Selling Education Through "Culture": Responses to the Market by New, Non-Government Schools

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Abstract

The move to a market model of schooling has seen a radical restructuring of the ways schooling is "done" in recent times in Western countries. Although there has been a great deal of work to examine the effects of a market model on local school management (LSM), teachers' work and university systems, relatively little has been done to examine its effect on parents' choice of school in the non-government sector in Australia. This study examines the reasons parents give for choosing a non-government school in the outer suburbs of one large city in Australia. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu specifically his ideas on "cultural capital" (1977), this study revealed that parents were choosing the non-government school over the government school to ensure that their children would be provided, through the school's emphasis on cultural capital, access to a perceived "better life" thus enhancing the potential to facilitate "extraordinary children", one of the school's marketing claims.

Introduction

There is little argument that the culture of educational institutions in Australia and elsewhere is changing. Whether it is schools (see for example Campbell, 2005) or institutions of higher education (Marginson, 2004), Australian education is changing its focus. Accompanying this change in culture has been a move in two major policy directions, marketisation and performativity. Both of these policies can be seen through a lens of competition, choice, the increasing emphasis on accountability, value adding (of, for example, cultural pursuits promised in marketing materials) and the move to make the consumers of education bear the costs. The implementation of the education market and performance targets are restructuring education in all sectors and across all school types in Australia. Another key change evident in recent studies of choice (see for example English, 2005), is the move to insert a form of

"culture" into curricular and co-curricular experiences offered at schools in Australia to attract parents. These activities include a valorising of music, drama, certain kinds of sports and the privileging of LOTE within the curriculum to inculcate culture and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) into students.

The government policies of marketisation and performativity are converging at the point of the funding of non-government schools. The funding of non-government schools is a contentious issue in Australia because it is one of the few countries where non-government schools draw monies from the public sector in the form of grants and funding. The current funding model for non-government schools in Australia is calculated on the socio-economic status (SES) of a school's students. This funding assigns a score to each student based on the Census Collection District (CCD) in which they live. This model is estimated to have increased the funding to non-government schools by $15 million over the period of 2001-2004 (Department for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000). The federal government also provides establishment grants to new, non-government schools of $500 per full time equivalent student for the first year of operation and $250 per full time equivalent student in the second year (Harrington, 2004). "An estimated $11.9 million will be appropriated for these grants during the 2001–2004 program years" (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia: House of Representatives, 2002). Significantly, "there is no commensurate Commonwealth assistance for new government schools" (Harrington, 2004, ¶ 8).

Citing Purcey, Campbell (2005, p. 7) argues that one result of a move to a market model is that parents (especially parents who are aspirational for their children) have to learn to become consumers in an education market. Another clear result of these policies is that schools are being encouraged to adopt a private provider model of educational provision (Campbell, 2005). This is also creating a new class of school, the new, non-government school characterised by non-denominational Christian values, reasonably inexpensive fee structures which includes many "value addeds" and management by a board of directors. These schools are generally located in the outer suburbs of large cities. One such school was examined in order to clarify why parents are attracted to these schools over the other possible "competitors" in the "market".

Several studies on choice in the UK (see for example Vincent, 2001), and elsewhere (see for example Caldwell, 1999) have argued that parents are increasingly engaging with a market for education. Several studies indicate that for parents, ensuring that the school would expose their children to the right cutlural capital and introduce them to other children from "good families" is central in the process of choosing a school. Gerwitz, Ball, & Bowe (1995), examining processes of choice in the UK, found that parents made choices based on "the class and 'racial' composition of the schools" (p. 189). This led to schools increasingly orienting themselves towards

"meeting the perceived demands of middle-class parents" (1995, p. 189). The parents involved in the Gerwitz et al. study identified "their impressionistic, affective, personal responses to schools derived from visits or open evenings" as a "clinching factor in arriving at the final choice" (1995, p. 28). The school's ability to demonstrate its "middle-classness" through its "cultural offering" and cultural capital are central to processes of choice. This study examines how the inclusion of cultural capital in the curricular and co-curricular offering of one new, non-government school is influencing the choice of this school by aspirational parents who want to access middle-class careers and lifestyles for their children.

