

**PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF A PRIVATE SCHOOL:
A CASE STUDY OF PARENTS AT LERIBE DISTRICT, HLOTSE
TOWN**

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

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GLOSSARY

AGRIC.	= Agriculture
BEd.	= Bachelor of Education
BAEd.	= Bachelor of Arts with Education
HON.	= Honours
BSc.Ed	= Bachelor of science with Education
STC	= Secondary Teacher's Certificate
PH	= Primary High Certificate
MSc.	= Master of Science
PTC	= Primary Teacher's Certificate
NSS	= National Security Services

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate and describe parents' perceptions of the private community school at Hareeng English Medium Community School in Leribe district. The study uses the conceptual framework of parental choice of school. This is done with a view that parents' choice of schooling is related to the assumption that the private community school has a good learning environment. Because the parents assume that the school is good, the study shifted to explore the question of what makes a good learning environment. In order to obtain an exhaustive examination, data was derived from three sets of questionnaire. Data was obtained using open-ended questionnaires from a sample of Hareeng English medium Community school parents and teachers, and Phelane public school teachers.

The results show that the parents' choice in this study is not informed by the idea that the school is either public or private. Instead the study found that parents' choice is influenced by the idea that the school has a good learning environment. When analysis of parents' understanding of a good learning environment is done, the study discovered that parents' understanding though educational, is not consistent with the literature on school quality.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Education in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

.....
Mataelo Maria-Gracia Mohapi

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¹ Names in this study are all pseudonyms.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this study is to investigate the notion of parental choice with a view to explain the way parents understand and evaluate good education. The research intends to identify and evaluate the educational considerations that inform parents' choice of school and to draw their implication for understanding the provision of public education in Lesotho.

1.2 CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

Is parental choice in Leribe district informed by the private/public distinction between schools?

1.2.1 SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS OF THIS SPECIFIC STUDY

1. What is parental choice in education?
2. How does the socio-economic status of parents influence their choice of school?
3. Is the notion of "learning environment" relevant to research on parental choice?
4. What are the specific educational features of public schools that are rejected by parents in this study?
5. What are the specific educational features of private schools that are attractive to the parents in this study?
6. What are the specific features of a good learning environment advocated by the parents in this study?

1.3 RATIONALE

During the years of 1982-1987 and 1991-1996, I worked as a teacher in Lesotho, in the Leribe district, in one of the public schools. I have seen many parents taking their children out of public schools and sending them to private schools. My observation and concern with the phenomenon developed from years of experience as a parent and a teacher. Parents who are able to choose schools are those who are economically

endowed (Work for Justice 1997, p.9). They are either wealthy by birth or are educated. Most of the intake of the private schools in my district is drawn from middle-class homes, or educated parents who are able to get a job as teachers, nurses or civil servants in the government departments. Although there are children from families of low income who attend private schools, they are very few.

Since the paying clientele moves to private schools, this means that public schools remain with children whose parents struggle to pay the fee that is required. The functioning and infrastructure of these schools may also decline. Some of these schools are likely to close down and children from poor families will be left without proper schooling. Many teachers may also be without jobs because of the low enrolment. What this means is that social and economic inequalities in education are likely to be exacerbated.

Teachers in public schools also experience a sense of rejection, as they are prone to perceive themselves as unable to teach, and might regard themselves as worthless, since parents transfer their children to private schools. Teachers in private schools may develop a good relationship with parents because their schools are considered to be 'good'. Students in private schools might be appreciated more than those in the public schools with the popular opinion that the education they receive is 'better' than the education in public schools. In this way, education is tending to reproduce social and class differentiation. This social differentiation is also evident in the cultural sense. Children who come from private schools separate themselves from the rest of the community. Their relationship with elders in the community, and their peers in the public schools, is liable to separate them from the rest of the community.

Parents believe that by sending their children to private schools, the success of their children will improve, but there is no investigation that examines the ways in which parents' views are informed. In this research, I intend to examine the considerations that inform parents' decisions. I examine the ways parents' academic considerations are informed, and the social and cultural considerations involved in this choice.

In his research on open schools in South Africa, Cross (1986) claims that the context which gave rise to the phenomenon of open schools had a bearing on parental choice. He argues that parents' views of education and their choice of school were influenced

by the historical context in which they lived. Cross shows how 'open' schools emerged alongside the struggle of the Catholic church against apartheid. The church forced the state to move from a total rejection of open schools to a gradual accommodation of this initiative, and to admit black students into the traditional white private schools. Thus, the Catholic open schools initiated the social justice movement in education. Thereafter, the government began to subsidise private schools. Cross reports that school fees in these schools were high and selection procedures strict, and that black pupils attending these schools came from a black middle-class background.

Umlaw (1993) in her research discusses black parents' perceptions of open schools. Black parents began to send their children to open schools when the schools started to admit all children in South Africa regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. Umlaw's research examines how parents' understanding of open schools is related to their class position. In her analysis of parental choice, Umlaw argues that parental choice is determined by the parents' desire for 'good education' which, according to the parents, is associated with 'open' schools. According to Umlaw, whose investigation took place in 1993, parents indicated that they chose open schools because township schools were in a bad condition. Hence, parents wanted their children to be away from township disasters and instabilities. In addition, parents wanted their children to get a high standard of education as they were experiencing upward mobility.

These investigations show the development of open private schools in South Africa as a phenomenon related to political and social conditions in public schools. It is this kind of relational investigation that is missing in Lesotho. Parents have beliefs and they value education. Their choice is influenced by their beliefs and their beliefs are informed by the social and historical context in which they arise.

1.4 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The education system in Lesotho has gone through a number of shifts due to the ever-changing educational policies. This chapter sets out an outline of the educational history of Lesotho before independence, and after independence until the present. In order to understand the context of parental choice in Lesotho, it is important to situate it within the context of educational provision in the country.

1.4.1 TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

Traditionally Lesotho had its own system of education that corresponded to the needs of the people. Most learning was informal and the education was oriented towards practical activities in the home and in the fields. Education was the responsibility of all elders and both girls and boys learned cultural values, philosophy of life of the people and different responsibilities pertaining to one's people. Learners never dropped out and the basic thing for the learner was to show acquired skills required by the community. Some of these skills were reasoning skills learned through stories, games and riddles. This education was compulsory and free (The Task Force Report (henceforth The report, 1982, p.1). All competent elders were responsible for the learners' education, which means that children never ran short of teachers. Learning took place in the open environment.

The education was significant because learners obtained skills that benefited the whole society, and the children used the skills for the rest of their lives. Children were not alienated from their community, and they respected all adults regardless of the biological relationship. Apart from that learning came from within and learners understood the need to learn and were able to see their progress since the system was practical (Morojele, 1998, p.4).

In addition, formal education in Lesotho took place in initiation institutions where wise people took the responsibility of teaching. These were medicine doctors and leaders who were regarded as the representatives of the dominant and hegemonic power that the culture held (Khalanyane, 1995, p.61). They also promoted the interests of adults and asserted the power that they held upon the children. They were regarded as instruments of the society and promoted the beliefs and shaped the youth in a suitable way to the interests of the society.

Education in Lesotho was altered by the introduction of Western education with culturally different interests.

1.4.2 THE COLONIAL INFLUENCE IN LESOTHO EDUCATION

During the 1830s when the missionaries colonised the country, the church established the first school in the country where both children and adults learned reading. However the most important thing was the study of the Bible and participation in

church services, while the elders became teachers, interpreters and clerks in the civil service. It was in this sense that western values and behaviours were emphasised and the local people practised the foreign values. Education effectively became isolated from the communities, serving the interests of a particular group of people instead of the whole community (Morojele, 1998, p.5). This means that when the missionaries came to Lesotho, they introduced a new inclination that replaced the traditional education system.

The colonial influence changed the education system. The missionaries trained teachers formally and took over the responsibility of the education of the society. Learners were taught to be submissive and obedient and took what was given to them by the teachers who were knowledgeable. Their values were undermined and the element of sharing faded away from the local people while the children's education lay in the hands of the foreign system. The system of education failed to meet the needs of the country but provided what Khalanyane (1995, p.76) called "a Eurocentric education which was geared to the colonial needs." Thus, the curriculum is described as too academically oriented and lacking the acquisition of the skills needed for the people. According to Morojele (1998, p.7) education was more of a business than a common and shared phenomenon, and it became a private entity owned by churches. Since then parents and the community have never been included in the decisions on the form of education appropriate for their children.

For a long period of time the missionaries had sole responsibility over education and payment of teachers. Khalanyane (1995, p.64) shows that the British parliament passed an education Act in 1870 that gave the government responsibility for education processes. The colonial government supported the mission education through financing the schools and taking responsibility for education. Education has been the responsibility of the government and the churches since that period and the education secretaries were selected in order to be intermediaries between the churches and the government.

One of the most important characteristic of the education system is that only those who are able to pay obtain education. The traditional sharing has faded away and prominent classes have emerged within the society because not all people are able to

pay for education. This means that, what was at one time free and shared has turned into a private good.

1.4.3 EDUCATION AFTER INDEPENDENCE

As I have indicated, parents did not have 'a say' in education. However after independence, in 1966, a lot of changes, developments and restructuring took place. According to Khalanyane (1995, p.81), the government introduced the "automatic promotion system" in an attempt to consider the demands of the people. In this system of education learners did not fail regardless of their academic performance. It seems that all the parties were poorly informed about the process so that no learner was working hard for success and the teachers did not put much effort into teaching and recording their work effectively. So, most of the learners were shifted into the next class, even those who had performed poorly.

Since the government abolished the tuition fees for employing teachers in 1974 it requested that school tuition fee be paid directly to the government and teachers have since then been responsible to the government (Khalanyane, 1995, p.81). This gave the strength to the partnership between the church and the government (The report, 1982, p.3).

1.4.4 THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CHURCH IN EDUCATION

The report (1982) claims that the government is accountable for school provision in both the government as well as the non-government schools. This means that the government finances education and builds schools in areas where the churches are unable to (p. 20). Government's responsibilities include payment of teachers' salaries and the design of the curriculum for schools. In addition the government provides standard texts for the schools and conducts school-leaving examinations for all schools in the country regardless of form or kind (p.21). It is also the responsibility of the government to train human resources for good performance of teaching and learning.

The churches are still responsible for the day-to-day administration of their schools. This includes teaching and learning, transfers of teachers, promotion and dismissal of

teachers. Furthermore, the churches have always maintained and improved the school facilities and supplied the instructional materials for their schools. The church schools have remained rich because of the finances they obtained from the government and from external support which the church still get even today (p.18). However the churches have been overloaded as the changes in education occurred. There was no proper management and obligations to the schools, which resulted in a decline in the education system in general since most schools belong to the churches.

The report provides an analysis of the prospects and problems of education in Lesotho. Parents' views were surveyed on different aspects concerning education in the country. The report found that there has been a terrible decline in the education system.

1.4.5 THE DECLINE IN EDUCATION

The report, 1982 found that the existing system of schooling is suffering from critical problems including a decline of quality, lack of relevance to occupational and social realities, high dropout and repeating rates and very poor facilities, access and organisation.

The report exposes the declining quality of education. The most prominent is the weak performance of high school students in the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) examinations. The decline in education is also reflected in primary-school leavers who are unable to speak English or to do simple mathematics. In addition, the dropout rate from one standard or form to the next is too great.

The report suggests that the barrier to quality education is linked to poor school administration. Administrators are very poorly motivated in the education process. Weak management of schools and poor teacher supervision is prominent in the schools, which contributes to the decline in education. This is also a result of the division of labour between the churches and the government. Teachers do not listen to inspectors especially when they are government appointed. The churches and the government have successfully divided the teaching profession through the division of labour.

The report (p.16) shows that the quality of education has also declined due to the low

professional commitment of the teaching force. Many teachers are found in the streets during class-time. The teachers are said to be very low in morale (p.13). According to Morojele (1998, p.13), the government has contributed to this because it undermined the teaching profession in relation to salaries and benefits. Teachers earn much less than their equals in other professions. This undervaluing of the professional status of teachers by the government resulted in the 1995 teachers' strike. A great number of teachers left the profession in that year for 'green pastures' in the Republic of South Africa and to further their studies in the same country.

The education system lacks relevancy because the country is not self-sufficient. For example, the report shows a shortage of production even in the University of Lesotho, which fails to do research within the country and is dependent on foreign assistance. In addition, the public complains about the neglected practical subjects and that the country is only developing one side of the learner – the intellectual. The people need to develop in different skills that can sustain their lives. The problem of relevancy was even reflected by a tradesman, who in 1982 indicated that he had not undergone any formal education but was able to see that the education lacked personality (The report, p.9).

According to Morojele (1998, p.14), the report (1982) focused on the concepts 'drop-out' and 'push-out' of learners who leave school. These are things that contribute to the withdrawal from the school. In the first instance the learners are not able to finish their education because of problems such as age or family poverty. At times learners are pushed out of school because of the system of education itself, for example automatic promotion. The result is that the education is not obtained at all or the education obtained does not produce learners who can face the world. The chances of life of such children are very poor. This retards the development of the country. However, as a result of the poor personnel produced by the system, these problems are not grappled with (Morojele, 1998, p.15).

The system suffers from the problem of inadequate buildings and school furniture, and very poor conditions in which it becomes difficult for the children to learn. The report

(1982)² relates the problem of large numbers of learners in a class, especially in the primary schools. For example in 1979 the teacher-learner ratio was 83:1. Over 1/3 of the classrooms were church halls" (p.17). Not only are classrooms overpopulated but the text books are not sufficient for the learners. This is a problem because only the government and the churches are responsible while parents are watching.

