Gewirtz et. al note, (1995: 173) that emphasis on the arts ‘might in some senses be viewed as a positive outcome of market forces.’ In marketing terms, the provision of music is highly valuable to schools because it attracts children from supportive homes. ‘Music conveys subtle messages about social class as well as gender.’ (Gewirtz, 1995:140). While the state school is the undisputed leading music school in Dartford, Cranbrook College is currently planning construction of a Music and Performing Arts Centre to augment the range of co-curricular opportunities available to middle class children, thereby exerting further drawing power against Fleetwood and Amberley College, which already offer comprehensive music and arts programs.

Amberley College has relied heavily on the appeal of its music program as a means of attracting middle class students (often girls) who might otherwise choose private education. Achievement is central to its high profile and attraction of new students of both genders. At the same time, teachers are concerned to preserve access to students of all backgrounds and increase participation levels across the school, including the primary years. In the light of reduced government funding, Amberley has also had to take the initiative in soliciting funding for equipment and scholarships. It heavily promotes music in all publicity material; but this has demanded integrity in terms of the selection of students for promotional brochures, often contrary to the demands of the market. Unlike Fleetwood, whose publicity material featured an attractive non-music student ‘playing’ an instrument, which later revealed itself as lacking authenticity and became counter-productive to the image of musical participation it wished to generate, Amberley has not aspired to manage impressions in the way that a competitive market would encourage.

Managing symbolic production of the market

- Uniform

The most immediately visible aspect of school differentiation and marketing occurs in the uniform,(Meadmore and Symes, 1997) According to Gewirtz et.al. (1995: 136), ‘Student uniform is an especially good example of how simple and over images may conceal the more complex and covert processes and relationships of schooling.’ Middle class parents are said to favour uniform because they view it as an indicator of discipline. Additionally, some parents in this study attribute adherence to uniform as a preparation for the future. The importance of uniform as an indicator of discipline – either imposed or self-regulated – was a view shared by many parents in this study, although they expressed a consciousness of the efforts some schools expended to ensure this was maintained: this included teacher patrols in the local shopping centre on Friday afternoons after school. Where standards were not as high, parents were quick to see the school’s use of uniform more cynically: ‘We’ve got the blazer and tie’
regardless of how scruffy our kid’s hair looks or how many holes they’ve got in their blazers.’ [Kelly, D., 2006].

Meadmore and Symes (1997:184) draw attention to the fact that changes such as ‘the marketisation of state schooling and the existence of progressive social legislation have made possible the emergence of policies where, formerly, ambiguity prevailed in tacit and unofficial practices. Such contingencies have not only provided a space for new centralised policies to be written but also opportunities for schools to interpret such policies according to their enterprising needs’ (Meadmore and Symes, 1997:184). For government schools with a lower socio-economic clientele, there is a certain pressure to adhere to the standards of uniform set by the local private schools. Amberley College is symbolic of many state schools attempting to limit uniform costs to families by purchasing sets of blazers for more formal occasions. At Dewrang, there has been pressure on the principal from parents who are better off, to change the uniform to make it more ‘up-market’. Meadmore and Symes (1997: 184) draw attention to the irony that parents, rather than government policy emphasise dress regimes. It is clear that market demands have shaped parental attitudes to what schools reflect, even in smaller rural schools.

- **Publicity Materials: Prospectuses**

The dilemmas between making a financial commitment to marketing and promotion versus spending on school resources are well documented (Kenway, 1995; Gewirtz Ball and Bowe, 1995:131). Perhaps this explains the absence of smaller private schools and government schools from this form of marketing. Instead, they rely on press coverage in the form of articles featuring student achievement or weekly contributions to the schools’ column, In Our Schools which appears in the Dartford Tribune. On the other hand, private schools such as Fleetwood and Cranbrook College employ marketing and promotions officers to develop publicity materials and recruit enrolments at field days and agricultural shows and education fairs. Unlike the larger metropolitan schools, which often contract agencies to prepare advertising material, image production is carried out by the Dartford schools themselves. Again, the observations noted in the Gewirtz et. al. London study apply equally to Dartford: ‘The production of a glossy brochure by one school is matched or upstaged by the prospectus of another and the process may well continue to escalate as the aesthetic expectations of consumers continue to rise.’ (1995:131)