The difficult relationship between government funding markets and non-government schools

The move to a market model can be seen in the change in policy directions from a Keynsian-welfarist model of educational provision to a "corporate or semi-corporate operations, inside or outside the formal public sector" (Marginson, 1999, p. 230). Associated with this is a change in the ways that schools relate to governments so that the corporate sector is the model *par excellence* for schooling to follow. This can be seen in, among other changes, the move to a focus on "advertising sponsorship and philanthropy; curriculum development and models of business management" (Press & Woodrow, 2005, p. 281).

There has also been a move to make parents and students pay for the education they receive. In a market context education is seen as:

> …mainly a private good for which individuals should, in principle, pay; that education institutions should be forced to compete with each other to produce efficiency; and that government provision is an "intervention" in the market which should be reduced, if not eliminated, while private provision is increased. (Connell, 1998, p. 92)

A market model of education seeks to "make government more efficient by doing more with less, focusing on outcomes and results and management change" (O'Brien and Down, 2002, p. 111). It can be argued that the effect on parents is to attempt to protect their children from "the many uncertainties of life in post welfare Australia" (Campbell, 2005, p. 8).

Concomitantly, there has been a new focus on accountability and performance targets in Australian schools. This can be seen in recent statements about the onus on schools to report to parents and governments their performance in nationally coordinated examinations and university entrance. Australia's federal government made $31 billion available to schools in all sectors conditional on "state governments and school authorities publicly releasing school performance for each school" (Nelson, 2004).

The performance data include academic results, school leaver destinations, teacher qualifications and professional development and finally staff and student retention rates and absenteeism. The data are to be published on the internet, however, the government feels that this information could be incorporated into a form of "report card" and could be published on the school's signage and, therefore, used as part of a school's overall marketing efforts. The linking of performance to the market, is related to a situation in which "all the resources required for the operation of the school are decentralised for local decision making, so that the money literally follows the student" (Caldwell, 1999, p. 258). This has created a new paradigm for schooling in these new times.

Similarly, teachers need to perform in certain ways and the performance of teachers has been emphasised in Australia through a renewed debate over performance pay. In one example, a recent study (published in April 2007) was commissioned by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) into the introduction of performance pay based on three models, merit pay; knowledge pay and skills pay. Using case studies from independent schools, the report examined the effects of the introduction of performance pay on retention of teachers, standards, recognition and outcomes for students. Its findings include a desire to see further research into the area, however, after examining the independent school case studies the authors state that the results demonstrate "that there is a strong desire to provide greater recognition to teachers who can show evidence of attaining high standards of professional performance" (Ingvarson, Kleinhenz, & Wilkinson, 2007, p. 150).

The private provider model, not only in debates over teacher performance pay but more generally, is held up as the preferred model of all schooling. One effect of this change is that parents expect to be able to "influence the school's practices in the perceived interests of their children" (Campbell, 2005, pp. 9-10). Another effect of these policies is to create a new avenue for "choice" for (especially aspirational) parents through the creation of new schools which emphasise accountability and performance measurement, affordability of fees and the ability to educate children toward university entrance through the inclusion of cultural activities and cultural capital. Several studies have utilised Bourdieu's notion of aspirational parents who use education to increase their children's social status but these new, non-government schools target parents who are not middle class and have traditionally been content with the state or government school sector in Australia. These new schools have been termed "new, non-government schools" by this study and feature a number of distinctive qualities. These schools usually promote value adding through a focus on non-denominational Christian values (often seen through the blending of several Christian denominations in their broad management, funding and direction), the offering of additional curricular such as music, equestrian and other competitive

sports (not seen in all schools) and speech and drama and the valorising of other subjects such as Languages Other Than English (LOTE) in the senior school. These schools generally offer many support structures including school bus runs, before and after school care and holiday programs. They compete directly with government schools rather than other private or non-government schools. One such school was chosen for analysis in this study. The inclusion of cultural capital in the curricular and co-curricular programs at the school can be seen to "construct" certain kinds of graduates through the inclusion of value added cultural capital in the form of culturally recognised behaviours such as playing musical instruments, knowledge of other languages and cultures and the playing of certain sports.