Education in Lesotho is made up of the churches, the parents and the communities, and the government. That is why the government refers to education as 'a three legged pot' (The report, p.18). Churches and parents play the most important part in education in relation to the finance, infrastructure, and moral support they provide (Morojele, 1998, p.17). Although this is a good start there are problems on account of the fact that the churches are not sure for what they were answerable. At times they have acted as if they are an agent of the government so that there were inefficiency and uncertainty in education. Following the report, the government tried to work for a union of the community, the church and the government, with the idea that education must "ensure that it discharged all its tasks in the intellectual, moral, cultural and technical development of both adults and children" (The report, 1982, p.18). However, the parents have never known their responsibility but have been responding to the demands of the churches and the government. This means that where the finance for the school is required, the parents are always ready to participate. If they are required to work at school, they are ready to go and participate. The community has been working very hard but with obedience not knowing that it is their responsibility to do so. As a result, where decisions are to take place in education, parents have never had any say.

Committees have been selected in schools and have never been functional; instead, they have created problems in schools. This problem has not assisted the education system but has made education decline even more. Of the existing public and private schools, only a few are said to be 'good' enough educationally, to satisfy parents' ambition (The report, 1982, p.24).

² There is no recent information found

1.4.6 SOCIAL CLASS IN LESOTHO

According to the Five Year Development Plan (Kingdom of Lesotho (1996/97-1998/99)), there is uneven distribution of income in Lesotho, where the majority of households earn a very low income. 10% of the households in Lesotho earn 44% of the gross national income. 40% of the households earn only 8% of the gross national income. The plan defines "the poor" as those who spend 50% of their budget to obtain a daily meal, "very poor" is defined as those who use 60% of their budget to obtain a daily meal. The last two groups live in the rural areas whereas the higher income groups live in the towns and nearby villages.

Employment is a critical problem in Lesotho. About 9% of the labour-force is employed in the formal sector, 20% is employed in the informal sector and 15% are migrant workers in South Africa. The rest of the labour force is either unemployed or engaged in subsistence agriculture (Kingdom of lesotho 1996/97-1998/99). These figures show that a very small percentage of the population in Lesotho falls within the traditional middle-class. However, more and more private schools are opening, which suggest that there is an incentive that drives parents from various social classes to choose private schools even though only a small number of parents can really afford these schools.

Mathibeli (1996) on "Influence of home-environmental variables and selected related factors on high school students' academic performance in Mafeteng district," found that "conducive dwelling", or the number of family members; number of rooms in a house; caring parents; number of children sharing a bed; enough food for a home are among the key factors which contribute to the level of attainment of learners. Mathibeli found that in the schools he investigated, which were public schools, the learners were a mixture of middle-class, low-class and high-class backgrounds. Mathibeli's study suggests that in public schools, learners with different social status can be found. My study attempts to find out what is the social background of the parents who send their children to private schools, and how does it influence their choice. Given that not only traditional middle-class parents send their children to private schools and so, possibly other incentives influence parental choice, the study will attempt to explain the notion of parental choice.

1.4.7 SCHOOL OWNERSHIP

As has been indicated above, formal education is the responsibility of the government, the churches and the community (The report, 1982, p.21). There are four types of schools between which choice is exercised, namely government, church, community, and private community schools (The Justice Report, 1997, p.7). In the following discussion I describe each of the four types.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The government has only a handful of schools. In these schools, the government appoints the school board members. The government maintains its school buildings, the infrastructure, furniture and all the resources either material or human.

CHURCH SCHOOLS

The report (1982) illustrates that more than half the schools in the country are owned by the churches (p.22). A church school is managed by a priest or a preacher, or by a governing body or a managing board comprising church members. The church manager is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the school. The school managing board is engaged in teachers' affairs such as transfers, promotions and dismissal of teachers in the school. The church maintains and improves school facilities and supplies instructional materials to the school although the supply is very poor (p.23). The government assists the churches by paying teachers, conducting school-leaving examinations and providing standard texts.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Community schools are managed by an elected school board of governors. The board of governors is made up of the principal, the chief and other members of the community, and parents. The board of governors helps in the day-to-day running of the school, and is responsible for the teachers. That is, it employs, disciplines and fires teachers. The government gives assistance to community schools as it does to church schools. This means that although the government owns only a handful of schools, it delivers basic services to almost all the schools within the country regardless of form or kind.

PRIVATE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

These schools are owned by a group of individuals. Most of these schools belong to parents who are themselves well educated and relatively prosperous business people, professionals and civil servants, or in isolated cases to the churches. Some schools belong to non-governmental organisations (Work for Justice, 1997, p.7). Private community schools are not subsidised. These schools are independent from the control of the government. What is unique about private community schools is that they are under the full control of parents. This means that school board is selected amongst the parents (those who own the school). The schools are very expensive. They can only be afforded by a small section of the population.

The Work for Justice report found that these schools are considered the best schools in the country, mainly on account of their good results. The Work for Justice report further shows that there is a growing number of parents who prefer these schools, although many of them struggle to raise the money for their children. This becomes a threat to public schools as many of these public schools lose learners (p.6).

Another thing which makes these schools unique, is their emphasis on the teaching of English from reception onwards. Unlike government schools, church schools and community schools encourage the local language as the medium of instruction during the beginning years of schooling (p.7). Parents who manage to afford the fees of the private schools choose them because they say that children who attend public schools (that is the government, the church and community controlled schools) perform poorly in school-leaving examinations. Parents comment that these children have difficulty getting into higher education (Ibid). The Work for Justice report claims that the private community schools are some of the best run and most successful schools in the country and obtain consistently high examination results.

Parents regard examinations as very important because examinations are a means to higher education. Their interest in examination results encourages them to opt for schools that can help their children pass examinations at the different levels. The different levels of education are meaningful for them because they mean achievement and progress to tertiary education. Below I examine the different educational levels.

1.4.8 LEVELS OF FORMAL EDUCATION

Formal education is offered in three distinct levels, namely primary, secondary and high school levels.

PRIMARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

This level covers seven years of basic education. In this period, learners cover basic education in reading, writing and mathematics. They include learning basics in Science and Social Studies. Primary education (grades 1-7) is conducted in the national language for the first four years and mainly in English in grades 5 through 7. However, in the private institutions, the medium of instruction is English in all grades. At the end of the seventh year, learners write the standard 7 (Grade 7) leaving examination which promotes them to level two of the educational hierarchy. Candidates are graded by normalising all learners' scores and passing at least two-thirds of all learners. This has created a high percentage of passing learners although there is a general sense that the quality of primary education has deteriorated, which is seen by the low quality of pass rates in the high school (Wolff, 1984, p.46).

SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL OF EDUCATION

This level comprises three years of secondary education. The curriculum at this level is a development of the primary curriculum. The core subjects are English language and literature, local language and literature, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Schools also offer other subjects such as religious education. After this three-year period, the students write another leaving examination that enables them to proceed to the third level.

THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

In this level the children spend two years preparing for entry into tertiary education. The curriculum is the continuation of the secondary level of education with a similar structure of subjects. The children write the Cambridge overseas examinations (COSC) after two years.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Parental choice or 'parentocracy' (Bray, 1996) is the ability of parents to select the type of school that they want their children to attend. Bray (1996, p.1) suggests that parental choice springs from the understanding of the concept of education as a right.

2.1 CHOICE OF GOOD EDUCATION IS A CONTESTED ISSUE

Although parental choice is a democratic phenomenon it cannot be conceptualised independently from the social, political, cultural and economic context in which it is pursued and institutionalised. As such, democratic practices like parental choice must be assessed by the particular ways in which individuals and groups in a society organise themselves in order to confront particular historical situations. In other words, the notion of parental choice helps to explain the ways in which individual consumers of education negotiate the principles and values of good practice.

We face transition in education and this itself gives rise to confusion, insecurities and uncertainty in education (Work for Justice, 1997). There is no model of good practice that is universally acceptable (Winch, 1996 p.86). It is likely that we are entering a period of public debate and contestation about what constitutes good practice.

I begin this chapter with a survey of literature on middle class parents' perceptions of the role of education in improving life chances (2.2). In the second part of the chapter (2.3), I examine the question of 'what makes a good school?' on the assumption that 'parental choice' is related to 'quality schooling'. In 2.4, I investigate perceived differences between public and private schools. And in 2.5 I argue the consequent inequalities developed in the field of education, due to the division between public and private provision of schooling.

2.2 THE MIDDLE CLASS AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN IMPROVING LIFE CHANCES

According to Harvighust and Newgarten (1967) middle-class parents are active, ambitious and are very flexible in life. Research indicates that their homes are usually medium to large in size, neat and well kept with very tidy surroundings. The group is very conscious of the importance of money. They are found to have education and income (Biggs and Porter, 1994). Research shows that middle-class parents believe that all children can succeed as long as they are provided with an appropriate learning environment (Cohen et al, 1980; Craft, 1990; Walford, 1990). Middle-class parents do not take success as something to be achieved by brilliant children alone but they consider children as unique. Each child is to be treated independently and with appropriate learning materials (Bernstein, 1975, p.129). Cohen et al (1980) in their study in Britain on the relationship between social class and education found that middle-class parents hold high aspirations and encourage their children towards very high expectations. Middle-class children develop high career aspirations and judge their schooling in terms of longer-term objectives such as entry into tertiary institutions (Roberts, 1980, p. 51).

Education is extremely important to middle-class parents. Many of them are in this class through the pursuit of professional careers. Those who come from low background have achieved their status through their hard work. It appears that these parents are in this class because of their value of social mobility through education. Middle-class parents, therefore, feel that it is essential that their children be educated at least to secure a college or a university degree in order to maintain middle-class status (Roberts, 1980). Woods et al (1997) show that this respect for education is due to their interest in class reproduction. They see schooling as an entry ticket into elite occupations or what gives them "market appeal" (p.124). This means that they believe that their children will obtain better jobs in the market if they are educated.

The assumption about education as a ticket to the market, is that the external pressure of the market economy will lead to internal changes in the functioning of schools (Hughes, 1997). Thus, it is assumed that schools will be aware of the preferences of parents and will take active steps to change their practices in accordance with parents' preferences. Yet, research shows that the assumption is too simplistic. Woods (1994,

p.126) claims that schools adapt and respond to the environment in which they exist, not necessarily to the preferences of parents. Schools use different measures in order to promote themselves, such as being linked to feeder schools, producing items such as computer skills or even allowing prospective parents to visit the school. Thus, parents' interests are indirectly benefiting from the market pressure.

There is no unified position in the literature as to whether middle-class parents have a clear preference for private schools. Roberts (1980, p.40) indicates that middle-class parents choose a good school regardless of its form or kind. They choose any school provided that it can meet their needs. Cohen et al (1980, p.41) indicate that middle-class parents believe in schools that produce good academic results and develop character by instilling discipline. This means that middle-class parents choose private schools only if they fail to obtain what they require from the public system. On realising that their children may fail in the public school, especially if the child is an average learner or a slow learner, middle-class parents resort to private schooling.

Others (Walford, 1990; Salter and Tapper, 1985) argue that although middle-class parents go for any school that can give them access into the market, they are inclined to choose private schooling because of the privileges associated with these schools (Walford, 1990). Private schools are associated with educational, social and occupational advantage (p.104). Private schooling is indicated to be the main means of channeling one into a particular economic status, a certain social position and having influence in the society in general. Private schooling is portrayed as

The means of transferring economic status, social position and influence from generation to generation, a self-reinforcing virtuous circle for those who can afford it and an inside track to positions of power and influence (Salter and Tapper 1985, p. 30-31).

Analyses of parents' perspectives on school choice suggest that middle-class parents value education that equips their children with academic qualifications, schools that sustain a conducive and caring learning environment, and schools that develop the character and personality of the child (David, 1993; Gaziel, 1996; Glatter et al 1997). Middle-class parents are aware that the development of character and personality and the attainment of good results need secure and effective environment and time. They are therefore involved in the education of their children. They visit the schools during

their own time to find out about the progress of their children (Roberts, 1980,p.41). They also present themselves at their children's schools on official open days. According to Roberts, middle-class parents visit the school in order to discuss the problems of their children and arrange special coaching if needed (ibid).

Research (Cohen et al, 1980) show that middle-class parents often criticise their children's teachers as they believe they know education processes. On voicing their concern and opinions about their children, they never stop. They are ready to go to the principal if their demands about their children are not met. Bernstein (1975, p.129) argues that middle-class anxiousness about the way their children acquire basic competencies, brings them into conflict with the school at some point. This is a result of their belief that they possess educational knowledge.

In sum, the literature does not suggest that all middle-class parents prefer private schools. Rather, it suggests that some middle-class parents are influenced by the belief that any school can meet their needs provided it delivers the goods. What the literature does suggest is that parents believe that a good school is a school which produces a good learning environment. In the next section I examine the question of 'what constitutes a good learning environment?'

2.3 WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

Research shows a close correlation between middle-class parents' conception of the role of education and indicators of school quality (Corcoran, 1984; Lightfoot, 1983; and Govinda and Varghese, 1993). In the following analysis, I examine briefly some of the indicators mentioned in the literature on good schools. I elaborate the notion of a good learning environment as consistent with quality schooling.

I rely on Lightfoot's research on good schools (1983). Her analysis of good schools is relevant to my study because she indicates that good schools are the result of a conducive learning environment within the school. The interaction of the learner with the surroundings is an important agent of quality schooling, that is, the relationship of the learner with the teachers, the community and the society. Lightfoot describes the different learning environments of the six American schools she investigated. Her work portrays the importance of reflecting on our actions in the interaction process for better practice in our respective areas.

SCHOOL ETHOS

In her research of six schools in America, Lightfoot found that the quality of a school is not a quality that can be shown in scores, enrolments of students, good attendance or achievement in literacy. She argues that these categories are insufficient to define what a good school is. The quality of good schools is a complicated notion which can be described as the schools' ethos, "a mixture of parts that produce a whole" (p.23). She argues that goodness cannot be divorced from the environmental conditions within which the school is operating. This means that the nature of the school, its excellence, is determined by the internal activities of that particular school.