For all the impressive images and corporate identification however, the parents in this study see such publicity material for the image making it is. Their comments support the findings by Cuttance and Stokes (2000:78): ‘School publications such as newsletters, prospectuses and brochures provide valuable information about schools. On their own, they are not considered reliable sources of objective information because they are considered ‘marketing’ documents.’ The images and language depicted in the promotional materials nevertheless intersect with powerful discourses of belonging, opportunity and success: they are ‘a form of rhetoric that must be read as cultural texts.’ (Meadmore and Meadmore, 2004:386)

These two schools’ promotional materials do not, in fact, vary substantially in terms of layout, size and emphasis. As Gewirtz notes, the messages embedded in school communications… are also becoming more uniform and somewhat formulaic’ (1995:137). Consequently there are fresh-faced happy adolescents on the front covers, with full-size A4 colour images of various depictions of school life inside and outside the classroom. School logos and mottos occupy prominent positions on the front cover featuring corporate colours. In the case of Fleetwood, the prospectus is organised around key discourses similar to those described by Meadmore and Meadmore of ‘community depicted as being the entire school ‘family’ embracing an emotional closeness that displays superior emotions.’ (2004:383). Here, this discourse is rendered in terms of ‘My Educational Home.’ The thematic organisation of prospectuses allows for the exploration of features related to school organisation, curriculum,
co-curricular activities and boarding. A pocket at the rear of the prospectus includes enrolment forms, a fees schedule, notes on curriculum and various specialist programs. Placed at the front of these notes is an analysis of the most recent VCE results. These are constructed as a Press Release and present various in-house statistical comparisons showing ENTER scores and Course destinations.

- **Buildings**

When the Principal of Cranbrook College took up his position in July 1999, he inherited buildings in a ‘shocking state of disrepair.’ The rural recession experienced in the previous decade had been strongly felt in declining enrolments and income. As he states, ‘…we had roofs falling in down at Longleat, and we spent a lot of money. Is that going to bring in more kids? I don’t know, but I think that if you provide for them a ghetto, they will treat it like a ghetto, so we spent a lot of money on improving facilities, but we don’t have a swimming pool and eight tennis courts and all those sort of things. So if people come in here and say, ‘Now I’m going up the road to Fleetwood and you know, they’ve got a swimming pool’ and so on, I say, ‘Look, if that’s the style of education you’re looking for, then that’s for you. We’re not going to try and compete with Fleetwood’s facilities.’ [Lonsdale, H. in Morgan, 2003]

Despite the sentiments of this principal, the very nature of the education market has compelled this school to participate and compete. Four years later, the school is held up as an eminently desirable school to attend on the basis of its facilities, which represent a careful juxtaposition of tradition and heritage with modernity.

The old-world image of an ivy-covered stone building with clock tower and adjoining buildings painted in the school’s corporate colours presents a powerful impression of tradition, solidity, compactness, good management and careful planning to parents choosing Cranbrook College. In recent times, generous federal funding, capital borrowing (offset by fee increases) and bequests have enabled ambitious refurbishments and landscaping projects at both Fleetwood and Cranbrook. Cranbrook currently has planning approval for a Sports Centre to be constructed on an adjoining site – a venture which sits oddly against plans by its state counterpart to decommission one of its gymnasiums because there is not enough money to refurbish it – and a Performing Arts, Music and Drama Centre.

The acquisition of new college facilities also enables promotion of the school in less directly marketed forms, such as hosting public events in these facilities so visitors from ‘outside’ will pass on their impressions to others. This practice also intersects strongly with the hosting of school functions such as open days, orientation days, tours and school anniversary celebrations, which in themselves present powerful marketing opportunities. By contrast, the public education sector has lost out in terms of the federal funding windfall to the non-government sector. Its increasingly poorer clientele, combined with its legislated voluntary fee-paying status compromises its ability to locally raise funds, while media constructions of a crisis in public education facilities further feed into the insecurities of parents.

Yet while schools themselves market buildings and grounds there are some parents who do not attach a great deal of importance to this aspect of educational provision, preferring instead to focus on the quality of teaching, class sizes and subject breadth. For other families, including the child who is often the choice-maker, the appeal of superior sporting facilities and spacious attractive grounds is potent.
Commodifying students

As Gewirtz (1995, 175 – 6) states, ‘children themselves are coming to be viewed as commodities, some of whom are more valuable than others. The emphasis seems increasingly to be not on what the school can do for the child, but on what the child can do for the school.’ The news in August 2006 (Bachelard, The Age, 25.08.06:1) that a prominent Melbourne private school had offered scholarships to an entire girls’ volleyball team from a government school in a bid to improve its gender balance as it moved to co-educational status confirmed the trend identified a decade previously by Gewirtz et. al. (1995) as the result of an intensification in marketisation in the United Kingdom.