The College as a Study Site

The college analysed in this study is similar to other types of new non-government schools where the focus is on exposing children to cultural capital through its curricular and co-curricular offering. Cultural capital is the acquisition of cultural knowledge, valued by the academic cannon, which can be used to advance social position, it involves the symbolic capital of knowledge of, among other things, languages; music; theatre and the playing of certain sports. The college analysed targets parents who are from traditionally working class areas and emphasises that all children who are enrolled should be taught a language from preparatory school as part of its endeavour to inculcate cultural capital. Mandarin Chinese is the college's foreign language and all students are required to study this language from preparatory school to Year 10. Similarly, the school offers musical instruction to all students as another form of cultural capital and parents are required to "sign off" on the amount of practice their child has participated in every week. Students in preparatory school are required to learn violin. This is the instrument all students are required to learn until Year 5 when they are able to choose another orchestral instrument. After this time, students receive instruction in their chosen instrument from qualified teachers. The curricular exposure to Mandarin Chinese and music allows this school to inculcate cultural capital and ensures the college inculcates students into the legitimate disposition through exposure to cultural capital valued by the academic cannon (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 26). This is in stark contrast to other schools in the local area, namely the Catholic school and the state government schools who do not offer such value addeds to the curriculum. These "additions" to the curriculum tend to become significant when this school advertises its capacity to meet the "aspirational" aims that parents have for their children.

The school that was selected for the study is one of two sister colleges which were established by the same body, which represents the educational partnership between two separate, traditional Christian churches, and share administrative staff in common. The college is located in a new suburb (less than 20 years old) located centrally

between two major cities and is part of a growth corridor. This area has been identified by McGregor (1997) as the middle-class heartland of the state. The area has a population of approximately 60,000 people. This College also draws students from other outer suburbs (between 15 and 20 kilometres from the central business district of a major city), an area with a population of approximately 27,000 people.

In terms of its middle-classness, the suburb is a new, large, planned community featuring, several shopping and recreation facilities including picnic grounds, water features, a golf course and walking tracks. This area also is the site of recent educational development including a new Catholic Education Office (CEO) school (also known as a "college"), this new non-government college and a government school.

Data Collection Methods

There were two main methods used to investigate the issues around parents' choices of new non-government schools. First, school-generated documents collected from the College's office were examined to ascertain how the College was presenting itself in its promotional materials and how it was relating to its parents.

Second, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather data about why parents choose new, non-government schools. The interviews were conducted with parents at the case study site to gather their perceptions of the school choice process (what they wanted from a school and why they felt compelled to actively "choose") and first hand information about their reports on why they were choosing this type of school. Twenty-one respondents were interviewed for this study using a semi-structured technique, this represented 10 per cent of the familial population at the school. Four respondents chose to be interviewed as a couple, while the remaining seventeen families elected that the mother alone be interviewed, this was because the families indicated that mothers were primarily responsible for the decisions regarding the children's education. All parents stated that they held high aspirations for their children post-school (including professions as diverse as doctor, lawyer, teacher at the school that was the site for this study or diplomat). The parents who were interviewed reported they were employed in traditionally working class or "blue collar" jobs where the father's main source of income was from trades (including builder, plumber, "brickie", electrician) or from office work (clerk). Mothers, if employed were involved in secretarial or office assistant work.

Only one respondent interviewed lived in the same suburb as the school, all other parents lived in the surrounding suburbs. These surrounding suburbs are much older and do not have the same image or attract the same middle-class target group as the

houses are much cheaper to purchase and the suburbs have a less positive reputation and prestige value. The houses in these suburbs are well below the market value of houses in the suburb where the school is located.

Data Analysis

The study involved Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of two samples of school promotional texts, the web site and the prospectus and this method also was used to analyse interview transcripts with parents. Critical Discourse Analysis can take many forms and in this case the work of Fairclough (1989) provides the framework for the analysis. In Fairclough's terms language is treated "as a form of social practice" (p.20). Within this method, an analysis of the text of the school-generated documents and the interview data revealed the way power relationships and ideologies are embedded into discourses. CDA was used to "read" the College's texts in terms of the three aspects of the constructive effects of discourse: social identities, social relationships between people, and systems of knowledge and belief.