Lightfoot shows that school ethos include relationships between teachers and learners, the goals set by the school, the attunement of the management to the needs of staff and a general sense of care and respect for the needs of the learners. She argues that in good schools,

It is important for the students to experience the caring, individualized attention of humanistic education and not merely be aware of the ideological rhetoric voiced by the faculty and administration (1983, p.24).

That means that care is something which learners experience through interaction with their teachers in good schools. Teachers need to consider that learners are human and require the human relationship in the teaching and learning environment. In quality schools, the way the teacher relates to the learners makes them feel smart and become eager to learn.

However, Lightfoot argues that, although individualised human caring is important, it is highly likely that it becomes too lenient. She argues that in good schools, if learners realise that teachers are too permissive, they criticise their leniency as they feel it might be an agent of disorder at their school. Lightfoot argues that even in more privileged environments of the school, learners require conservatism and wish for adult clarity and maturity (p. 360).

Wexler (1990) also investigated the notion of care in education. In his research of three schools in America, he gives a description of the learning environment in these schools. Wexler found that care and respect were missing in the three schools. In these schools, different factors contributed to the absence of care, for example

teachers were interested in bureaucratic activities, individualism and academic excellence respectively. He found that in one of the schools with good academic work, although both parents and teachers were concerned with good performance of the learners, there was hardly any sense of concern for learners' social and emotional life. Parents and teachers put little emphasis on the learners' social and emotional life. They emphasised learners' achievement because of their interest in good results.

Besides, learners were individualistic. The notion of individualism was explicit as learners worked hard to be at top. Learners put effort to achieve in sports and in academic work. Competition was the most important thing and there was a very low sense of care and concern for others. Wexler indicated that teachers tended not to identify with others because of professional pursuit. Each teacher competed for excellence for the purpose of status. Students too tended to compete for success and, therefore seemed to be less concerned about their fellow learners' social and emotional life. In this sense, he said,

It is the idea of the school, the possibility of larger society and a relation to it that is being lost in the professional achievement process (p.19).

Wexler points that if there is no care of teachers for the social and emotional welfare of the learner there will be no respect between teachers and learners. And thus, teachers may not have power to control the teaching and learning process and learners' dropping out of schools increases as the relationship with teachers declines. Hence, Wexler shows that if,

The mutual non-caring occurs WITHIN the school, and whatever its origins, it becomes a closed feedback loop in a failed pedagogic relation. IT IS REINFORCING THE RELATION OF FAILURE AND WITHDRAWAL (p.10 emphasis in the original).

In addition, where care and respect are lacking, the teachers' profession become a job. Wexler shows that trust and reliability of the teachers and the learners play a major role in education. He continues to argue that trust is the agent of good pedagogical relation and can create a good learning environment. Wexler argues that in one of the three schools, the one with excellent results, teachers were isolated because of differences in relation to professional achievement. The departments created barriers between different members of the school. He found that in such school environment,

there is little sense of belonging because teachers grouped themselves into different departments and students do not relate easily with teachers except on academic grounds. In this sense there is no caring. Teachers and learners feel disconnected, isolated and separated from the larger society of the school. There is no intimacy. Wexler (1990,p.14) considered that "there is the professionalisation of the social and lack of identification with the school". In this regard the social aspect is ignored and only academic work is improved. However, academic expectations alone cannot develop a good school. Relevancy of knowledge to the society is a corner stone in education if education is to make meaning to them.

In addition, Lightfoot shows that in good schools, there is a sense of connection and accountability between teachers and parents. Learners engage in both academic and non-academic subjects. Good schools offer subjects that benefit the community within which they are located. In other schools non-academic subjects such as sports like dance are highly taught because sports develop thinking and discipline the learner. Academic life is made alive and interesting when learners are involved in different extra-curricular activities. According to Lightfoot (1983, p.289), good schools are not only related to academic work, but they also assist learners psychologically. At times they act as reformatory schools for learners with social problems. Where achievement is major in education, opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and empathy among learners are distorted (Lightfoot, 1983).

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Lightfoot argues that in good schools, there is a sense of belonging. She argues that the evidence of belonging is when the school encourages interaction with learners. Good schools encourage different activities for learners in order to encourage school community. In addition to that, Lightfoot argues that, in schools that are large, there is a need for smaller communities within the school. These groups develop a sense of belonging to the learners with different interests (p.348).

Similarly, good schools encourage collaboration within the environment (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992). The notion of collaboration means that the school community is working together, for example, teachers are working together in order to develop themselves in their respective subjects' knowledge, in their different teaching

approaches, and in the social and emotional life of the school. In such schools each member is valued that s/he can deliver something for the benefit of others in the whole school. There is sharing of ideas by individual teachers for the effectiveness of the school,

In effective schools, collaboration is linked to the norms and with opportunities for continuous improvement and career-long learning. It is assumed that improvement in teaching is a collective rather than individual teaching enterprise, and that analysis evaluation and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992).

Collaboration of the school community develops a caring environment for teaching and learning. This means that where teachers advise each other about good practice, teachers develop knowledge. Knowledge is power. In this sense, a teacher with educational knowledge in her area is accepted in the company of her colleagues. This means that s/he is recognised. In addition to that, knowledge increases efficiency in the teaching and learning process. The notion of efficiency denotes the ability to perform within the school premises in order to ensure, increase or improve equality with the purpose of maximising the number and quality of educated learners. In this regard teachers' activities are related to the aims of the school such as transmission of knowledge of subject matter, cognitive skills, and the value of educational attitudes needed for mastering the educational process and for participating in the wider society (Carrim and Shalem, 1999, p.74).

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Lightfoot shows that in good schools, there is commitment in different learning areas. Both the teachers and learners can be seen engaged in their respective classes. Seriousness is very purposeful in both bright and slow learners. In a reading class of learners with learning problems, the learners are encouraged to be quiet and work on their assignments individually. The teacher helps them, encourages them and insists that they be quiet. The teacher gives them support. In cases where learners are fast the teacher encourages the learner to do more work as the previous activity was easy. The environment of the class is serious, the rules of the class are clear and caring is very certain in that class. Learners acquire critical skills. They analyze as because learning is not factual. The teacher encourages them to develop ideas in order to find

the truth. The teacher and the learners engage in debate. Lightfoot claims that,

The adults are not afraid to disagree publicly, nor do they alter the nature of their discourse in order to present a simpler, prettier picture of the world to the students (1983, p.229).

According to Lightfoot learners experience reality not stories. In this case they develop confidence and competence because they can argue the existing phenomena. Lightfoots' critical engagement overlaps with the notion of critical dialogue between the teacher and his class (Burbules, 1993). According to Burbules the notion of being a teacher entails legitimate authority. He argues that there is a need to create an environment in which learners can feel confident and secure when speaking. This means that teachers in good schools do not undermine learners. Teachers cannot assume that their claims are necessarily what learners will reproduce because knowledge is a contested phenomenon, just like practice is. Authority can be viewed as growing out of an ongoing communication between the teacher and the learner. Many of the comments, encouragement, praise, expressions of gratitude and explicit statements of agreement are not to be understood merely as comments, but can be viewed as direct attempts to create and maintain bonds of mutual concern, trust, respect and appreciation, crucial for a successful ongoing dialogue relation (ibid).

According to Burbules, a critical dialogic engagement with learners can incorporate differences that are present in individual learners. Learners have different values, beliefs, and practices, and on using critical engagement their understanding can develop. We cannot run away from the fact that learners are different but difference does not mean that there are no similarities we can share. In the educational sense, the purpose of critical dialogue is to recognise difference through a common process of reasoning and reflection. This means that the primary role of the teacher is to equip the learners with processes of reflection with which the learners both recognise another's point of view and examine their own. One way in which teachers can pursue the common with all the learners in the classroom of different cultures is a particular mode of questioning. The teacher demonstrates respect through an explicit mode of inclusion. All learners' views have the right to be included. The teacher listens, questions and makes the learners examine the values and significance of their views. In this way the teacher enhances the respect for the view as it is taken

seriously, and debated. Teachers who use critical dialogue not only interrogate views but also promote views which are socially valuable. Burbules says,

The teachers can select and promote through critical interrogation the learner's views, socially valuable to the contribution and maintenance of a socially or educationally valuable aspect, regardless of whether they are minority, tradition or progressive (p.21).

The important thing is the reasons behind the values. A process of reflection includes an examination of what is socially valuable and what is not. Hence the teacher's role is respecting views and yet discriminating between them.

Another significant point in critical dialogue is to give the learner time. It is beneficial to the learners to be given time in order for them to ask or challenge each other's views in the class. It is a way to demonstrate their capability to interrogate in order to develop rationality. According to Bensusan and Shalem (1996) the teacher's critical role is to stimulate learners through different modes of questions, in order to analyze the claims of the political and educational practices which they experience in their everyday life. Critical analysis is assumed to transform the beliefs that the learners hold into a more coherent and supported set of beliefs. Quine and Ullian (1978, p.16) cited in Bensusan and Shalem (1996) argue this when they say, "in so far as we are rational, we will drop a belief when we have tried in vain to find evidence for it". The assumption for this is that when learners are rational, they strive to attain knowledge with which to examine their beliefs and have reasons for holding the belief. The role of the teacher is to give the learner ways by which a reasonable belief may be discriminated from that which is not reasonable.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMNT

Another factor that contributes to a good learning environment is parental involvement. Parental involvement is regarded as such because both the school and the parents endorse the need for some kind of parental support in the child's learning. Grozier (1995, p.125) views that since a learner belongs to both parents and the school, there is a form of partnership between the parents and the school because of the child. In this partnership involvement, commitment and responsibility are envisaged. He argues that an involvement, commitment and responsibility based on the interest of

the child is a necessary prerequisite to protect one's investment, the child.

According to David (1993,p.147), parents' involvement in education can be deliberate part of a good learning environment. Parents can be involved in assisting their children with their homework and encouraging their children to learn. Following David, research shows that if parents are involved in encouraging their children to learn, this has positive effects on children's educational performance. This points that there is greater education for the children whether in the classroom, play activities or generally in support activities by parents during the school day or even in preparation of the child for the school.

David (1993) quotes Smith and Tomlinson's research in which they found that it is possible that parental-involvement can assist successful learning for children at school despite the fact that children came from a variety of multiracial and multicultural home backgrounds. Thus the notions of reducing disparities between children, on the basis of different home backgrounds in order for the learners to achieve equal educational opportunities were emphasised.

David found that parents are mostly attracted to schools in which they feel they can be involved. Parents choose schools near their homes for convenience factor. This reflects the concern which parents have for the education of their children because parents value to be involved in education matters in the local schools. A survey of parents' views on school education in Scotland (1989) found that parents value schools that are welcoming and where there is a good relationship between the parents and the teachers.

McGeeney (1980) and David (1993) argue that although there have been parental involvement within the schools, there is some evidence suggesting that it can lead to school-based difficulties and exacerbation of tensions. McGeeney suggests that parents are to understand how their children are taught in order to really assist children's performance. However, he perceives that on the one hand it is possible that teachers can resist this help, with a view that their professional status is undermined particularly if the assisting parents are not trained. Lareau in David (1993,p.153) found that teachers' job-satisfaction is negatively influenced by their relationship with parents. Parents were not loyal to the requirements of teachers for the child. For

example, if teachers request learning materials such as books from parents, parents do not do as required. On the other hand, this involvement can make parents to object if their children are taught by untrained teachers, a behaviour that develops if a parent becomes an educator. Parents are to be aware that involvement is not to usurp teachers' professional responsibility but to support the teachers' responsibility by assisting in reading, writing and general school-work at home. This can have an impact upon educational achievement of their children.

Nevertheless, McGeeney (1980,p.132) shows that many parents get involved in their children's efforts to learn. Some manage to assist their children's learning enjoyably while others are unable to appreciate the need for patience and understanding in handling children's difficulties. According to McGeeney, parents who have a feeling that their support can make a difference, are never easily persuaded by directions from school that tuition should be left entirely to the teachers.

SOCIALISATION OF THE CHILD IN AN ORDERLY AND DISCIPLINED ENVIRONMENT

Parents choose schools that have discipline and are safe. Good schools are seen as safe environments that possess a visible and explicit order. Lightfoot (1983, p.346) argues this by showing that the social organisation of good schools depends on the clear authority of the school, and the use of power to create the means of coordinating the actions of the school community.

Corcoran (1984, p. 74) claims that order and discipline are the backbones of effective and caring schools. Difference in effectiveness is in the manner in which discipline is exercised. Corcoran argues,

Discipline is important but how it is achieved is equally important. Co-operation, consensus about goals and values, and strong leadership are needed to foster an affirmative discipline.

On the same issue Corcoran argues that the principal who lacks discretionary authority may not be able to build a distinctive school culture or be able to create a strong sense of community. Corcoran indicates that although research on the role of principals in quality schools is very sparse, literature explains that good principals manipulate both the bureaucracy and culture in schools. This means that, they use rules, procedures

and authority together with norms, rituals and stories (p.84) to capture a favorable learning environment.

Corcoran (1984) and Govinda and Varghese (1993) identify leadership building, clear goals, an orderly school climate, high expectations and standards, and frequent monitoring and assessment of learners' progress as factors that are associated with quality schools. Corcoran indicates,

Such schools are more tightly managed. Their curriculum instructional practices and tests are more carefully aligned, and their work directed toward agreed-upon goals. Such schools, it is contended, are able to reduce the effects of socio-economic background on academic achievement. They are 'strong' schools that are able to make greater demands on their students with policies and practices that reduce the influence of social environment and peer culture on student behavior and academic performance (p. 73).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Lightfoot indicates that although discipline is a very important agent of order, discipline alone may not shape good teachers or inspire teacher motivation and continuous professionalisation. For Lightfoot, teachers require periodic in-service training. This offers teachers the new approaches and ideas in the teaching and learning process (1983, p.44). As such, teaching cannot be enforced but it can come from within. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), training of teachers require that teachers be involved in workshops that are meant to develop them professionally. Teachers are supposed to raise the problems which they encounter in their respective school environment. This is to develop them in relation to the environment of their schools. What works in my context may not necessarily work in another teacher's context. Teachers need to make their own judgements about what can operate in their own classes. Schon in Fullan and Hargreaves indicates that in this case, "professional action involves making discretionary judgement in situations of unavoidable uncertainty" (p.28).

