

Choice markets and comprehensive schools: a qualitative study of teacher and student experience

PhD Thesis

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I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Peter Gill.

Abstract

The aims of the study were: to consider qualitatively the ways in which school choice and market policies were experienced by schools, teachers and students and to consider similarities and differences in choice patterns and student intakes in different locales.

Six schools, three in each of two locales, North Town and East Town were considered. East Town was identified as a locale where parents actively chose schools, and North Town as a locale where few parents made active choices. Four tutor groups from each school, two from year eight and two from year ten, were interviewed along with a sample of teachers.

The study uses post-structural analysis of discourses to examine the qualitative interview data. It also draws on several bodies of theory: Critical Race Theory; Foucauldian analysis; and Bourdieu's concept of capital.

The thesis considers the effects of school choice on schools within each locale, comparing differences between the towns. It argues that whilst East Town is heavily affected by choice, there is little evidence of active choice within North Town. East Town teachers are heavily influenced by market and accountability discourses and feel in competition with other schools. As a result students are categorised by a fixed notion of ability and in relation to an 'ideal student'. Emphasis on ability was less visible in North Town where students are often unaware of choice. Choice in East Town had positive effects on some schools and students but negative effects on others, with serious consequences for student self esteem. Racial segregation across schools in both locales emerged as a central concern. In comparing the towns, the thesis argues that East Town provides an example of the effects of overt choice policy, whilst North Town is less affected by the choice market, retaining comprehensive ideals.

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PART ONE: theory and design

Chapter One

Beginnings: personal, historical and political origins

Reflections

The choice of topic for this study, and the Masters Thesis which preceded it, has its origins in my own school experience. I remember in the first year of secondary school writing my school's address and pondering over the meaning of the comprehensive part of the title. I attended a rural comprehensive school between 1989 and 1995, whose population was comprised of students from five villages. There was no choice of school or sense that choice was an option, so all children from the village attended the school. I remember having been aware of social divisions within my own village from infant school age. Southlands, the local authority housing in the village, was on the opposite side of the main road which split the village in half. As children we categorised our peers as either different from us, the Southlands kids or the same as us. This resulted in part at least from the fact that we were not allowed to cross the main road alone and had to play at the park close to our homes, meaning that we did not socialise outside of school with Southlands children. The extent to which road safety was our parents' main concern or whether they in fact used the dangers of crossing the road as a means of preventing us mixing with a further danger, the Southlands children, may be questioned. I think the two were most probably interrelated, although perhaps not consciously.

The social geography of housing locations within the village provided my earliest experience of social inequity. At secondary school this division was reduced, as classes were comprised of children from across the villages. Looking back, the school appeared to embrace the comprehensive ethos, we were fairly randomly (or so it appeared to us at the time) allocated to tutor groups with whom we stayed for all lessons, there was no streaming or setting and very little lesson differentiation. The 'natural' divide between the Southlands children and those from other parts of the village remained to a degree

within the school, however the mixed groupings of children from several villages meant this divide became less discernible, as residential geography was now a less visible and less known factor. The sense of 'them and us' became less explicit. I became friends with a Southlands girl, although our friendship remained largely within the boundaries of the school and rarely stretched to outside. As students we were aware of our own places and positions within the group but, given that this was before league tables, we did not consider whether our own school was good or bad and certainly did not compare it to other schools. Success was not portrayed to us, by the school, in terms of specific outcomes or results.

Assemblies emphasised diversity rather than meeting specific targets of achievement, we were told that the woods would be very quiet if the only birds which sang were those that sang best and the school did not appear, to us, particularly bothered or competitive about academic achievement. However, diverse outcomes in terms of attainment were accepted by teachers and the school. In hindsight, teachers and the school may not have challenged potentially unequal access to the curriculum for students in the group.

Following a year as a nursery nurse I completed A-levels at a state sixth form college. A friend, Jo, asked one of our teachers if it was worth her applying to Oxford and he said probably not, that she'd be very unlikely to get a place, despite the fact that she had ten A* grade GCSE's. Rather than discouraging her, his negative comments became a reason to prove him wrong and she persuaded me to go to an Oxford open-day with her. As we wanted to read the same subject I did not want to apply to Oxford as well, in part because I did not want to not get in if she did and in part due to its close proximity to home. Jo dared me to apply to Cambridge if only to prove our teacher whom we both disliked wrong. 'Can you imagine telling him we're both going to Oxbridge,' she asked, 'I'd love to see the look on his face!' I randomly selected a college and applied.