The interview data were analysed in terms of the relationships that the parents perceived to exist between themselves and the College. This is the "social relationships" element of discourse. The school-generated documents collected for the study offer representations and an identity for the College and contribute to the "social identities" constructed by the College. These documents are important in explicating systems of belief and knowledge through the values expressed in the Prospectus and website and this element also was evident in the parents' interview responses. All three CDA aspects are important when analysing why parents are choosing this College over others when they enter the education market. The data were analysed to reveal how cultural capital was promoted by the College (through the web site and the prospectus) and sought out by parents. Significant in the systems of knowledge and belief, cultural capital was actively promoted by the school and used by parents to evaluate an effective and value added (and therefore good value) educational product.

Evidence of the "marketisation of language", whereby promotional appeals published by the College were utilised in the parents' discussion and stated beliefs about the College, were identified through the analysis. The analysis of the school-generated documents and the parental interviews were compared to examine, not only the constructions of knowledge and belief, relationships and identities and the emphasis on cultural capital in the texts but also the "relations between and within discourse structures" (Mills, 1997, p. 134). This comparison highlighted the appropriation of discourse by parents. The following findings were analysed using CDA. Several themes emerged from the data, these included the importance of cultural capital in this school's promotional efforts, the

importance of cultural capital in the choice process parents who choose this school go through and the role of cultural capital in tapping into the aspirations parents who choose this school have for their children.

Marketing Cultural Capital

Through the marketing material produced by the school, the inculcation of cultural capital is promoted as central to the reasons for choosing this school. The first page of the prospectus includes an address from the principal. In this address, the principal states: "the greatest gift you can give your child is the gift of education". At the end of the address, he invites "you and your family to join us for an extraordinary journey into your children's future." This "extraordinary journey" is facilitated by the combination of "traditional values and modern resources and facilities" that "provide our students with an extraordinary 21st Century education." This style of education is one that combines a "range of programs, designed to help our students discover their talents and fulfil their potential in academics, sport and the performing arts". In this early part of the prospectus, the emphasis on cultural capital is strongly established. Creating a social order (the gift of education) and establishing the discourse of cultural capital (academics, sport and performing arts) through the school's programs, the prospectus establishes itself as an ideological text. The focus on cultural capital is maintained throughout the text and is taken as evidence of the school's success when the principal refers to "our enormous growth achieved in less than a decade as proof our approach to education, coupled with a no-nonsense discipline policy, are exactly what parents have been seeking". By inviting parents on an "extraordinary journey" into their children's futures, the intention is to establish the school's credentials in terms of its ability to provide an "extraordinary journey". The Prospectus invites and enlists parents into a language of aspirations and success, both academically and socially mandated by the cultural capital inculcated through performing arts.

At The College there is a focus on an education which values the academic, spiritual, social, cultural, emotional and physical development through communicative interactions between "the College" and "the home". Packaged with compulsory involvement in culturally mediating co-curricular activities, the instruction is selected, organised, paced and measured according to the College's desire to improve the cultural and social status of its students through their involvement in music, LOTE (Languages Other Than English), sports and a Christian environment. Parents are invited to see this as a holistic developmental education, capable of producing their children as extraordinary young people:

> The College is committed to a holistic, developmental education, in which each student is provided with the skills and knowledge necessary

> for them to develop academically, spiritually, socially, culturally, emotionally and physically (Executive Principal's Address, 2002).

This education is achieved through a "wide range of academic opportunities" including exposure to Mandarin Chinese to ensure students are able to "make the most of their God-given talents" (website). Through this, the LOTE (Languages Other Than English) program has an important role to play in the construction of "extraordinary individuals" and social relations between students and their future peers. Mandarin Chinese has been selected *as the "*College's foreign language" and is taught "in all classes from prep onwards . . . for students to acquire the language skills and an appreciation of the culture of what will be Australia's most significant economic partner . . . ". This is mandated from Prep to Year Ten. However, if students wish to continue they need to choose Mandarin as an elective subject in Senior (which is strongly encouraged through the emphasis on developing effective business leaders). The College claims that this is an essential skill for people who wish to be successful internationally in business and can be seen to be an attempt to construct students into elite, corporate futures. This constructs for parents a view of the role the children will play when they graduate. In this way discourse "privilege[s] their own version of meaning as if it were natural, inevitable, and incontestable" (Gee, 1996, p. 102).