In good schools, teachers are central and dominant and their needs are catered for (Lightfoot, 1983, p.333). They are recognised as critical educational authorities and are involved in educational matters such as curriculum design. They are regarded as guiding the growth and development of learners closely. As put by Govinda and

Varghese (1993),

The teacher who plans, directs and participates in the teaching-learning process is the key figure influencing the nature and quality of the activities which take place in any school (p.93).

Teachers' intimacy with learners puts them in an important and special position, as they interpret the behaviour and values of their learners. Teachers in good schools are placed at the core of education as they shape the content, method and context of learning (p.335). They not only influence learners in their classroom teaching, but even through their personality. In addition, as the traditional community breaks up, children usually away from parents because of work, teachers' morale need to be greater than it has been before because the community trust them, and believe that they can guide their children to be responsible citizens.

In sum, the literature indicates that goodness in schools is portrayed in a variety of ways. Good schools are a result of the school community involvement in school matters for the development of learning of the child. The literature suggests that school quality is very complicated as it involves different parts. However, the literature reveals that such environment is led by imperfection and uncertainties. Lightfoot indicates that perfection in schools is non-existent. The portraits of good schools reveal imperfections, uncertainties and vulnerability (Lightfoot, 1983,p.309). According to Lightfoot,

A consciousness about imperfections and the willingness to admit them and search for their origins and solutions is one of the important ingredients of goodness in schools (ibid).

Research in South African schools has shown that even in very difficult context a kind of goodness can still be experienced. In the following analysis, Christie and Potterton describe how good schools in such environments maintain a good learning environment.

RESILIENCE IN SCHOOLS WORKING UNDER UNPRIVILEGED CONDITIONS

Christie and Potterton (1997) examined various factors that contribute towards building and developing school quality in South Africa. The research provides portraits of resilient schools, highlighting features that improve the quality of

schooling and teaching and learning environments. The researchers singled out schools that are operating in difficult circumstances. They examine the ways in which these schools cope with different struggles of apartheid but nevertheless manage to sustain a functioning environment.

In their study of thirty-two schools, Christie and Potterton (1997) found that resilience was enhanced by indicators such as a sense of responsibility; centrality of teaching and learning, safety and organisation, authority and discipline and a culture of concern. They show that the schools that performed well are schools that protect themselves by employing specific strategies to avoid the negative influence of vandalism for the purpose of teaching and learning. They characterise these schools as resilient schools. The notion of "resilience" refers to "the ability to survive and develop in contexts of extreme adversity. Resilience conveys ... the capacity, once bent, to spring back" (p.10). This indicates that the schools which are performing well still experience problems, yet in spite of their difficulties, they are able to provide a purposeful and supportive framework for teaching and learning to their students and staff (p.10). Although resilient schools struggle with problems in their environments, Christie and Potterton illustrate that the schools, faced and resolved problems stemming from both their environments and themselves (ibid).

According to Christie and Potterton resilient schools show a sense of responsibility. That is, the schools have a will and ability to take initiatives (p.11). Because of the development of authority in these schools, they are able to do things for themselves. Each teacher and learner has a sense of responsibility in the process of teaching and learning. They develop the power to act for themselves in small and sometimes big ways (p.12). As such,

Resilient schools are able to recognize what sorts of things they are able to do for themselves to master necessary resources and to act. This can be in small ways within the school, like sweeping classrooms and picking up papers in the playground (p. 12).

Christie and Potterton (1997) indicate that teachers view teaching and learning as their primary purpose and the focus of attention. Learners are controlled by measures such as securing the school environment or allowing people from the nearby community to sell food within the schools' environment in order to avoid loitering of the children

during breaks. Also these schools have educational vision in that they involve all members of the school society in school matters. The schools encourage different perspectives from parents, teachers and learners about continuous developments. Furthermore the report shows that the schools have a clear purpose of education (p.14). Thus the children in these schools simply clean the school environment. A clean place is a reflection of a disciplined community.

2.4 PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The common definition of public schools regards these schools as schools owned and financed by the government while private denotes schools that are financed and owned by private people or institutions. In this section I adopt Fenstermacher's (1994) description of notions of public and private.

The notion of public denotes activities that are out there where there are different kinds of people with different habits. The public sphere is a place that needs care, love and patience as people do not know each other. There is a need for tolerance. The public sphere is a place that requires civility. Contrary to that, private denotes the inside where secrets are kept out of public scrutiny (Fenstermacher, 1994). Fenstermacher (1994) argues that the decline of national identity in family values contributes to the decline of public life. He shows that care, intimacy and tolerance have been neglected in the public sphere. He further argues that private matters, such as sex have been exposed to the public through media, this has corrupted the public and has affected the teaching and learning process. He says, "The public life has been corrupted by the private realm. It is as if that which was once private, has leaked into that which was once public, producing a kind of corrosion that has as its results, the loss of what, in an earlier time, was called the public morality"(p.58). Care, intimacy and tolerance of the public declined and created a decline in values of the family, decline of the national identity, and culture transformation. Culture has changed, but whether that is due to private life influence is a question to be developed.

Fenstermacher (1994, p.62) argues that public life has the responsibility of developing virtues needed for effective participation in the private sphere. Interaction between the parents and children he argues can determine a healthy public life and a healthy private life. According to Fenstermacher, co-participation of family members is

believed to develop public participation. This calls for reforming the private life as well for the benefit of the public. According to Fenstermacher, a healthy family life presupposes a healthy public life and vice-versa. He indicates that the private and the public spheres differ in that the private life has love, respect and regard, the values that are not found in the public sphere. In the public the expected values are fairness, justice, and equality. In this way, the difference allows and encourages forms of domination that cannot be tolerated. In arguing for the reconstruction of public and private, Fenstermacher shows that the values and responsibilities of enlightened domestic life become the values of an enlightened public. This means that if the private life has love, respect and regard, the public will gain fairness and justice because love is fair and just. As such, it is important to restore the private for the development of the public. She writes,

In the private sphere, the restoration must involve decent and dignified conceptions of parenting and child rearing; it must provide time and opportunity for children and adults to build bonds of love and understanding; it must take place in settings that are safe; and it must include some minimal freedom from want. In the public sphere, it must acknowledge the value of difference while seeking the basis for commonness; it must permit us to communicate with one another without inflicting physical harm or psychological trauma; and it must challenge us to see that our individual visions of the good life are interdependent with the health of our communities, our states, our nation, and our world (p.66).

What is important is that schools are public institutions regardless of form or kind and are responsible for the development of the public sphere. I argue for a conceptual shift from traditional conceptions of public and private schooling which separate children and encourage class within nations. If education can be considered a public good but not an individual good, it can equip each youth with the intellectual and civic tools that are required for a decent life in the culture and economy (Sizer, 1997). According to Lightfoot, the problem of the declining behaviour among learners, can be overcome through establishing cooperation in schools. Below I show the inequalities that are associated with the notion of school choice.

2.5 PARENTAL CHOICE AND INEQUALITIES IN SCHOOLS

In his analysis of the role and function of markets in education, Whitty (1997) argues

that the notion of choice of schooling creates many forms of social inequalities, such as class inequalities. This in turn creates inequalities between schools, because popular schools are tempted to be more selective, both academically and socially through explicit and implicit methods (p.13). Sizer (1997) indicates that if communities are divided by access to knowledge and the opportunity to learn, it is likely to undo the chances for a democratic life and a democratic government (p. 43).

Although the common belief is that choice puts the power in the hands of the consumer and the parents, Whitty argues that the link between 'parental choice' and 'the autonomy of schools' creates 'quasi-markets', which in fact benefit only a small section of the parent population. Whitty's investigation shows that market ideas in education create polarisation between schools.

INEQUALITIES BETWEEN MIDDLE-CLASS AND WORKING-CLASS FAMILIES

Whitty argues that although choice is an important practice, it creates inequalities because of the ways schools select their student population. Schools compete with one another in order to attract the students that can afford high fees. In most cases, private schools select children who are already motivated, who are gifted and committed to their work (Whitty, 1997, p.13). These are children who come from middle-class families and are seen as assets because they are able to pass examinations. This subverts the purpose of schooling by creating unequal classes of citizens, and provides only one class, the middle-class, with the skills and knowledge for full participation in the society (Hammond, 1994). This may cripple disadvantaged learners as they are denied access and disengaged by the school structure. As such, choice increases inequalities in societies. Hence, Whitty argues, "choice is creating social polarization between societies" (1997, p.17).

POLARISATION BETWEEN 'GOOD SCHOOLS' (PRIVATE) AND 'POORLY PERFORMING SCHOOLS' (PUBLIC)

Whitty quotes Wells (1997, p.21), who claims that the characteristic of private schools of being driven by economy ignores that a school is a societal entity which is very complex in nature. This means that schools include different actors with different ideological, political, social and cultural tendencies. Schools have different management levels, staff relations, pupil relations and pedagogical relations and each

of these are found within differing layers and develop potentially particular dynamics of their own. In addition, schools are not isolated but are tied to the communities within which they are located and to the broader society. What is significant is that choice is likely to reinforce differences and the overall quality of the advantaged schools because "the lack of power that some schools experience is embedded in their social and economic lives" (Whitty, 1997, p.27). Wells argues that it is not possible for choice to improve educational opportunity, but problems are likely to increase in many schools as many are rejected because of income problems. Whitty argues that such choice plans,

merely increase the variance in student achievements, with some students decidedly worse off, rather than bringing about the overall improvement envisaged by the exponents of choice (ibid).

Thus, choice plans encourage different values in competition for entry into higher education and to privileged occupations, and more value is placed on traditional academic success which make access a positional good and scarce. The schools which produce good results are preferred by parents but these schools are more selective (Hammond, 1994 p.49).

Whitty (1997) shows that poorly performing schools battle because they admit students who are disadvantaged economically. Due to their socio-economic environment they are less able to attain good results. In this regard poor schools are neglected because they cannot produce good results.

2.6 IMPLICATIONS OF PARENTAL CHOICE ON TEACHERS' WORK

Teachers work under stress in order to satisfy both the head of the school and the parents, and to obtain high examination scores at the end of the year. Teachers are usually found to be in burnout. Whitty (1997) argues that teachers are given extra work which creates "tiredness, irritability and depression, sleeping badly, increased drinking, and a sense of guilt that they are neglecting their own families" (Whitty, 1997, p.24).

The marketisation of schools has deprofessionalised the teaching profession because the school governing bodies have become directors in schools (ibid, 24). This means that teachers are given predetermined policies and are directed to implement them.

Whereas many claim that the autonomy of schools is a benefiting factor to the improvement of school performance, Whitty argues that flexibility and claims of enhanced professionalism can sometimes become a cover for exploitation of teachers (ibid). Governing bodies monitor teachers as they do their work. In the process, Whitty argues, they are only interested in how much of the material is covered but not in the quality delivered to learners. This reflects that governing bodies do not trust teachers. Where trust is lacking, meaningful teaching and learning cannot take place.

Whitty shows that self-managed schools experience a top-down model of decision making in which the manager enforces his ideas of management on the teachers. This model of managing schools creates a very low level of trust among the different hierarchies of the school (ibid, p.29).

Whitty argues that there is a need to find out how positive aspects of choice and autonomy can develop new forms of community empowerment instead of increasing differentiation through education. Firstly, Whitty argues for the reprofessionalisation of teachers so that they can improve the practice of teaching and learning. Secondly, he argues for the empowerment of the community to support students, with the purpose of ensuring a conducive learning environment for learners. Thirdly, Whitty argues that new policies can be developed in order to improve education. For example, it is important to create responsibility in every individual and to inform the bureaucratic system whose shortcomings have helped to legitimise the tendency that treats education as a private good rather than a public responsibility. Mouff, cited in Whitty, argues that there is a need to develop a conception of citizenship that implies an education system that involves creating unity without denying the fact that children are individuals (Whitty, 1997, p.38). Fenstermacher (1994) claims that it is of value to stress civil education in different institutions whether they are public or private. Darling-Hammond (1994) argues that research illustrates the success of schools which foster common learning experiences, cooperative work, and the participation of parents, teachers and learners in making decisions. She says, "Communitarian models for schooling provide alternatives to the disengagement, separation and inequality fostered by bureaucratic approaches" (p.50).

2.7 SUMMARY

On analysing middle-class parents' perceptions of education, Roberts (1980) shows that choice is related to a belief that the school has a good learning environment. Nevertheless Walford, (1990) and Salter and Tapper (1985) suggest that some parents prefer private schooling as they associate them with educational, social and occupational advantage. There is no agreement on parent's preference for private school. As such, the examination of what makes a good learning environment is done. This is found to conform with quality schooling. Lightfoot (1983) shows that quality of a school is complicated and is associated with the environmental conditions within which the school operates. This study unfolds the way that a selected group of middle class parents perceive the school of their choice. It tries to unfold the ways in which parents' understanding of quality learning environment inform choice of school for their children.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The literature in this study has raised a number of questions and concerns with regards to parental choice. This study presents a description of parents' understanding of good learning environment of a school with particular reference to private schooling in Lesotho. In this, I intend to unfold the parents' perceptions of the main features of a good learning environment. I also examine which of these features, according to these parents are lacking in the public schools.

3.1 THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

This is a case study. The case study research is used because this method of research allows one to probe deeply and to analyze the different views held by the respondents. By using a case study, the researcher is able to get insights into why certain patterns are observed in the behaviour of an entity. This is done in the hope that understanding the insights can suggest ways to assist others in future (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990; Cohen and Manion, 1994). Cohen and Manion indicate that case study data is "down to earth" and is related to the experience of the respondents. The strength of case studies lies in their attention to nuances of the object observed.