Offers of scholarships, articulating with the provision of funded bus transport to students in more distant rural communities, and combined with uncertainty in the face of adverse press accounts of public schooling, provide the latest inducements for aspirational families to abandon local schooling in rural areas. (Lamb, Rumberger, Jesson, Teese, 2004:31). The process of selection in this case, is directed at the eldest child in a family so that subsequent children in a family will follow, thereby guaranteeing the school some continuity of enrolment. Given that children in small rural schools are targeted for such support, it is likely that the SES postcodes they represent qualify the schools for more favourable capita federal funding. At the same time, the award of scholarships has the capacity to influence neighbouring families and friends to consider the school.

To varying extents, all four Dartford schools offer scholarships based on assorted criteria of excellence in fields of musical, academic or sporting achievement, or rurality. These are premised on the belief that a larger curriculum is better, or that there are more co-curricular opportunities available at a larger school. Yet, as Di Stefano points out, ‘There is only so much that an individual child can do in addition to study.’ (The Age, 26.08.06)

Financial inducements to families with the requisite social and cultural capital guarantee the school future success and marketability. In this study there is evidence to suggest that behind the offer of scholarships is a form of selection designed to give a particular school a competitive edge in sport, music, debating or academic achievement. This however, inspires a degree of cynicism among the community, as district families ‘track’ the progress of children from the primary schools: as one parent says, ‘It is easy to put your name behind something that is already there.’ [Elliott, G., 2006]

On the other hand, students with special needs are not assisted. The incentive structure of the market encourages such schools to shift the burden of responsibility for them to the government schools. For those with the necessary cultural, social and economic capital, the offer of subsidised private schooling can be irresistible; however the impact of ‘cream-skimming’ is felt in smaller rural communities. Such practices also work against other private school parents who have paid full fees, only to see others guaranteed subsidised entry to the same school. Whatever sacrifices these families have made to ensure a type of social closure, seem to be compromised. Often this creates the impression that scholarship holders are ‘second class’ members of that community.

Ways parents position themselves in the market

The Sangster Shire Council recognises the economic and historical importance of education in attracting families to the district and actively markets the region in terms of its safety, space, clean air and natural environment. Employers, such as government departments and professional firms have also promoted education as a means of attracting families to the area. Choice, physical location, access, quality, the fees differential between schools and their
specialisations are all cited in marketing material as particular advantages to families. The discourse of ‘choice’, however, is read in different ways by different families in this study.

Historical factors and tradition have played a significant part in consolidating the reputation of education in Dartford. Over time, education markets have been differently constituted, although there is still strong differentiation between classes in the ways they have engaged in the market – ‘stable, but not static’. (Ball, 2003) New funding and transport policies have shifted the terrain on which the education market is realised. The intensification of school marketisation through policies of choice has created a mechanism which enables those in a position to choose to seek ‘advantage, social advancement and mobility.’ As Ball (2003:17) notes, ‘class relations in education may differ from those prevalent in the past, but they have by no means disappeared.’

Sangster Shire has a relatively ethnically homogeneous population characterised by strong Anglo-Celtic roots and a high proportion of people born in Australia. In addition, a small but notable proportion of people identify themselves as having German ancestry. (Prospero Research, 2003). These socio-cultural characteristics are reflected in religious affiliations with the Uniting and Lutheran churches in the rural parts of the Shire; in turn this is reflected in type of private school provision in Dartford. In terms of socio-economic status however, there is greater variation within the Shire.

While financial resources and property are one aspect of class difference, Ball defines class rather more broadly, as ‘situated realisations.’ Class in his view, is dynamic and relational, productive and reactive: ‘certain locations are sought out and others are avoided.’

Economic restructuring and globalisation have removed the old certainties and threatened the security of the middle class (Pusey, 2003; Ball, 2003) whose response to risk has been an intensification of positional competition. Middle class parents who can exert their market power to gain a competitive advantage for their children are increasingly likely to do so. This paper concludes with an outline of the way middle class parents mobilise their positional advantage in relation to the ways choice is effected through travel.