In the promotional material, it is implied that Mandarin Chinese is cultural capital that will be required by all students in their future roles. Arguments supporting the teaching and learning of **this** language are pervasive throughout the documents. This renders the modality of the discourse of Mandarin Chinese presented in the school-generated documents as unchallengeable. As Fairclough states, modality functions as "a point of intersection in discourse between the signification of reality and the enactment of social relations" (1992, p. 160). The LOTE program is one which purportedly empowers the students who are exposed to it, and the College's affinity with its importance is significant. Mandarin Chinese functions as a form of cultural capital which will connect with the aspirations of parents so that this college becomes a conduit for future economic, social and employment success.

The College also mandates that all students are involved in the Instrumental Music program and, from Prep onwards, all students learn an orchestral instrument. The focus on music is an important aspect of the College program with parents required to monitor and sign off on the amount of practice a child has completed each week. Monitoring and signing off on practice involves parents in the schooling process and allows parents to be involved in and encourage the uptake of cultural capital. The exposure of all students to music tuition is described in the prospectus as an equity issue of inclusion. "Rather than only the gifted or a selected few students having access to instrumental music all students are able to enjoy musical tuition". From Prep to Year 4 the instrument is the violin, in Year 5 students can choose from a range of other

musical instruments including brass, woodwind or percussion. Class time is also devoted to receiving "instruction from String, Brass, Percussion or Woodwind specialist music teachers" (website). The College claims through its website that this training in music helps to develop the students into self-disciplined people and "personal-achievers" who appreciate and understand classical music. "This compulsory program enables students to develop self-discipline and gain a sense of personal achievement as they master their chosen instrument".

The musical activities at the College are significant in inculcating in students cultural capital. The College's focus "on all students from Preparatory Class onwards [having] the opportunity to learn and play an orchestral musical instrument" is significant because attendance at concerts or playing a noble instrument is a "classificatory" practice (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 18). The playing of a "noble instrument" such as the violin (and later brass, woodwind, string or percussive instruments) matters, not just through the ability to "play" the instrument, but also through engagement with others and through acquiring the cultural capital required to enjoy such performances. Through its "innovative" academic, cultural and sporting programs, the College prospectus argues that it allows its students "to discover their talents and fulfil their potential". Exposure to music tuition which commences in prep classes and is part of the core curriculum, ensures this College inculcates students into the legitimate disposition through exposure to cultural capital valued by the academic cannon.

Buying into a Better Life

The parents provided a rich and colourful series of reasons for choosing the College, most of these reasons revolved around the school's inculcation of cultural capital through their curricular and co-curricular program. For example, Lisa said "It's the little things that make the difference, the whole picture is brilliant but it's the little things".

Other parents identified the importance of value adding cultural capital to encourage them to choose and stay with The College rather than other schools in the market.

> "The holistic environment, music and your after school activities, tournament of minds, private tuitions for speech and drama, music, dance. You know, they just offer everything I mean and I guess it's a bit like a cult, making sure you stay within that wholesome environment and you're not tempted by others, and it's very important [my son] still has his state school friends but they slowly drop off because he's no longer in that environment, but he's also got his private school friends and they tend to spend a lot more time together". (*Donna, personal communication, April 1, 2002)*

> "It's there if you want it … it's like a little total package" (*Lisa, personal communication, April 4, 2002*).
>
> "There was just a bit extra with the independent school and part in the way of what I would call extra-curricular things like instrumental music". (*Jennifer, personal communication, April 12, 2002*)
>
> "It offers everything, I'm not into drama, music those kinds of things but they're there if my kids are interested in those kinds of things. They seem to offer everything … we're only little and I like small. I was looking for a small school". (*Trina, personal communication, April 2, 2002*)

The College's emphasis on the co-curricular cultural capital are part of the IDF (Ideological-Discursive Formations) (Fairclough, 1995) associated with this institution. As the College defines itself through its provision of value-added co-curricular activities aimed at inculcating cultural capital, so too do the parents define the College and their children's relationship to it through co-curricular activities. This represents marketisation of language where the appropriation of the discourse promoted by the promotional efforts of the College is taken up by parents. The College's offering of co-curricular activities which are available to children as part of a "little total package" but are not necessarily utilised by the students "I'm not into drama, music … but they're there if my kids are interested …" (Trina, personal communication, April 2, 2002) naturalises school choice with value-added cultural capital delivered through co-curricular activities. The belief that a good school is one which includes a heavy emphasis on curricular and co-curricular cultural activities, implies particular ideological assumptions about the social identities of and the social relationships between the College and the home.