The use of a case study is done with a view to establish generalisations about the wider population from which the sample has been drawn (Cohen and Manion, 1994 pp.106-107, Best and Kahn, 1998).

3.2 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The type of analysis used in this study is qualitative. Qualitative analysis obtains the 'insider perspective' (Best and Kahn, 1998). The analysis is based on the belief that respondents are actors in the school and will be able to comment on the nature of the conditions in the schools within which they work. I intend to access the ways in which parents in the school understand their learning environment, the way in which they make sense or understand realities, the educational experiences provided by their schools. This means allowing them to speak for themselves.

Although not envisaged in the original design of this study, the research had to take a turn in the selection of the sample and had to include teachers in the sample. The

original intention of the research was to only work with a group of parents and to analyse their considerations for choosing a private school for their children. Nevertheless, during the interview it became apparent that most parents believe that either private or public school can meet their needs, provided its environment is conducive for learning. In fact as the research will show (see 4.5.3) the parents in this study are very concerned with the possible negative influence of private school culture on their children's sense of belonging to the community and this is despite their choice to send their children to a private school. This has meant that contextual considerations influenced parental choice. In order to investigate these, it was important to pursue in the literature review the question of good learning environment. This analysis, (see 2.3) helped to unpack the central features of conducive learning environment. It also helped in the analysis of the interviews as it became more and more clear that although the parents insist on giving good learning environment to their children, their opinions are not well articulated educationally. As a teacher in a government school, and having given my deep concern with the flight of kids from a government school (see 1.3), I decided that it is important to have teachers' views included in the question of what constitute a good learning environment and how the public and the private school are different with regard to this.

To meet this end, I selected two groups of teachers, one from the school under study and one from a public school nearby. This meant that the nature of the study developed a new dimension of company, the views of parents and teachers on the learning environment in public and private school. This has helped to confirm and clarify the views of parents, whose experience with the public sector of schooling is very diverse. The differences between parents' view and teachers' experiences (of the respective schools) are used to explain how each group considers qualities of a good learning environment.

The method used to analyse the views of parents and teachers does not intend to portray absolute truth on the question of school quality. Lightfoot (1983) points out that to perceive school quality within the negative tones of social science operating with the assumptions of absolute ways of malignancies is problematic. Such an approach results in working towards finding malignancies without considering the goodness within the environments of the schools, or working towards finding

goodness without considering the malignancies within the school environment. However, healthy and workable environments are defined as not being without contradictions, imperfections and inconsistencies. The research works with both the positive and the negative aspects of the school and considers the emerging contradictions, inconsistencies and imperfections in the different processes of the school. Besides, one considers that a school is not an isolated environment but it is tied to the society within which it is located. In addition a school is a historically constructed entity which means that understanding the history of the school plays a major role in understanding the processes within that school environment.

3.3 SAMPLING

A sample is a small proportion of the population selected for observation and analysis. By studying the characteristics of the sample, it is possible to make certain inferences about the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn (Charles and Gay, 1976).

In this study, the sample consists of three groups.

1. 30 parents whose children are in standard 1 (grade 1), form 1 (grade 8) and form 4 (grade 11) and attend Hareeng English Medium School (HEMS) at Phetane Village, Seliba town, in the Leribe district of Lesotho.
2. 6 teachers teaching in HEMS in standard 1, form 1 and form 4.
3. 6 teachers teaching in standard 1, form 1 and form 4 in Phelane public school in the Leribe district of Lesotho.

3.4 CRITERIA OF SELECTION

The principal of the private school, HEMS, allowed me time to conduct research among parents and teachers of her school. HEMS enroll children in the primary, secondary and high school. Parents of learners from these different educational levels were selected. That is, they were selected from standard 1 learners (grade 1), secondary school learners (grade 8) and high school learners (grade 11). I was given permission to speak to learners, in order for them to make their parents aware that I will interview them in their respective families.

In order to select my sample, I was provided with a list of the parents of the standard 1 learners that reflected their places of residence and whether or not they had done standard 1 in a public school before enrolling at HEMS. The form 1 and form 4 learners provided me with the names of their parents together with their addresses. Next to the addresses, the learners indicated whether they had started schooling in HEMS or had been transferred from another school.

The selection was done as follows:

1. Parents were chosen to provide a mix between those who were in the school for the first time, having transferred from a public school, and those who had opted for the private school from the beginning. In the case of the first group, their interests in the private school would be clearly remembered, whereas the second group had demonstrated a clear initial preference for private schooling. Even in the standard 1 group, parents were found who transferred their children after one year in the public school.
2. It was hoped that the sample would be representative in terms of the parents' social-economic background. But I assumed that because of high fees, working-class children would hardly be found in this school. This was confirmed by the participants' responses during the interviews. Parents' responses indicated that they provide a middle-class background to their children. The portraits of parents discussed in 4.2 located the parents in the middle class.
3. Location of a family was another way of selection that developed during the interviews. Parents were to be within the town or in villages around the town but not in places far from the school.

42 parents were selected at the start. However it was possible to interview only 30 parents. The reason for this is explained in 3.5 below.

Table 1: Distribution of parents across the selected classes

CLASS OF LEARNER	NUMBER OF PARENTS	PROFILE OF LEARNER	
		Learner started in HEMS	Learner transferred from public to HEMS
Standard 1	12	7	5
Form 1	8	4	4
Form 4	10	3	7

The 6 teachers selected in HEMS were teachers who taught in a public school before joining this private school. Teachers were selected in this way in order that they give their experiences in both the public and private school.

Six teachers were also selected from a public school nearby HEMS to tap their experience in the public school as well as their opinions about private community school matters. The decision to interview this group was only made during the course of the interviews because parents showed such disappointment with the public schools. So, I wanted to hear from these teachers, their experiences in a public school. Teachers are direct agents of school matters. Their experiences can best explain school processes. This was to capture triangulation. According to Cohen and Manion (1994: 233), triangulation attempts to explain the richness and the complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and in so doing, making use of data from different respondents.

3.5 PROBLEMS IN RELATION TO SAMPLE ACCESSIBILITY

Although I asked the principal to help by calling a general meeting for parents, it was impossible since such a thing required her to have time to write letters to the parents before the meeting. So, the principal said that parents would not come. I therefore decided to walk from village to village to find the parents. On account of time constraints, it was impossible to reach all the selected parents. The standard 1 parents were mostly found around town. The places of residence of many of the Form 1 and Form 4 parents were so scattered that I was unable to get there. They were scattered all over the country and were in places that lacked transport. I could take a day or

sometimes two days to get to a place. So five parents stay in the village but work in town while the rest (twenty-five) live in town.

Apart from that, in some of the families selected, both the mother and the father were away because of work primarily. I therefore interviewed thirty parents within the selected classes (as shown in table 1 above) and 12 teachers. Time constraints prevented me from interviewing parents in the public school.

3.6 METHOD OF COLLECTING DATA

INTERVIEWS

An interview was conducted with thirty individual parents, six private school teachers and six public school teachers. An interview is a face-to-face meeting between an interviewer and an interviewee. An interview allows interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. This act is not readily available within the mailed questionnaire/self-completion structures. This interaction allows the respondent to ask for clarification when questions are not clear. Again the interviewer probes for specific meanings of answers. In this sense, the interview allows for greater depth of data than is the case with other methods of data collection such as self-completion questionnaires in which the respondent is away from the interviewer (Hopkins and Antes, 1990 p.263).

Interviews are problematic as they are costly, time consuming and very difficult to administer. But interviewees create their own answers and they give more of the understanding through the use of different gestures and facial expressions, which are a form of language conveying different meanings (Hopkins and Antes, 1976 p.145). In addition, the researcher's intervention is reduced.

The respondents were interviewed in a group of two, three and four. The number of respondents found in the place of work determined the number. Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.287) claim that a group interview produces a wide range of responses because it has the potential for a discussion to develop. They show that group interviews are important in that respondents are aware of what others in a group say.

The first part of the interview was structured around fixed-alternative questions.

These are questions that limit the responses of the subjects to the stated alternatives of yes and no or can be answered by one word or a number. Fixed alternatives allowed a respondent to give the answer in a manner in which the response is easily coded (Cohen and Manion, 1994). However, the information becomes too superficial. This type of question was only used in order to gain knowledge of the credentials and ages of parents and teachers, and teachers' period of experience in the teaching profession.

The rest of the interview with the parents was organised around an open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire provides the respondent with a broad freedom of expression and its elaboration represents informal talks (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989). Interviewees use their own terms and their own references in order to clarify points. The open-ended questionnaire is advantageous because the questions stem from the personal contact, which is non-existent in the closed questionnaire. Cohen and Manion (1994 p. 278) indicate that when the purpose of questions is less obvious, as in open-ended questions, the indirect approach is likely to allow frank and open responses. During the interview, at times a question led to another without pre-planning the question. In this case the respondents' excessive freedom of expression established information which one did not expect (p.167). If an issue is raised without being asked, it means that the issue is important for the respondents. A tape recorder was used to record information during the interviews.

3.7 THE DESIGN OF THE PARENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

As stated before (3.1) the study is interested to find parents' understanding of good learning environment with particular reference to the provision of private schools. The questionnaire consists of fixed alternative questions and open-ended questions (refer to 3.6). The questionnaire was developed from the literature examined in chapter two above. It is divided into two parts:

- * The first part establishes the participants' socio-economic background
- * The second part probes the participants about their views on what makes a good learning environment, their views about the role played by the private school in education and the impact the school has on the community.

The first part of the questionnaire is compiled around the following aspects of the

socio-economic background of parents.

The economic status of the parents

This section of the interview questionnaire examines the work parents are involved in. This was used to understand the economic considerations involved in parental choice.

The parents' position in the workplace

Parents were asked about their role within their work. This tested the status of parents in the place of work.

Parents' understanding of the relationship between education and career

This section of the interview questionnaire examines parents' view of educational credentials and their role in life improvement. This was used in order to establish parents' investment in education and their school preference.

The second part of the questionnaire addresses the following areas:

Parents' perceptions on good learning environment

Parents were probed on their conception of a good learning environment. This probed the parents on their reasons for sending their children to the school. It also probed the parents on their reasons for rejecting the public schools.

Parents' Involvement in the school

This section of the interview questionnaire probes the ways in which the school encourages parental involvement. This was used in order to understand the ways parents value involvement as a way of improving the teaching and learning of their children.

Observed Problems in a public school

The purpose of this section was to engage the parents in a comparative exercise. Parents were asked to reflect on problems experienced in the public sector of education. Those parents whose children went to a public school before were asked to reflect on their personal experience and suggest ways of improvement.

3.7.1 DESIGN OF TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Although the questionnaire of the two groups of the sample of teachers is separated, however it consists of similar aspects.

The teachers, in both private and public schools were interviewed and the interview questionnaire was separated into two parts. The two parts of the questionnaire reflected the following aspects:

The first part establishes the position of teachers in their work place.

The second part probes the teachers about their professional experience in both the private school and the public school in which they once taught.

The first part of teachers' questionnaire is compiled around the following themes:

The teachers' educational background

This section of the questionnaire examines teachers on the qualifications they possess and their role in the schools in which they teach. It assesses the functional ability of the teachers in the schools.

The teachers' views on good learning environment

This section of the questionnaire examines factors that attract teachers in the schools in which they teach. It also addresses factors that make the teachers to reject the previous public schools (in the case of private school teachers).

The teachers' perceptions on parental involvement in both the private school and the public school

This section probes teachers on their experience of parents' involvement in both the public and the private school. It also asks the teachers to reflect on the positive and negative experiences brought about by parental involvement.

The teachers' views on the private school

This section probes the teachers to reflect on their experiences by examining the impact of private school on learners' integration with their communities.

3.8 PROCESSING DATA

Data was first transcribed. According to Cohen and Manion (1994, p.206), this kind of data enables the researcher to include the content which she/he obtains from the respondents. Data is analyzed into categories in order to identify relations among the categories (Hopkins, 1976, p.155). Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 55) argue that categories and units of analysis identified reflect the nature and the purpose of the research. Data from different respondents that appeared to share similar characteristics was grouped under a particular theme. It was found that there were themes that were related, and the researcher therefore developed a cluster theme, under which the sub-themes could be clustered. Anderson (1990, p.81) indicates that such data analyses include the possibilities of discovery and reconceptualisation of the research questions. He explains that the analysis needs to be done repeatedly in order

to capitalise from the collected data. The analysis tells more about the kinds of factors stressed and ignored (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 56). In the following section, I discuss how I divided the content into themes guided by the literature in chapter 2 above.

3.8.1 THEMES OBTAINED FROM PARENTS' CONTENT

Data is analysed into the following themes:

The Socio-economic background of parents

The theme discusses issues such as,

- choice of school is exercised by parents who are middle-class and are working in different government departments.
- The parents' belief that education is a key to better lifestyle.
- The parents' reasons for carrier development.

Parents' reasons for choosing the private school

This theme addresses issues such as:

- Parents' understanding of good learning environment
- Parents' understanding of their involvement in the school
- The impact of the private school on the children and how it influences the community

Parents' reasons for rejecting the public school

This theme addresses issues such as:

- parents' experiences and perceptions of public education
- parents' views on measures to develop public schools.

3.8.2 THEMES ORGANISED FROM TEACHER'S CONTENT

The content of the interviews with teachers was also analysed into themes. The

content reflects the teachers' experiences in either the private or the public school in which they taught.

The major themes are as follows:

Teachers' views on the learning environment in the private school

This theme is discussed under:

- The physical conditions, discipline and motivation
- Teaching and learning
- Recognition of teachers' professional status
- Leadership

Teachers' views on parental involvement in the private school

This theme is discussed as:

- The impact of parents' involvement on teachers in the private school

Teachers' views on the impact of the private school on learners' integration with the community

The theme discusses the schools' influence on learners' integration with the community.

Teachers' views on the public school learning environment

In this, the teachers gave their different experiences in the public schools in which they previously taught in relation to the private school teachers. The public school teachers gave the present experience. This is discussed as:

- professionalism in the public school
- parental involvement in the public school
- measures to be taken for the improvement of the public school.