 Whereas the exclusion of stakeholders from consultation was a hallmark of the Liberal Government’s 1993 School Bus Transportation Review, the 2000 Labor Government Review of School Bus Services enabled state-wide consultation and input into the policy process. The policy gaps and contradictions created by school and route closures over the previous decade now enabled for the mobilisation of private and government school interest groups for control of the policy outcomes. The new recommendations reflected a fundamental change in orientation to the provision of bus funding, occasioned by the broader development of markets in schooling where consumer-driven, competitive and individualistic behaviour had been encouraged. Discourses however, were framed less by a ‘user pays’ mindset than a recasting of notions of egalitarianism in discursive processes around ‘discrimination’, ‘inequity’ and ‘unfairness.’ These meanings shifted depending on which school constituency was represented. The recommendations, which became policy, clearly reflect Ball’s notion that legitimation for new arenas of opportunity for those families holding relevant and transposable assets and resources is provided by policy.

Relaxation of conditions of transport eligibility for non-government students through indexed subsidies for school operated bus services and private car conveyance has alleviated financial pressure on rural middle class families whose alternative would be to board. The modification of schools’ boarding policies to allow weekly boarding or overnight stays instead of term boarding, represents a new articulation with existing policy and therefore accommodation to the market by private schools facing increased competition for enrolments. For many of the middle class families in this study, such arrangements have been enthusiastically received.
The intersection of market schooling with other deregulatory policies of government (such as transport) enables or constrains choice. As Gewirtz et.al. (1995:51) note, ‘Access to a car, the patterns of bus routes… and … timetables, the pattern of busy roads and the physical location of schools all affect the possibility and the perception of choice.’ Perceptions of families in relation to time or cost, and space (distance) in turn, are mediated by their material and cultural resources, and in this way, school choice can be said to be class-related. The strategies employed by middle class families in this study (principally mothers) who have opted for more distant schools (state or private) clearly reveal a form of household organisation that allows for private travel ensuring supplementation of, and independence from bus services.

‘Well, I’ve been in here since eight o’clock this morning, because I did tuckshop at the school. You know, I do it twice a term. Fine. Then I had hockey training, then I waited around for four hours until he could play basketball. Now he has… we have the option of him staying with his grandmother or he can go to the boarding house, but he does prefer to come home. I like to watch my children play sport. I missed out big-time and I’m over-compensating to my children for what I missed out on. I acknowledge that. I mean, they spend two and a half hours each day roughly, travelling on a bus. That’s a lot of wasted time.’ [Philippa Parsons, 2006]

Increasingly competitive markets have also required schools in the private sector to review their provision of boarding facilities. Traditional, fixed term boarding, which originally catered for more distant families, has in recent decades experienced a decline in popularity due largely to financial cost and social reasons. Schools have however, sought to enhance their marketability by incorporating greater flexibility into accommodation arrangements. Accommodation of students overnight or on a weekly basis has resulted in the attraction of middle class families located at medium-distance whose children can continue to avail themselves of a range of co-curricular activities after school without the prohibitive costs of full-time boarding.

The capacity of middle class parents to also supplement transport enables their children to take full advantage of the after-hours co-curricular opportunities provided by private schools which would otherwise be denied users tied to bus timetables. Often this coincides with the employment of one or both parents in the town. Parents employed in professional or managerial positions were likely to have more flexibility. The ability to call on social networks and the location of family, especially grandparents, in the town also enabled a greater degree of flexibility. This however, was not confined to private school families.

The relative remoteness from established bus pick up points, access to which is often dangerous, was also overcome by driving children there. In the word of one mother, ‘They can’t ride a bike or anything like that because it’s over the Clematis-Leicester Road, so we cut along the Peppercorn Road and down the Clematis-Leicester Road, into a lane to be collected, so I won’t be sending them… I’ll still be doing the bus for another ten years or so. I did say to someone at one stage, ‘Did you know I’ll be driving them to the bus stop for nineteen years?’ I worked it out once! But still, that’s the way it is…’ [Annabel McKenzie, 2006] For middle class families, ‘You just do what you have to do.’ [Phoebe Douglas, 2006] For distant families, legislated incentives have enabled car-pooling:

Claire Westwood: ‘I’ve noticed that some of the Dewrang children that travel daily, they go out on the Muntham and Dewrang-Sheoke Road. Three families share that travel down to Sheoke to go to Fleetwood.’