The College's emphasis on co-curricular activities is essential in developing the reputation of the school. The College gains reputational capital from the co-curricular activities which have "sign value" and are decoded and utilised by the parents in their school choice decision process. The co-curricular activities, through their emphasis on music, drama and languages, assist in "constructing prestige economies", and can be seen to be part of the double process of emulation, an imitation of richer schools and a differentiation from poorer schools (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 148). The emphasis the parents placed on the inculcation of cultural capital through the curricular and co-curricular activities is an example of the appropriation of the College's promotional discourses by the parents.

The appropriation of the College's promotional and advertising discourses also can be seen in the role of "sales person" that parents adopted at the College. The parents' descriptions of the College and their stated involvement in the promotional strategies are determinations of the role of "parent" available at the College. The parents were actively involved in "selling the school" to other parents at events such as Open Days and

shopping centre displays. The texts of the College's promotional materials (such as the Prospectus and website) form the parents' own discourses about schools and schooling and their relationships to education generally and this College in particular. This demonstrates the connections between text, its features and the social practice of actively selling the College to anybody who will listen.

> "I just couldn't rave enough and I'm being honest here and I'll tell anyone I don't have any gripes at all about the school …I was so impressed I would encourage anyone that's looking at schools to go there, it's made a huge difference to us". (*Sarah, personal communication, April 9, 2002*)

Another parent expressed the view of most parents, that making the right choice was vitally important to their children's futures. While this represented a need to engage actively with marketing texts because consumption of the right types of schooling "depends on [parents'] abilities to construct, control, and manipulate texts and symbols" (Luke, 1995, pp. 5-6), for one parent, the best source of information was shopping centre displays. For her it was deeply important that she make the right decision because "we'll have an 18-year association with the company from go to whoa." This connects with Marginson's (2005) view that education has changed from a public good to a market model which views students and parents as consumers and in which schools become producers organised under a management model ("association with the company"). The corporate discourse can also have implications for the school's performance including its ability to inculcate cultural capital which can be measured and used by parents in gaining power and privilege for their children. According to Lyotard, performativity in education "creates the prospect for a vast marketplace for competence in operational skills" (1989, p. 51). In this environment, education is reduced to a service that can be judged on its effectiveness and competence, based on the criteria published in advertising and promotional campaigns and "sold" as part of a College's promotional efforts.

The purchase of this college's offering and its emphasis on cultural capital (delivered through value added curricular and co-curricular activities) were cited by parents as reasons to spend a large proportion of their income on school fees. The parents interviewed, including Laurie and Caroline identified the cost of sending a child to the College as considerable but when compared with other items such as a car, boat or a holiday (also items of display of wealth and privilege), it did not seem so expensive.

> "For people like us it's a choice, do you buy a boat or a new car? We use our income that we would spend on leisure to give our kids a good education". (*Laurie, personal communication, April 9, 2002*)

> "I always look at things like, you pay this much for a car, I mean I would sacrifice getting a less desirable car because education, to me is

> more important than anything else for them at the moment, it's a priority". (*Caroline, personal communication, April 1, 2002*)

For Laurie and Caroline, while the overall price was comparable to a car or a boat, education at this school was the most important thing they could offer their children. By comparing its purchase to cars and boats, education becomes a consumption item which can be compared qualitatively with other consumption items in the market. Consumption engenders control over the education process so, for parents involved in this study, in order to obtain a high quality education for their children, parents must seek the services of the private provider that is able to inculcate cultural capital rather than accepting the government service as they had with their previous children.