3.9 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

When describing reliability of an instrument, Fraenkel and Wallen (1990, p.318) say that it is the level of consistency or stability of the measuring device. Interviewing three different sets of respondents tested the reliability of this study. Their responses to the interview questions were compared to confirm that the measurement was accurately carried out and resulted in similar results. Reliability is also defined as the consistency of the responses. In order to check the consistency, repetition of some open-ended questions at different points in the questionnaire was done.

According to Cohen and Manion (1994, p.170), external validity is described as the extent to which the explanations of the study or measurement can be applied to other contexts. The themes that were developed to analyse the parents' perception and the confirmation of these from interviews with teachers are used to make recommendations for what aspects of parental choice are worthwhile pursuing further.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS: ANALYSIS OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS

This research investigates the parents' conception of private school, more particularly their understanding of the provision of good learning environment. The chapter opens with a brief description of the private school used in the case study. In the next section, in order to understand parents' conception of the school, I analyse the socio-economic status of the participants, with a view to portray the influence of their class position. In the third section of this chapter, I analyze the parents' reasons of choice of private schooling for their children. And in the fourth section the analysis is on the impact of the private school on the community. In general, the analysis in this chapter is intended to describe parents' view of public school's valued features and their views of quality learning environment (see questions 4, 5, 6 in 1.2.1).

4.1 PROFILE OF THE SCHOOL

In order to understand the context of the school, I examine the profile of the school used in the case study. In the description I discuss some of the physical features of the school environment.

Started in 1983, under the principalship of a Danish woman, Hareeng English Medium Private community School (HEMS) is situated in the Leribe district, in the Phetane village. The school is protected from animals by a very tall security fence. To the east of the main school-building, the ground is occupied by students' plots and an orchard.

On entering the main gate, a large staff room for both primary and high school teachers is seen. The school's grounds are very tidy. In front of the principal's office is a nicely cut lawn, which is surrounded by flowers. In the middle of the lawn, is a brick stand on which the mission statement of the school is written. The mission's words read 'STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCY'. The principal's office is divided into rooms that are offices of the schools' accountant where the children and some parents were seen entering to pay the fees. When entering the office, I was attracted by the set-up of the office and its cleanliness. Towards the west of the school campus, near

the principal's office, but behind the staff-room are primary school classrooms built of sand and cement blocks while behind the primary school classes, are the pre-school classes. The classrooms all have ceilings and nicely covered with floor tiles. In one classroom where I was welcomed, the room is well furnished with pupils' desks and the teachers' table. The walls of the classroom are full of posters for different subjects. Outside the classes, yellow-painted lorry wheels are seen with many other playground equipment for the pre-scholars. On the other side of the staff room are high school classrooms. The teachers' staff room is well furnished.

Although the school is multi-cultural, there are only a few children of other nationalities like Indians, Chinese and African from other countries. Local children dominate the school. The primary school teachers are all local teachers while expatriates dominate the high school. These teachers all share one staff room. The school has only one principal for all the levels.

4.2 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF PARENTS

In the rationale to the study, I noted that many parents in the Leribe district transfer their children to private schools (Work for Justice, 1996; Kingdom of Lesotho 1982). It is therefore important to find out from parents who are in a position to exercise this choice, the grounds on which their choice is made. I show their occupational stratification which I argue locates them in a particular socio-economic position. I also refer to their life development.

The parents who participated in this study fall within the middle-class social group. The parents are working as teachers, nurses, managers in government services, police and insurance company brokers and clerks while others are self-employed in their small businesses. The majority of these parents are skilled professionals. Only a few are unskilled. This group includes a pensioner and a hawker. Some parents in this study stay in town in government houses although their homes are in different districts. Another group stays in the rural areas where they own a house and commute to town for work every day. A few, who own a house in town, stay close to the school.

Most parents whose children attend this school are educated. The table below reflects their occupations, positions at work, educational credentials, monthly income and

their gender and age.

Table 2: Parents' occupations, positions at work, educational qualifications, monthly income, gender and age

OCCUPATION	POSITION	EDUCATION CREDENTIAL	WAGES (R) per month	GENDER	AGE (Years)
PROFESSION	College lecturer	MSc (Agric.)	3,500.00	M	48
	Principal	BAEd+Bed (Hon.)	4,000.00	M	41
	Deputy	STC+ACP	3,500.00	F	41
	HoD Maths	STC+Bed	2,500.00	F	41
	HoD English	BAEd	2,500.00	F	41
	Teacher (assistant)	STC+Bed	2,000.00	F	43
	Teacher (assistant)	Bed	2,000.00	M	41
	Teacher (assistant)	BSc.	2,500.00	F	35
	Teacher (assistant)	STC	1,700.00	F	39
	Teacher (assistant)	STC	1,400.00	F	35
	Policy Broker	PH	1,800.00	F	42
	Policy Broker	PTC	1,800.00	M	40
	Policy Broker	PTC	1,600.00	F	35
	Nurse-clinician	Diploma	2,300.00	F	48
MANAGEMENT	Dress maker	Certificate	2,000.00	F	35
	Director of Red Cross	BAEd	2,500.00	F	42
	Director of NSS	BSc Ed+ Police	3,500.00	F	35
	Bank Manager	Diploma in Accounting	3,500.00	M	48
	Government Garage	Motto-Mechanics	3,000.00	M	48

CLERICAL	Town Clerk	Diploma in Town-Planning	3,000.00	M	48
	Post office worker	Form C	700.00	F	45
	Work-Shopper	Form E	2,000.00	M	46
	Police	Form E	2,000.00	M	35
	Office-Typist	Form E	800.00	F	35
	Office-Assistant	Form E	600.00	F	42
UNSKILLED	Housekeeper	Standard 6	*	F	48
	Room-Renter	Standard 6	900.00	F	48
	Hawker	Standard 6	Unstable	F	60
	House-keeper	Form E	*	F	35
	Farm Worker	Standard 6	Unstable	M	62

* means that the parents rely on their wives/husbands financially

The participants can be classified into professionals, managers, semi-skilled workers and unskilled workers. Below I describe the social status of these groups and life-style that it generates. The unskilled group is located in because it is found that although they are unskilled, they have children in the private school. They manage to pay the high fee. One gives a reason that he has invested his money while retrenched from the mine and he is able to pay the fee, again he supplements his money by selling milk from his two dairy cows. Another one indicates that she was a nurse before hawking, but she can afford to pay the fees because they pay quarterly. Housewives had their husbands who are working. But they mentioned that they are struggling.

4.2.1 PORTRAITS OF PARENTS ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION

"I AM A PROFESSIONAL"

This group holds relatively high qualifications. They are trained for the work they do. They are secondary school teachers, lecturers in a college and nurses. Their ages range between 30 and 50 years. Their appearance is smart on the whole and they have accommodating characters. The parents claim that they have stable families with both partners. Some parents own houses that are well furnished and are located in very

clean surroundings. Some are involved in community activities and in most cases as leaders of these activities. For example, they claim that they are leaders of burial societies. Even though I did not get to all parents' homes, I managed to come to their places of work that are mostly very clean. The place is very tidy because of the pictures and the atmosphere in general. The buildings are made of very expensive bricks with large windows. These parents claim that education is the key to life, and they show that they want their children to obtain the best kind of education and all their children must obtain education for life.

"I AM A MANAGER"

This group includes parents who work as directors and managers in government services. Their ages range between 35 and 50 years. Their appearance in public is smart. They claim to have worked hard in order to achieve what they possess. They are leaders in community projects and the civil service. They command others, and are responsible in the general management of their departments. Some possess small businesses such as shops and restaurants. Their homes are in the richest area of the town where houses are only built of bricks. Their home surroundings is very quiet. The neighbourhood where the house is built is very quite. This group feels superior to the first. They are very conscious of the importance of money. They claim that education is the key to life and they like their children to attend best schools for preparation of life.

"I AM A CLERK"

These are parents who serve the public and work as clerks or typists in the post office, schools and government offices. Their age is between 33 and 50 years. They are mostly high school graduates. They have not fared as well as the other groups in terms of finance. They find it very difficult to maintain what they feel is a comfortable style of life. The group considers schooling essential for a good job, and they expect obedience from their children. These parents claim that their children seldom have discipline problems at home or at school. They want their children to be educated and believe that education is the key to a good life.

"I AM UNSKILLED"

The parents included in this group did not finish high school. Their age is between 35

and 60 years. They recognise that education is the key to a good job and they claim that they want their children to be educated more than they have been. They are mostly devoted to their churches and work hard to maintain their income. They really struggle in life in order to pay their children's school fees. They claim to live by obtaining profits from the little monies they obtained when going on pension while they were working in the different institutions.

4.3 EDUCATION, SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND LIFE IMPROVEMENT

The data in this section was obtained in response to the question "Do you think that there is a need for you to improve your career and your qualifications?" Most of the participants remarked that there is a need for them to improve their careers. Parents indicated that with improved careers and qualifications, they will have self-knowledge. They need new knowledge and skills in the changing world. Thus, parents want to update the knowledge they have in the different fields that inform their work. They are interested in improving their qualifications because they associate it with improving themselves. The following are examples of their claims, "A career requires a dynamic person. This is due to changes that occur in life"; "I improve my career due to new findings in the area of agriculture"; "There are changes in the communication system. I want to do short-hand and other communication skills"; "There are different challenges in the teaching profession, more knowledge keeps me up-to-date".

Most parents perceive that there is a need for improving qualifications for purposes of status, securing the work, securing the income, and for being promoted at work. The following remarks are examples of their claims, "Qualifications improve salary"; "Qualifications improve income"; "Improved qualifications improve lifestyle"; "Improved qualifications is a ladder for promotion at work." This is consistent with the literature examined in 2.2 above. Woods et al (1997) show that parents see schooling as that which gives them flexibility in the market. Parents believe that schooling is a means to a few privileged occupations or gives them better jobs. One parent claimed "I like scholarly work therefore I do not feel well without studying."

A few parents do not wish to improve qualifications due to their age and due to indulgence in business. They put it thus, "I am too busy to do that, my business

cannot function properly"; "My property can be destroyed by children". This parent claims that if she went to study, it was highly likely that what she has in the shop would not be cared for during her absence. Another parent commented, "Age prohibits me to study."

Others argue that improvement of qualifications is not important to them, but they show that they want to do anything that can help them 'make much money': "I only need anything that can improve my income regardless of educational qualifications." The table below shows the value that parents put on education, since they keep on developing their educational profession.

Table 3: Career development of parents in the sample.

FIRST POSITION	CAREER DEVELOPMENT CHANGE	PRESENT POSITION
Assistant teacher in high school	Study	College Lecturer
Assistant teacher	Study	Principal
Assistant teacher	Study	Deputy
Assistant teacher	Study	HoD Maths Department
Assistant teacher	Study	HoD Eng. Department
Assistant teacher	Study	Assistant teacher
Office Clerk	Study	Assistant Teacher
Secondary school teacher	Study	High school teacher
Office clerk	Study	Secondary school teacher
Assistant salesman	Study	Secondary school teacher
Primary teacher	Better post	Policy Broker
Primary Teacher	Better post	Policy Broker
Primary teacher	Better post	Policy Broker
Dispenser (Pharmacy)	Study	Nurse Clinician
Temporary Teacher	Study	Dress maker
High school teacher	Better post	Regional Cross Director

High School Teacher	Better post	Director of NSS
Assistant Salesman	Study	Bank manager
Government office clerk	Study	Government garage manager
*	*	Town Clerk
*	*	Post Officer
*	*	Work Shopper
*	*	Police man
Assistant Saleswoman	*	Typist
Nurse assistant	*	Office Assistant
*	*	Housekeeper
*	*	Room Renter
*	*	Hawker
*	*	Housekeeper
*	*	Farm worker

* denotes that a parent has not improved his/her career.

PARENTS' ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN

What most parents said they want, regardless of economic problems, is good education for their children. Parents reported that they sacrifice things such as building beautiful houses, buying furniture, buying expensive clothes, so that children can get good education and a good future. A parent (professional) asserts, "I want to paint walls of my sitting room, but because of Tsebo's fee, I ignore. Education comes first." Parents view education as a social good. They emphasise the contribution of the school to the child's development and life chances.

The parents believe that a good job and confidence can only be obtained through good education. They believe that in a good school the child is assisted to be independent in life. A parent, (professional) claims, "I choose a school that will enhance education of my child, to prepare his good future." Another parent (management) perceives, "I want my child to be able to struggle in life. She is confident, she can even dance

among the multitudes"; "I am interested at the child's progress in education. I might like him to be a doctor or a nurse, but only to find that his interest differs as he grows." Another (clerk) remarked thus, "I wish my children can be educated to the university level. They have to be capable of doing things for themselves. They must be independent."

There is a wish for a good life-style detected from the remarks of the parents. Most parents perceive that good future can be obtained if the children get good education from a school, which they trust can help them to attain what they desire for their children. They show that they have great hope that the school will help the children attain good education. Some of them say, "The teachers in the school work hard to enable children admission in different higher institutions"; "Teachers in this school are very influential, they encourage our children and have high expectations"; "The school can help if the same educational level can be kept."

The parents who value education see it as a step ahead in life or as the field that will broaden the individual scope of their children. They regard education as a source of income for their families. The females are more aware of the value of education for their children.

4.4 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN PARENTS' CHOICE OF THE SCHOOL

Parents indicate that they obtained information about the school in a variety of ways. Some know the school because of friends with children in the school. Many parents report that they buy the yearly pass list (a book written by the examination council in order to announce the children's results) and check the results of the school. One parent decided to attend parents meetings in different schools within the vicinity with the purpose of comparing the ways the schools give their yearly reports. A number of parents indicated that their other children attended the same school. Parents said that children comment positively about their school. The following are examples of their remarks, "The child says good about her teachers and classmates"; "The child likes the school and she encouraged others to attend" and "The child talks about his participation in debates".