James Westwood: ‘It’s a fair hike.’

For parents, the disadvantages of bus travel are seen in terms of time wasted; the intrusion into homework time; the tiring aspect of long distance travel and competing commitments to sport/ballet/music. These disadvantages were offset by weekly boarding. On the other hand, parents who chose long distance travel justified it in terms of the importance of keeping their
children within the family environment where they wanted to have maximum influence on shaping their values, or because the children had worthwhile interests at home they wanted to pursue. These parents believed the rigours of travel inculcated good habits of reliability, organisation, punctuality and a good work ethic because they could do some of their work on the bus. Others disagreed completely with this:

‘There was a year there, I actually had to go and live with my mother and I used to travel on the bus every day to Dartford from Windy Cove and to school and it is a hell of a long day. And you get home from school and it’s too bloody dark to go and do anything. It’s too late to go and do anything. Kids don’t get a chance to be kids. I want my kids to be close enough to town so that my kids can get off the bus at a reasonable hour and be able to get on the motorbike and go for a ride or go and bounce on the trampoline or go shooting or… and do whatever they want to do and have a chance to be kids.’ [Gavin Fox, 2006]

Boarding however was not discounted as a future option; as children progressed up the school, the demands of study could be met by staying in the boarding house. While boarding was seen to offer convenience, there was acknowledgement that it represented a loss of parental control – ‘you lose touch with what’s happening in the classroom more … at home you can see the books and lockers happening…’ [Pauline Dryden, 2006]. Despite this, advantages of convenience and opportunity were cited. Parents commonly spoke of ‘opportunity’ in terms of wider social mix, the benefits of preparing children before they left the district for tertiary study and work. Boarding school was seen as a ‘safety net’; a supportive environment that allowed children a certain degree of independence without too much risk.

As Ball has noted, the ability of the middle class to mobilise positional advantage occurs at key points of articulation in the schooling process. The preparation of children for transition to schooling in Dartford often required careful negotiation of the gap, as seen in the case of one family who progressively withdrew their children from local sport in Dewrang and took them to Munthan to play hockey where they would develop social contact with other children at their new school.

The capacity of middle class parents to make such interventions also is seen in relation to financial constraints. A separation, which eroded the ability of one family to meet school fees for its children entering Year Seven, was overcome by applications for scholarships. The importance of acceptance in this school, notwithstanding the financial difficulties, was offset by the social importance of developing contacts: ‘I mean, I know some people can’t do anything else, but in our society now, it’s not what you know, but who you know… And at the end of the day I think they are going to know people who are going to get them further here than anywhere else,’ [Fleur Alexander, 2006] Hence, ‘the cultural, economic, political and social assets of families are mobilised to stay ahead of the race.’ (Brown cited in Ball, 2003:21)

Moving away from the local community was seen to offset the disadvantages of isolation and perceived weaknesses and risks of state education. Negative perceptions of local government schooling, fuelled by the media and federal politicians, (Blackmore, 2006:3) has influenced many of these middle class parents to view state education as a ‘non-choice’ by constructing its problems as

- Poor teaching quality; low academic expectations linked to low VCE results;
- Low expectations and attitudes to achievement
- Lack of subject choices
- A culture of insularity
- Poor leadership, lax standards linked to the scruffy appearance of students
- Social problems

These problems tie in to the fears and anxieties of the middle class and the desire to assert their positional advantage (Pusey, 2003). School choice has also been seen to act as a form of social closure where parents are concerned to disrupt unsuitable friendships or to ensure their children escape ‘bullies’ who were going to other schools. The private environment however is variously characterised by some ambiguity in terms of having a ‘nice group of children’ [Fleur Alexander, 2006] whose conduct and demeanour implies a tacit values match and as having a ‘wider social mix’, an attribution which tends to contradict the class-based homogeneity of the private schools in Dartford.