Aspirations Through Cultural Capital

The cultural capital provided through the college's curricular and co curricular emphasis on music and LOTE helped the parents in the process of "child-matching" (Gerwitz et al., 1995, p. 28) in which they were attempting to match their children's interests, personality or aspirations with the school that would best suit, eventually settling on the College. For parents interviewed in this study, there was a conviction that their choice was based on "sound educational evidence" demonstrated through the cultural capital offered in the form of value addeds (there were no students who had graduated from the college and achieved the desires these parents had for their children as evidence). For instance, Sean hoped that the "secret handshake" that allegedly existed in more exclusive and traditional non-government schools would eventually also exist at this school too and this would help his son "get ahead" in life. Lisa reported "not sounding snobbish but to me employers look at what school they've come from . . . [and see] they've got a grasp, they know how to carry themselves." This demonstrates the role of curricular and co-curricular emphasis on cultural capital at the College to create an image for the school and (through this) its graduates which had influenced Lisa's school choice process.

Several parents reported a perception that government schools were inferior to non-government schools. Government schools do not provide culturally valued activities as part of the core curriculum and were considered inferior because of this. Many apologised for this attitude or qualified their statements with phrases such as: "not sounding snobbish but . . . " (Lisa, personal communication, April 4, 2002), " . . . that might sound a snobby thing . . . " (Suzanne, personal communication, April 5, 2002) or "I'm trying not to sound like a snob . . . " (Trina, personal communication, April 2, 2002). For other parents, the evidence of the importance of inculcating cultural capital through the curriculum could be measured through school success. Donna stated "no-one will ever tell me the school doesn't matter, you look at these state school kids,

how many get [top tertiary entrance scores]?". For her, the only guarantee of educational success (measured through a performative device such as a tertiary entrance score) was in the non-government sector. Within a marketised environment, education is being "integrated into the capitalist market economy" and is "seen as a commodity, purchased by the state/parent to enhance the human capital, the potential of each individual" (Cox, 1998, p. ix). For parents like Donna, the only guarantee of enhancing the potential of her son is through the purchase of the non-government school with its emphasis on cultural capital.

The parents were utilising the value added educational offering of the new non-government school in an attempt to demonstrate that their children had "a grasp" of how to behave appropriately and "they know how to carry themselves" (Lisa, personal communication, April 4, 2002). Parents believe this cultural capital would achieve social change through upward social mobility. The parents assumed that the struggle for greater social mobility for their children would only be achieved by eschewing the government school option. The parents felt the school should play a role in shaping and constructing identities for children ("employers look at what school they've come from" Lisa, personal communication, April 4, 2002) and were using this new, non-government school as a means of ensuring success for their children.

Sandra, Donna, Wally and Cathy indicated that they thought their children would be denied opportunities to increase status and occupational success by accepting the education offered at the government school. The government schools they had originally chosen for their children had not met their aspirations for their children (these parents had sent their children to the same local state school for a time and been dissatisfied before choosing the College). For example, Sandra stated: "I used to think the level of education was fine until we ran into problems with our oldest child . . . he was pushed right through the system put into the too hard basket and that was not acceptable" (Sandra, personal communication, April 7, 2002). Despite the financial pressures this placed on families, their desire to see their children achieve success and improve their happiness and status necessitated the choice of a non-government school.

Conclusion

Education has traditionally provided a ladder for children to "climb out of one class into another" (McGregor, 1997, p. 39). The parents' distrust of the government school system and strongly held belief that only through the non-government school system could their children's educational needs and their aspirations be realised signifies their place in the "middle-mass" of the social system who seek to satisfy their needs privately. These parents seem acutely aware that vast social differences exist in Australia, including differences in "culture, wealth, status and education that come

together in the unequal exercise of power" (Meadmore, 2004, p. 74). Through accessing a non-government education for their children, the parents are seeking a school that will improve the social status of their children through cultural curricular and co-curricular offerings.

There are significant changes occurring in education. These changes have previously been examined in a number of contexts and can be seen in a number of different levels within the education context. The policies of marketisation, performance measures and choice can be seen to converge in the new non-government school. Encouraging a different relationship between parents who are constructed as consumers in an education market, these schools are successful because they understand the important role of cultural capital as a means of encouraging choice among aspirational parents.

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