Most of the parents remarked that the community likes the school. Parents referred to the percentage of children that even commute to the school from far places.

According to Mrs. Moroa (the oldest committee member of the school), since 1996, half of the school enrolment commute to the school every day and come from external districts. This means that the school does not only serve the community within which it is located. A parent claimed that, "Those who are very far even rent rooms". While other parents view thus, "The community likes the school and appreciates the goods the school delivers. Good results, good discipline as well as acceptable character are obtained from children attending this school". "Communities like the school. Even those who are from other districts, such as Botha-Bothe, like their children to experience the environment of the school"; and "The school has a very good reputation."

In the above responses, parents noted that they knew the school in different personal ways and they indicated that if parents learned positive things about the school from their children, they are mostly attracted to the school. I now turn to parents' reasons for choosing private schooling for their children.

4.5 EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN PARENTS' CHOICE OF THE SCHOOL

The analysis in this section of the chapter is focused around reasons for parents' choice of the school. The literature suggests that middle-class value quality education in which they are involved in their children's education. Parents' responses to the interview question are clustered around the following sub-themes:

- * good learning environment
- * parental involvement
- * cultural values.

I begin by looking at parents' perceptions of good learning environment.

4.5.1 GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The parents conceive a good learning environment as including factors such as control of learners, effective teaching and learning of learners.

"TEACHERS AND CHILDREN ARE UNDER CONTROL"

According to the participants, "control" means application of strict administrative

rules in the teaching environment. Parents believe that strong and strict administration improves progress in a school, as children will reap fruits at the end of the year. Parents claim, "a strict administration does not allow teachers to go out of school freely without any serious reasons." "A good school is one that possesses a strong, responsible head-teacher who supervises teachers for perfect school work." "I admire a tough leadership which is able to discipline children to be better human beings." "What we like about the school is strict administration, we are proud of the principal, she is a real administrator." "A well-managed school is good for my child because good management accounts for good discipline".

Most parents are impressed by the strict administration of the principal. Parents are concerned with the decline of good manners among children. They associate strictness with discipline and a form of good behaviour controller. They consider 'strictness' necessary for the education of their children. Strict administration helps the children to develop good character and it disciplines them: "Our children, particularly those in the higher forms, do not loiter in the street during classes".

Parents consider the principal of HEMS to be firm in what she does or says. She abides by the school policies. She is a good role model. She is always early for school and she supervises teachers and children. "Every day the principal checks that the school operates in a normal way"; "The principal is very quick to check that all classes have teachers who are doing their work." Parents suggest that because of the principal's firm, dutiful character, "Children do not like to leave home late when going to school as they could suffer the consequences".

"CARE AND HAPPINESS OF OUR CHILDREN"

What most parents of children of HEMS say they admire about the school is the happiness and care experienced by their children in the school's environment. They claim that children are very happy. A parent remembers a day when she visited the school. She comments thus,

The principal cares, she buys different materials for teaching and learning process. Our children are happy because they are always in classes, learning. The environment is a good learning environment.

Care and happiness not only involve the principal's attitude to the learning facilities,

care and happiness include attending classes fully.

"THE SCHOOL IS HIGHLY CONTROLLED FROM TEACHERS' POLITICS"

Apart from the happiness of pupils within the school environment, the negative attitude of the school towards teachers' politics, more particularly the right of teachers to strike, influences parents' choice, "We observed that as teachers were on strike, learners also strike, but neither HEMS teachers nor pupils strike, everything is normal"; "Many parents became attracted to the school in the year 1994, when public schools' teachers were on strike. This school did not join the strike"; Most parents repeatedly emphasise that they do not want their children's education time to be wasted. This is reflected in statements such as, "The public schools' teachers do not teach concepts of the level the child is doing and this delays the child to learn and develop mentally"; "Public school teachers undermine the level of knowledge of our children, they teach concepts that are below their cognitive development."

"LOW PUPIL-TEACHER RATIO IS AN ADVANTAGE TO OUR CHILDREN"

In addition, parents view low enrolment as an advantage to the proper functioning of the school. They claim that a low pupil-teacher ratio allows effective teaching and learning in classrooms as small numbers allow easy class control and care of pupils. They claim, "low pupil-teacher ratio is a factor that helps teachers to be more efficient and affective in the school"; "The pupil-teacher ratio is low in the school and teachers become more devoted and responsible"; "There are fewer children in the class and they are easy to control"; "Children are few and they are academically cared for".

In summary the central issue raised by parents about the private school is strictness which helps to induce discipline. Parents believe that strictness enforces learners to work hard. Apart from that, parents value the care and respect shown to the learners. The anti-political attitude of the teachers is also appreciated as this is believed not to temper with the children's education. In the next sub-section, I analyze parent's responses to good academic results.

"THE SCHOOL HAS VERY GOOD ACADEMIC RESULTS"

Parents' replies to the interview question portray parents' interest in good academic

results. All parents reported that the school produces good standard 7 (a primary leaving examination) results at the end of every year. "Parents are mostly attracted to the school because of end of the year results"; "Every year the results are very good at this school because children pass English, without which they cannot proceed to higher classes." This idea is reflected in the literature on parents' conception of quality education (2.3 above). The literature indicates that parents desire academic progress and qualification for their children for better forms of life. The literature on quality schooling shows good results as one of the indicators of good learning environment.

"TEACHERS ARE DEDICATED TO THEIR WORK"

Parents claim that teachers are dedicated to their work and impart good leadership qualities to the children. By dedication parents mean that teachers are loyal to their work. Parents claim, "Teachers are jealous of their profession"; "Teachers are more responsible and worried about their work. They work hard for good reputation"; "Teachers are concerned about our children, they also keep contact with us from time to time"; "Teachers are responsible for their work, they follow up the children's performance, throughout the year"; "Teachers even call parents if they realise a learning problem in a child."

Most participants remark that the teachers of the school are very good role models for their children. They claim that there is a good atmosphere in the school, that teachers have an interest in their children's work and that their children are very motivated. The literature on quality schooling reflected that emotional closeness of teachers to learners plays a major role in the teaching and learning process (Wexler, 1990).

"CHILDREN ARE HIGHLY MOTIVATED TO LEARN"

Moreover, participants indicated that the children are highly motivated to learn, happy and satisfied at school. A parent elaborates,

The satisfaction of my son is reflected through his activities such as collecting empty boxes of tea, coffee, covering papers and empty tins. He was holding a big plastic bag full of those things and was very happy because they were going to do shopping with his teacher.

Another parent adds thus,

My child shows competence and satisfaction. He always collects learning objects such as insects and plants. He is highly motivated in this school. He does his homework with interest.

While another comments,

My child is very happy because she does not hesitate when she is awoken for school. This is an attitude that she did not have before. She now pressurizes others to go to school early. She is really motivated.

Other responses show that children are motivated. The parents said, "The child does not want to leave the school for another school"; "Children are happy because they are devoted to their work"; "The child speaks about the way he likes his teachers and classmates"; "He even speaks about his good performance and the awards he gets for doing well"; "Teachers make starred cards with names of the good performing pupils and there are given as a motivating instrument."

"TEACHERS HAVE CONCERN IN THE TEACHING OF OUR CHILDREN"

Many parents indicate that teachers' concern at this school has made a difference in the performance of children whom they had thought hopeless with regard to good academic performance. Concern in this regard means seeing to it that learners do their academic work and giving each child her time. This means having an interest in the child and assisting her to understand concepts through the use of different procedures and sources. Parents show that they respect teachers and the school because of these changes in their children. Many of the parents who claim that children experienced change comment,

My child had problems of learning because she is shy but now she is confident, she is motivated and willing to learn. She reads papers and extra books besides her textbooks.

While Litho (professional) comments,

When observing my child's schoolwork, I am encouraged. He writes exercises, and is always checked. He has also developed independent learning skill.

Palesa (unskilled) affirms thus,

My child likes the school very much. Although he is a slow learner, my child has never been discriminated. Teachers in this school are very patient. My son always appreciates his class teacher and his classmates.

Sekila (management) confirms thus,

The school has parent-teachers, who give our children real future with which they can withstand the world's storm. Teachers build total human beings. They care for the children.

"TEACHERS' APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH"

Participants indicated that their good impression of the school is increased by the way children are taught English, the language of value in the world's market. They responded that their children are fluent in speaking English and perceived their children not to have learning problems created by English though it is not a local language. All the parents remark thus: "Children speak English at and out of school premises for practice and exercise, which is seldom found among children from public schools in the area". Another parent recalls how the children impressed him during 'open day'. He comments, "The children are very fluent in English. I wish my own children could experience that. My children would do well in English."

In sum, parents' responses portray the need for accountability and responsibility among teachers. In addition, parents are interested in the end of the year results. The parents want their children to learn in a tertiary institution and hence have good jobs to retain their status mobility, as indicated by the portraits. From the point of view of parents, proper education can be achieved if the learning environment has the committed teachers, involved parents to mention view examples.

4.5.2 PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRIVATE SCHOOL

This section explores parents' understanding of their involvement in their children's education. Parents' responses indicated their involvement to be in the following areas:

- * the learning of their children.

- * general matters of the school.

In order to understand the nature of parents' involvement in the education of their children, I asked the participants the relative distance of the school from home. Most participants indicated that they stay within the vicinity of the school, at 2-4 km from

the school. Their children are not transported to school but walk to school. These are parents who work in the small town due to transfers in their respective work. A small group of parents reported that their children are transported. These are parents whose children are staying in villages out of the town.

4.5.2.1 THE LEARNING OF THEIR CHILDREN

Data describing parental involvement in learning of the child are gathered under:

*daily routine supervision

*giving assistance

*school visits.

INVOLVEMENT IN DAILY ROUTINE SUPERVISION

Parents responded that the school encourages them to be responsible in the demands of the school such as cleanliness at school, to give children confidence and support to learn. This is shown by the following remarks, "The school encourages us to check the work daily"; "I am suppose to check that the child is clean enough to feel free when he is among other children"; "Parents must encourage their children to be early for classes."

Another way in which parents claimed to be involved in the routine of the school is by signing the homework. They indicate, "I am involved in the signing of the children's homework. If I do not sign the child's homework, the child is not checked by the teacher at school" and "I am involved because I sign my child's homework". The signing of the homework is not necessarily done with the intention of helping academic performance.

GIVING ASSISTANCE

Most participants indicated that they help children with their academic work. The following expressions show how parents understand their assistance "I help her to write the assignment"; "If the child asks, in relation to his school activity, I help him if I am able to"; "I help the child to do his assignments by explaining concepts he cannot or did not understand at school"; "We are involved by helping the child to understand the assigned homework." Parents' involvement in this regard means that parents are

supplementing teachers' work at school by helping the child to do the homework and have an understanding of what he is doing. Furthermore, participants understand their involvement in their children's academic work to include finding different learning materials to supplement those of the school. Parents understand their involvement as teaching their children even at their homes. This is mirrored in expressions such as: "We even buy books for her to read at home"; "I buy them books, and they know their reading time"; "At times I read for him his own text, imitate characters in the book. The child does likewise and becomes motivated when realizing that he has grasped. At school the child's reading skill will be assessed by the teacher to reassure that there has been something done at home."

"WE GO TO THE EXTENT OF FINDING SPECIAL TEACHERS FOR THE CHILDREN"

One or two parents said that they are forced to find another private teacher (unattached to the school or even those who teach in the school) to improve the academic progress of the child. This is reflected by parents whose children cannot cope with the 'high standard' of education of the new school. This is shown by responses such as: "I get a private teacher for my child, because not all teachers have remedial classes"; "If a parent does not know how to help her/his child with home-work, he has to find an extra teacher."

MOTIVATING THE CHILDREN TO LEARN

The parents indicated that their involvement in their children's work affects the children academically. Since parents' expectations are very high about the academic performance of their children, this creates a higher desire of learning in the child. One parent puts it thus,

Our involvement influences children academic performance because when they know that 'our parents are paying a lot of money for our education', they work hard, to satisfy parents. Involvement motivates the children, as they want to show that their school is different.

The parents also alleged that they motivate their children as they encourage them when they face study problems in the different subjects. One parent responds thus,

We give our children courage and support if they are discouraged to learn. At times they are hopeless to excel in their studies. As a parent I must

encourage my child to consult the concerned teacher and show him/her the value of giving himself time.

PARENTS' SCHOOL VISITS

Visiting the school is another way in which parents are involved in the education of their children. The visits are done for different purposes, such as attending meetings and during the open day of the school. This assists the parents in socialising with the teachers and the school. Parents also showed that they are always welcome by the principal and the staff during school visits. Some parents' responses in relation to the visits at this school were, "The school welcomes because teachers offer help if I need help"; "The principal and teachers welcome me, even if I have personal clashes with them, when I get to school, I am always warmly welcome and assisted."

Participants mentioned that they attend school meetings every quarter of the year. In the meetings, they are shown different things such as, the performance of their children and they are told about the discipline of their children. They indicated that the meeting for the financial report and matters concerning the general developments of the school is usually held once a year.

PARENT-TEACHER MEETINGS

When asked whether they knew the teachers of their children, many of the participants mentioned 2-3 informal meetings with their children's teachers. Formal meetings with teachers are called when the child has a problem in academic performance and a parent is called by giving a note to the child. This is detected in the following responses, "I know my child's teacher and I meet her when there are problems mostly, especially academic. But when the performance is fine, I do not mind to meet the teacher"; "I know my child's teacher, but I seldom meet him. I mostly meet him when I am not satisfied with the child's academic work."

Parents also reported that the school encourages them to visit at any time in relation to the performance and progress of their children. Below are some of their comments, "Teachers call us if the child has problems, so that we can talk about the child and help"; "When the child has problems, teachers call you. The school advise us to come to the school regularly, so that we can know about the performance and progress of the child"; "We can meet teachers at any time but 'open day' is official day for

parents to meet the children's teachers."