On entry to Cambridge University I was unprepared and somewhat unaware of the differing educational and class related experiences of my peers, many of whom had been privately educated or had gone to state grammar schools. Having left school with the sense that people were different, but one which did not classify people by intelligence or ability I found myself surrounded by people whose education had taught them to value academic attainment as the main route to success. They rated each other

in terms of academic success, which was held as an ideal and one which they aspired to replicate in the future for their own children.

As a result of my own school experience, I felt alienated from the socially segregated and class entrenched assumptions of many of my peers. The relentless discussions and arguments concerning this must have sown the seeds for this project some years later. I set out on this research endeavour with the belief that comprehensive schooling was more socially inclusive. I began, wanting to conclude optimistically with some rosy utopian ideal, for a socially inclusive world where background and intelligence were not central criteria of value. However, some time spent teaching and an attempt to explore philosophically the ideas underpinning comprehensive schooling, for my M.Phil rendered me far more aware of the enormous social and value-driven complexities and conflicts within the field, and more pessimistic and certainly less idealistic that there might be any readily agreeable answer.

Initial conversations with teachers and parents of children I taught made me increasingly aware of the significance of choice for many of them along with the lack of any utopian comprehensive ideal or experience. The idea of the PhD project thus developed as one to assess the impact and reality of both choice and comprehensive ideas at the level of experience. Considering how schools as lived social institutions might be affected by choice, and the lived experience of school policies regarding choice and inclusion became central concerns. I was also concerned to assess what current value, if any, comprehensive ideas of social inclusion and equality of opportunity had in practice, how these related to school choice and how schooling was being experienced by students and teachers.

Introduction

This thesis, concerned with school choice, equity and inclusion in England combines a study of policy and theory with analysis of the lived reality of school for teachers and students. Despite feeling the pressure of prevalent discourses of scientific objectivity to produce a piece of work that is neutral, non-biased and coherent within the realms of scientific enquiry and the quantitative and empirical demands of government bodies and policy makers, any research in this field is necessarily conducted by a human being. As my account demonstrates, this researcher has her own positions, feelings, beliefs, values

and motivations. This is both unavoidable and necessary, adding depth and richness to analysis, provided that the research is carried out in a reflexive fashion. A PhD thesis is inevitably a personally committed piece of research, given that the topic is freely chosen, and researchers are free from constraints and pressures often exerted by funding bodies or the research context. Given the power and centrality of the researcher in such a project it seems apt to emphasise this by beginning with a narrative account, setting the scene and contextualising both the researcher and the origin and development of the project.

The ways in which I conceptualised the thesis inevitably evolved over the three years of working on it, with each conception building on and adding to the former.

At the outset I wrote: *'The study aims to look at schools in areas experiencing high and low levels of parental choice, assessing the consequences and implications of this.'* Hence I began the project unsure of what I would find and what I might conclude. The study instead began as an observation focussing on equity/inequity, inclusion and the historical legacy of comprehensive schooling.

Early observation of the differing patterns of choice in different areas of the country provided a basis from which to develop the research as a project concerned with looking at how the operation of choice and schooling is experienced by students and teachers. Initial literature reviews made evident the need to relate this to both theories and policies, and to attempt to consider lived experience, theory and practice. Policy is primarily about practice rather than ideas and values, about voters, rather than philosophy. Politicians and policy makers may prefer to leave questions of meaning, value and social conscience in a 'Plato'-nic cave, however, this would deny the complexity and inevitably value-laden nature of schooling. This thesis aims to bridge this gap by synthesising and addressing ideas, policy and practical experience.