Citing the findings of van Zanten’s work in various Parisian locations, Ball (2003:40) notes that the interests and impact of the interests of middle class parents produces significant, informal, indeed sometimes illegitimate modifications to official policy. This is also evident in the case of rural parents in this study who have attempted to protect their children’s access to particular bus routes or connections through private accommodations and arrangements:

‘And then, even with the system up here now, like we’re so spoilt. The next door neighbour is… drives the bus for Salt Springs school, so she picks up our children at the end of the street [road] and we say the end of the street so that… um other children that catch the bus they don’t miss out, so down the end of the street, which it takes five minutes for the children to walk, then they get a bus at Red Chimneys and then they get to Dartford. So it’s really a good system. We’re very lucky.’ [Angela Carter, 2006]

For other parents, the need to protect the bus routes to ensure continued access to transport and education in Dartford is hugely important. This may mean intervention through a third party so that regulations are not employed against them:

‘It did concern me a lot because we had about twenty children getting on in Peppercorn, and then this extraordinarily large number were being picked up in the town boundary… But I was always hesitant to make a noise because we were always told that if there was an increase in numbers… that because we were a private school our kids would be the first ones off the bus.. So then I thought, oh…I’ll go through Dennis [Teacher at Amberley and neighbour] and you can just quietly say to Mr Boyd [Bus Coordinator], ‘Can we do something about this?’ … You know, you don’t want to upset your own apple cart.’ [Philippa Parsons, 2006]

‘I just hope it never gets to a stage with transport that – the service that’s offered to us is terrific – I hope, we hope, we never have to pay because it will cost us a lot of money and unfortunately …[we can’t] just move. Many people can just move, and move their child, but not the way we’ve got ours, so I just hope it never gets to that stage, because otherwise we’ve really probably… I think a lot of people would think twice about sending them up here if that option happened… I think it would damage a lot of families with their educational opportunities that they’d like to give their children.’ [Angela Carter, 2006]

If it were not for the options of various connections provided by government-funded buses and private family car, many families would be forced to re-think their original choice of location for their children’s schooling. This does not necessarily imply they would change sectors, but re-evaluate the option of boarding, either in Dartford or elsewhere.

**Conclusion**

Education markets have ‘long and complex histories’ (Gewirtz et al, 1995:7). Spatial location, social demography and the residual effects of earlier governments’ economic and political priorities contribute to particular contemporary realisations of market activity. The policy process itself therefore, is not a simple linear development but the result of sedimentation, articulation and conjuncture, gaps and contradictions. This study has explored the ways middle class parents have mobilised themselves around the gaps, discourses, contingencies
and contradictions which are its hallmarks. This study is significant in a number of ways. It provides empirical evidence of how markets work to advantage the middle class in specific rural contexts in similar ways to urban markets, but with the added dimension of travel. While this is a unique region historically in terms of private education, the capacity of the middle class to mobilise discourses of equity to enhance their advantage is evident. The study reinforces other studies about issues of how policies of choice as organising principles distributing educational provision exacerbate existing educational inequalities in terms of access and success and location in increasingly important in the politics of choice. The capacity of the middle class to move to private schools is now facilitated and financed by both commonwealth and state governments, Liberal and Labor as the discourse of parental choice has been let out of the bag. This is a significant shift from past equity discourses and federal and state government interventions seeking to achieve equity of provision and opportunity. While there are multiple factors determining parental choice of school – past family practices, experiences and networks; location; financial circumstances – what is evident is that those who choose have greater choices increasingly financed by government and that these increased choices limit the choices of those students in government schools. Such policies have long term implications for educational opportunity and outcomes in Australia. Recent studies already indicate that socio economic status are the primary indicators of educational achievement and that location is a major variable, with those with low socio-economic status and in rural regions achieving lower educational levels than elsewhere. If governments are concerned about equity of educational outcomes, then issues around the ways schools and transport are funded have to be addressed.
REFERENCES


Bachelard, M., (2006) ‘This principal had a year 10 girls’ volleyball team, then Haileybury College came along…’ The Age, 25.08.06, p1


Brantlinger, E., (2003), *Dividing Classes*, RoutledgeFalmer NY


Morgan, R., (2003), ‘The Impact of education markets on the practices and relationships of schooling’, PhD Colloquium proposal, Deakin University


Prospero Research and Policy Analysis Pty. Ltd., (April 2003), Southern Grampians Shire Council Census 2001: A Profile of the Southern Grampians


Teese, R., & Polesel, J., (2003), Undemocratic Schooling, Melbourne University Press


Wilkinson, H., Mothers marketing work: the experiences of mothers making choices for children with special needs, Discourse 17 (3) pp 301 - 15