THE OPEN DAY IN HEMS

All parents mentioned that "open day" is an official day of the meeting of parents, learners and teachers. It is the most important day for the social relations of the teacher, the child and the parent. Below are parents' perceptions about the open day. A parent remarks thus,

During the open day, there are many activities which children do, that are educational. They dance, while some present shows of their traditional clothes. Children are taught historical events. Many educational events are taking place.

Another parent sees the day in his way,

During this day children who have performed well are given prizes and compliments by their parents. Open day is an encouragement to those children whose performance is low, to work harder and those who have achieved to work more than he did. It is a positive motivation to all children.

While others describe the day by saying that,

Parents are given yearly academic records, and the teacher, with the parent and the child, discuss the progress of the child showing the child's strengths and weaknesses.

Parents regard this as the most important day in the educational life of their children. They regard the day as educationally, emotionally and socially important.

4.5.2.2 PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN GENERAL MATTERS OF THE SCHOOL

Parental involvement in this level refers to parents' effort at

- * raising funds,
- * making decisions for the school

RAISING FUNDS

The parents voiced that they cook food and sell to other parents during meetings. They also said that they contributed a certain amount of money in order to meet the needs of their school. These are some of their responses: "We usually buy a cup of

tea, coffee or even cold drinks with sandwiches during meetings in order to raise funds"; "We are encouraged to buy the school magazine for the children"; "We are involved because we help the school by raising funds for the different developments of the school"; "We have just paid R70 for each child to raise funds for the building of the hall."

INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

Data reflecting parents' involvement in this area show that parents view their involvement in decision making in three levels. The first level is in making decisions in general parents' meetings. Parents attend and contribute in decisions put on the platform for discussions. The second level is understood to be attending parents' meetings and signing the school handbook to witness presence in a meeting. The third level of involvement is the formal or official level where parents serve as members of the school governing body.

Parents claimed that they are able to discuss problems of the school or important ideas about the school with the principal. One parent reported thus, "The principal can bring an idea to the meeting and we discuss the idea and come to conclusion, under the guidance of the principal". Even if parents do not make decisions, they are free to give ideas that help to construct the school. Parents commented thus, "We are free to say our own views with regards to the development of the school, like advising teachers on how they can solve the problem of misconduct at school or giving teachers ideas of teaching effectively."

Other parents view involvement like this, "I am involved because I attend parents' meetings"; "We attend parents' meetings and we have to sign an attendance form to indicate our presence, this is very important for our children, as we know what is happening at their school." Parents' involvement at this level is very passive as parents attend meetings and it becomes difficult to conclude about the input they make in the school.

The third level of involvement in decision making is direct participation in the governing body of the school. Very few parents are working as officials in the school. Two parents are represented in the committee of the school.

In sum, parents' involvement in this school starts from routine assistance of the child, to parents' participation in the activities of the school especially their high involvement in the learning of their children. Their level of involvement is also experienced in attending meetings and making contributions to the developments of the school. Parents' involvement in the governing body is not fully participatory. Only a few parents are involved in the governing body while many of them are only represented in the governing body of the school. Besides, it is difficult to conclude that the contributions they make in the parents' meetings attended are taken into consideration.

4.5.3 EDUCATIONAL VALUES IN PRIVATE SCHOOL

In this section I explore parents' views of the kind of educational values acquired by children in the private school. Data are gathered around the theme

* School's social identity and sense of belonging

All parents observed changes in their children. The parents' responses show great differences in this area. The parents on the one hand view that the school alienates, or separates the children from their community while on the other hand the parents relate that their children develop superiority complex as they think to be better off.

Parents feel that their children regard themselves as different from the rest of the community. According to parents, the children have become a new community with quite different values from theirs. The following comments of parents show that some parents believe the school alienates their children: "The school cuts children from the community. They feel superior, play alone and walk alone. If they are transferred to public schools, they are not happy, but feel isolated"; "The school does not encourage the children to be involved in public functions, like other schools"; "When I go to national functions, my child remains at home" and "The school is forgotten by the education officers. They do not invite them for national services as they do to other schools."

In order to show that the school has alienated their children, some parents showed that there is a form of conflict between the child and other members of the community. They reported that their children are rejected by other members of the community,

such as the public school counterparts. Participants allege thus, "My child feels superior and is rejected by others as the child identifies herself as being better"; "There is conflict between children in the public schools and those in the private school. The public ones feel inferior and those in the private feel superior"; "Children from this school feel that they are special in the community." According to these parents, the school alienates the children from their cultural heritage and their traditional upbringing.

"OUR CHILDREN MAY BE ALIENATED BUT THEY ARE AHEAD OF THEIR PEERS IN LIFE"

Data in this area reflect that parents are aware of the problem but foreground other aspects of the relation to the community. The parents viewed the positive impact of the school on the personality of the children. The parents observed the following behaviour in their children, "They are still our children, they respect, and are free with the rest of the community"; "They are not cut because we still stay with them in our homes"; "They do not discriminate others." The parents said that because they stayed with their children and could influence them not to be lost in relation to their own cultural values, such as behaviour and conduct of not discriminating against others.

Many of the parents said that their children had developed confidence in themselves. The parents did not see separation but confidence, a value which children from other schools did not possess. According to some parents, the school could not influence their children's social values especially when their children commuted. What these parents understood is that their children cannot forget their identity.

PRESERVATION OF SOCIAL VALUES

In relation to cultural values, the parents' responses showed the understanding and the need of education to preserve identity values, community values, and global village values. The majority of the parents understood that the child serves his own people, his local community and the world at large. Therefore the exposure to these cultural values will benefit the child. The child will never feel isolated.

The parents indicated that they value a school that encourages the children to learn and to maintain their own culture. In HEMS, children still learn Sesotho as a subject. Parents respond in these ways, "Children learn their traditions in the school. The

Sesotho syllabus has lessons on language, traditions in the past and modern literature. Language is pregnant with culture, therefore our children cannot be lost"; "My child knows some cultural things that I do not even know"; "My child asks different questions concerning culture and traditional things."

There were however, the parents who indicated that the school does not teach the traditions of the Basotho, "The school is too western though local language is taught." For example, the parents indicate that "the school ignores the local historical functions."

PARENTS' VIEWS ON THE USE OF LOCAL TEACHERS

The parents wanted their children to socialise with competent people from their nationality. Effectiveness and efficiency are qualities which local teachers are expected to have as the parents believed that effective teachers can equip their children with desirable values. Their responses are as follows: "Local teachers should be effective and efficient"; "It is very important if the local teachers are efficient and effective, because they know the needs of the children"; "A child's local teachers help the child to realise their identity." Although they were interested in a good school for the development of cognitive abilities, the parents felt that local teachers can enforce the children's role in their society, as they know what the society needs from the growing child. The parents understood and believed that their children should learn cultural values that identify them as unique but also as members of the local community.

4.6 PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

The data in this section illustrate the participants' views on public schools. In responding to their reasons for rejecting public education, parents discuss factors such as:

- * Poor school leadership and management
- * Poor level of teaching and learning
- * Poor level of parental involvement

These are some of the many factors related to problems of the public school. The data

reflected that the parents are not happy about a number of factors in their children's previous schools. They indicated that lack of a professional spirit of learning is a major hindrance in these schools. Lack of purpose, favoritism that is prevalent and unmotivated principals were the main factors quoted by parents as contributors to poor professionalism. Below I discuss the parents' views.

4.6.1 POOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The parents pointed out thus, "The school did not have a clear purpose. The management of the school was poor. For example, teachers were surrounded by simbus (potato crisps), cakes, sweets, selling to children during classes". Others also showed that, "Low qualified teachers manage schools while the qualified are not given the positions. The qualified are not motivated because they feel they are not trusted". "The principal himself does not do the work, so teachers do as the principal does by neglecting the work."

A general picture given by the parents as a problem engulfing public schools is about the ownership of schools. The parents indicated that proprietors serve their own interests by choosing principals who serve their interests. The parents put it thus, "The proprietors choose principals who they know will serve their interests. They choose leaders who do not have qualities of leadership." The parents mostly report,

The proprietors' choice of management committee reflects choice of the liked ones. Leadership depends on whether one is a church-member. Proprietors do not care whether the teacher has interest in education or not.

The parents added that in the case where a school is owned by a church, attendance of the schools is highly interrupted by church services. One parent reports:

If management of the school is built of church members, church services interrupt teaching and learning. For example, my child spent about a week not attending classes in his previous school. When asked, he said that there was a conference for the church in the school and their classes were used as accommodation rooms.

The participants indicated that because there is a lot of favoritism in the schools, the school system functions poorly in most cases. They said that this favoritism leads to many problems in the education system of the schools. The parents' expressions show

these problems: "The principal is friendly with some members of staff. This develops very poor social relationship problems between the staff"; "The principal relates well with some members of the staff, that is, he has his 'own people' and gossiping results with a very poor level of engagement in the teaching and learning of poor children".

Other parents gave the following responses regarding poor motivation of the members of the staff. "The principal is poorly motivated and hence all are affected"; "In public schools supervision of teachers is very poor, school inspectors do not do the work". Responses also show that, "In public schools, teachers move freely and we meet them every day in town during work time"; "Children are very free and are found all over the street during the classrooms"; "There is no motivation for teachers as they are very negative to their work due to poor leadership"; "Public schools' teachers are not dedicated because they are not pressed to do their work."

4.6.2 POOR LEVEL OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The participants reported that because the schools usually have large classes, and poorly motivated teachers, there is a very low morale. "In these schools children drop from school in big numbers because they are not encouraged by the teachers to see the value of education."

The parents indicated that the children's schoolwork and their social wellbeing were not considered in their children's previous schools. One parent claims,

In the previous school, the child seemed to have poor teacher handling. The child lost interest in schooling. The teachers complained that the child would kill himself when he grows. I thought the teacher did not care about my child.

Other parents complain thus, "Teachers do not consider differences in our children"; and "Teachers do not check the progress of children". One parent reports:

In the previous school, my child was not given care at all in his studies. He repeated one class many times without being allowed to proceed to the next class. I thought that the action would help him, but he was not helped at all.

The parents indicated that in their children's previous schools, children were taught in their vernacular language and were not encouraged to speak English in public. According to the parents, this was a course of poor performance of the children

because examinations are usually written in English, the language that was not given first preference in these schools. "The medium of instruction is local language"; "Teachers are not strict in English. They do not force children to speak English, like teachers in HEMS school."

4.6.3 POOR LEVEL OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

When interviewed about their involvement in their children's previous schools, participants indicated that they were not involved in public school matters in any way. They responded that in most of their children's schools they were not considered as important for the school. One parent remembers,

In my child's previous school, the meetings to which we were called did not benefit us as parents or our children. The school proprietor and the principal never requested our views about the learning of our children. We never helped in the school matters because the principal was not interested in parents.

Another parent (management) adds,

The school's environment does not encourage our involvement. If you go there, with the child's problem, the principal can say anything she/he likes, which means that the principal has all the power at the school.

Another thing that the parents believed to be the cause of the low interest of parents in these schools is the low fee that the public schools charge for the children. "Parents do not pay a lot of money in this schools, that is the reason that make them feel less involved, they do not mind because they do not sacrifice."

4.6.4 PARENTS' VIEWS ON PROCEDURES TO BE TAKEN TO DEVELOP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The interview explored parents' views on what they assume can help the poorly performing schools. Responses included: "There should be a relationship between the school, parents and teachers"; "Parents must nominate the governing body of the school, the proprietor is not to be responsible for that"; "Parents must fight for the rights of their children, they must be involved in the education of their children whether their children are in public schools or in the private schools, because without our children the schools cannot operate."

Apart from the development of the social relationship in the school, the parents

referred to academic procedures that can be enforced in the public schools. One parent responds, "Parents must assist in disciplining their children academically. They must see that their children study and prepare their assignments. They need to sign to confirm the assistance they give to their children." Another parent asserts thus. "Parents need to encourage regular and punctual class attendance of the children."

Many parents state that it is important that parents feel they are responsible for their children. "In this private school, we know that tuition fee is a must at the beginning of every quarter and we pay on time. The same procedure can be used in the public school, so that our children can stop loitering in the streets. Besides, we must buy the teaching and learning materials on time to avoid wasting our children's time but restore responsibility."

4.7 SUMMARY

Overall, parents' responses reflect that the parents are interested in education and have high aspiration and expectations on account of social and economic mobility. The parents consider good learning environment in education and this is central to the reasons of their choice of this school. However, the parents have a feeling that although the school possesses many good educational qualities such as good discipline, high parental involvement, sense of belonging, motivated learners and dedicated teachers, to give few examples, the school divorces their children from their community. This act puts the parents in a difficulty as they feel the school enforces individualistic practices. This problematic is discussed in the conclusion to this study (chapter 7).

CHAPTER 5

PERSPECTIVES OF PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the attitudes of the six private school teachers regarding the school's learning environment. These views are important for the comparative dimension of this study (see 3.2). The chapter begins by presenting brief portraits of their educational beliefs. This chapter is organised around the following themes:

- * how did I come to know about and choose to teach in this school?
- * the school environment
- * parental involvement
- * the impact of the private school on children's integration with the community
- * the professionalism in the public school
- * teachers' views on parental involvement in public schools
- * opinions about improving public schools

The table below shows the professional level of the teachers in terms of the educational qualifications, their position within the school, and their years of experience in public and private schools.

Table 4: Profiles of private school teachers

POSITION	PREVIOUS POSITION	CREDENTIALS	EXPERIENCE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS	EXPERIENCE IN PRIVATE SCHOOL	AGE OF TEACHER
DEPUTY	CLASS TEACHER	M.ED	18 years	4 YEARS	48 years
SOURCE TEACHER	CLASS TEACHER	PH	15 YEARS	1 YEAR	42 YEARS
CLASS TEACHER	CLASS TE. CHER	APTC	10 YEARS	16 YEARS	48 YEARS
CLASS	CLASS	PTC	10 YEARS	3 YEARS	41 YEARS

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