The final conception of the work was thus one of a study which: *'considers the effects of school choice by parents, as experienced by schools, teachers and students and assesses the current relationship between ideas of comprehensive schooling, (equity and social inclusion), and those associated with a quasi education market, (namely parental choice, accountability and school diversity).'* Whilst research has addressed issues of markets and choice at a general level and in terms of parents as choice makers, there is

little evidence of how these competing discourses are experienced at school level by teachers and students. What meaning does comprehensive schooling and/or choice hold for those in the field? What effects are they having, and how does this vary across schools and locales? These questions are addressed by focussing specifically upon the perspectives and experiences of teachers and students in two contrasting locales where parentally driven choice markets appear to be operating to greater and lesser degrees.

This thesis seeks to explore the area from two perspectives:

- a) analysis of the official discourses and policies of schooling in relation to (in)equality, inclusion, choice and comprehensive schooling;
- b) local (teacher) and unofficial (student) discourses relating to inequality, inclusion, choice and comprehensive schooling.

Thesis structure

The thesis opens with an outline of relevant history and policy. This overview is brief and specific, unable to touch upon all the historical and political actions and nuances of the time, in order to set the scene and contextualise the current circumstances of secondary schooling. It demonstrates the first tenet of this thesis: that the halcyon days of comprehensive schooling never fully existed.

The second chapter further locates the thesis by situating it within the relevant sociological research literature, outlining and evaluating relevant work and findings regarding the role of parents as educational choice makers, potential implications of markets for schooling and earlier studies addressing the practical reality of comprehensive schooling. This provides the basis for the formulation of the overarching research aims and more specific questions which frame and guide the research design.

Chapter Three details the methodological and paradigmatic framework of the study and the ways in which it influences both design and analysis. It tussles with the complexities surrounding a project which is essentially, but not entirely, critical and one which also requires resort to post-structural positions as a means of allowing a multilayered reflexive analysis. This is followed by a detailed account of the practical project design, and discussion of practical research issues encountered during fieldwork.

Chapter Four introduces and provides an overview of the theories used and applied in subsequent data analysis. It explores notions of power, acknowledging the greater depth of analysis allowed by a Foucauldian account and notions of discourse and agency in relation to this. Race and ethnicity emerges as a salient theme in the data, so theories of race are discussed and aspects of Critical Race Theory adopted. Concepts of class are considered and Bourdieu's work concerning Cultural Capital is identified as an explanatory tool. Discussion of relevant theoretical perspectives are included here as a chapter in their own right to familiarise the reader with the theoretical ideas used, before seeing them applied to the data. Introducing the theories and positions simultaneously with the data analysis would detract from the analysis and the data itself.

Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight analyse the data thematically. In Chapter Five the ways in which choice operates within the locales and the manner in which it is experienced by teachers and students is considered, focussing specifically upon the differences between locales. Chapter Six and Seven address recurring themes and issues surrounding equity and social inclusion and exclusion which become evident in Chapter Five. Chapter Six focuses upon the classification and division of students in relation to a notion of ability and Chapter Seven considers the centrality of issues surrounding race. Chapter Eight returns to the idea of the comprehensive school, addressing the extent to which it retains practical meaning for teachers and students and the implications of this.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by synthesising the analysis in previous chapters in order to create a snapshot of the experiences of choice, inclusion and equity within the sample schools and locales, and to locate this in relation to current policy. It does not seek to provide absolute solutions in a constantly changing human field, but instead to observe, identify, name and challenge assumptions, discourses and practices which operate to the detriment of inclusion and equity as begets any project with a critical basis.

Policy history

To set the scene the present system of schooling is considered in relation to its historical and policy development. The policies which marked specific changes in school structure underpin the thesis. Consideration of these policies provides answers to the questions of why this study and why now? The main thrusts of policy developments are outlined

here, whilst detailed analysis of the implications of these in relation to a sociological analysis is set out in Chapter Two.

The current system of secondary schools across England is in no way uniform, varying between Local Education Authorities (LEA's). In some LEA's there are schools catering for students aged 11-18, in others 11-16 schools with separate sixth form colleges. In some the eleven plus exam continues to operate and in other locales secondary schooling is divided into middle and upper schools. It becomes evident as the thesis develops that this physically visible disparity mirrors disparities in educational experience. The roots of this are evident prior to the official introduction of comprehensive schooling by the 1965 Labour government.

Mass schooling developed gradually from the nineteenth century. By 1850 the State intervened in the field of education in order to establish a nationwide system. From 1850 five Royal Commissions and Acts of Parliament developed a statutory basis for a modernised system of education. This culminated in the Education Act 1870 which allowed a structured system of schooling: Public Secondary Schools, which became the domain of the middle classes; and Elementary Schools, for the working class, with attendance at each firmly connected to social status. Different regulatory codes applied to the Secondary and Elementary schools, with Secondary schools receiving greater levels of staffing and equipment. Early education policy concerned with schooling accepted distinct social class divisions and the appropriateness of different kinds of schooling. The Education Act 1902 granted LEA's the power to use rate payers' money to fund secondary schools which allowed access to further education and the professions for some working class students. Initially Secondary Schools charged fees. Despite a scholarship system for students from Elementary Schools allowing a degree of social mobility, most students from working class backgrounds remained in Elementary Schools until leaving at age fourteen. Emphasis in these schools was on basic numeracy, literacy and preparation for predominantly manual work. Private grammar, and public schools also existed, lying outside of state and public control. (Simon 1991, p. 25-26)

Between 1918 and 1939 the school system remained relatively unchanged with little policy development, besides the official raising of the school leaving age to fourteen and the 1926 Hadow report which proposed a system of infant, junior and secondary

schools. The lack of change and lack of political concern with schooling may be attributed in part to financial depletion post World War One, and the lack of public concern with education.

The earliest evidence of disaffection with the policy of Elementary and Secondary schools, which allowed social stratification, can be traced to the 1930's when, as Simon (1991) has documented, calls were made to abolish the distinctions between Elementary and Secondary schools and to create a single code of school regulations. The divisive system was, according to Simon, 'perceived as embodying obsolete values, both socially and politically' (Simon 1991, p. 31).

From the mid 1930's there is evidence of plans for policies to change the structure of the school system, and proposals for comprehensive or multilateral schools can be found¹. For example, in 1935 the London County Council, under Labour control², announced that it was opposed to segregated secondary education and planned to develop single secondary schools once it was legally possible. By 1942 the Labour party announced at its conference that it was also in favour of multilateral schools and the National Association of Labour Teachers (NALT) had, since 1941 been arguing for 'the single multilateral secondary school' (Simon 1991, p. 48) .

Two significant and controversial reports were produced during this period, the Spens and Norwood reports. A consultative committee of independent educationists chaired by Spens and appointed by the President of the Board of Education produced a report in 1938 entitled 'Secondary Education', (commonly known as the Spens Report). This considered the idea of multilateral schools, drawing on evidence in favour of this from several teachers' organisations, including the NALT. However, the final report recommended the tripartite system. A system of three types of school for all pupils over the age of eleven: The grammar school (previously the secondary school); the modern secondary school and the technical high school. It conceded that multilateral schools might be the right solution in sparsely populated rural areas and on new housing estates.

¹Multilateral schools were schools which accommodated grammar, secondary and technology school education within one building by dividing students into separate streams or groups, with each stream following a particular kind of curricular.

² The Council was led by Graham Savage (London's Chief Education Officer).

However, according to McCulloch (1993) the Spens report was virtually shelved by the outbreak of war in 1939.

As Simon (1992) notes, inequalities in educational experience in England had been highlighted during the Second World War by the fact that the majority of people in leading roles in the forces, government, judiciary and church were all educated outside of the state maintained system of schooling. It became apparent that schooling was perpetuating social class differences and a segregated society. It is at this point that one can see issues of social equality and equal access to schooling beginning to become significant for the voter and, in turn, for policy makers. This, as Benn and Chitty (1996) argue, was also reflected at policy level in a number of other countries. The adoption of comprehensive education was integral to the newly established Soviet Union and there was movement in America toward breaking away from the segregated education systems of Europe. These changes and the greater emphasis upon equity might be explained by the rise of the radical left and illustrates how schooling is intricately linked with politics, and how education policies are dependent on the politics of the time.

In 1942 a Labour Party conference resolution called on the Board of Education to formulate and encourage as policy the development of multi lateral schools. But this policy was not implemented during the post war Labour administrations. Simon (1992) views this as the first example of a lack of political will to implement comprehensive policy. One explanation for this hesitancy involves the controversial and class entrenched nature of secondary schooling and the strength of opposing views. Taking any firm position on schooling automatically loses a section of voters. This begins to explain the diffident and abstracted nature of the contemporary education policies considered here and the diverse and ideologically confused system of schooling which has developed from such hesitancy.

The 1943 Norwood report on curriculum and examinations, resulting from the Norwood Committee set up to reform the school certificate examination, suggests a number of shifts in policy and demonstrates a reluctance to be drawn towards the new ideas of the radical left. McCulloch (1993) argues that there were several shifts in policy and outlook evident in the Norwood report. This report took a traditional approach, accepting late nineteenth century notions of social hierarchy, conscience, morality and community and produced the ideological underpinnings of the tripartite system of

secondary schooling. It argued that three distinct types of schooling would best serve the abilities and aptitudes of children; allow a child centred approach for meeting individual needs; and provide fair and equal opportunities for students of different aptitudes and abilities. The Norwood report, published in July 1943 after the publication of the governments' White Paper on education (which assumed a tripartite system) did not question the validity of a tripartite model.

The Spens and Norwood reports had significantly different ideas of what tripart-ism would entail. Norwood, whilst advocating a tripartite system, challenged Spens' notion of parity of esteem between the three types of school, questioning whether it could be achieved. 'The two reports, when analysed closely, indicate the sense of confusion and controversy which was apparent within the 'educational state'' (McCulloch 1993, p. 1975). There is not room here to explore the complexities and controversies surrounding these reports. However, they are included to illustrate the tensions within and behind policies, illustrating how government policy is itself not a monolithic or straightforward entity. This is reflected in current education policy which contains visible tensions between the ideological left and the Labour Party's 'New Left' willingness to adopt right wing models of marketisation. Current changes to secondary schooling outlined in the 2006 Education and Inspections Bill, emphasise choice and diversity, which suggests a resurgence of the notion of individualised education meeting individual needs. An approach which was itself once used to justify the tripartite system.

The Education Act 1944

The Education Act 1944 advocated the development of a tripartite, selective secondary school system where students could attend one of three schools on the basis of aptitude. It removed the Elementary School system and created successive stages of schooling³.

[T]he schools available for an area shall not be deemed to be sufficient unless they are sufficient in number, character, and equipment to afford for all pupils opportunities for education offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities, and aptitudes, and of the different periods for which they may be expected to remain at school, including practical instruction and training appropriate to their respective needs. (The Education Act, 1944, Part II, point 8, ch31 p. 5)

³ (The Education Act 1944, Part II, point 7, ch31 p. 4)

Social class related inequalities of school experience appeared to be being addressed, with individual aptitude as opposed to family background seen as the key for providing the right education for the individual. A major part of the appeal of the 1944 Act was the belief that: 'henceforth, the best education would be made freely available to all who could benefit from it, irrespective of parental background and the ability to afford substantial fees' (Boyle 1972, p. 29). Looking back on this policy from a present sociological perspective, one would consider how class itself may have affected the ability of individuals to access schools. At the time the move was seen in terms of its equity. However, as the system of schools was introduced it became evident that grammar and modern schools were not being given parity of esteem in public and academic perceptions. The tripartite structure of the proposals was never completely fulfilled. In 1947, at their highest point, there were fewer than 320 technical schools in England and Wales (Boyle 1972, p. 28). The result was a bipartite system of grammar and secondary modern schools, mirroring the previous Elementary and Secondary schools.⁴ The only radical difference to school structure post the 1944 Act was the use of the eleven plus examination to select students for schools.

The need for LEA's to have regard for the wishes of parents was established in section 76 of the Education Act, 1944, when it stated that:

The Minister and local education authorities shall have regard to the general principle that, so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. (The Education Act, 1944 Part IV, 76 p. 56)

(This emphasis on parental wishes was subsequently retained under the Education Act, 1980. LEA's had to allow and meet parental preference as far as it would not effect the provision of efficient education and use of resources (Simon 1991, p. 477) and it gained further prominence under the Education Act 1988, see p. 26.).

After the Education Act 1944 certain authorities and groups began to consider more fully the idea of multi-lateral schools. The following section considers the extent to which Local Authorities and certain pedagogical groups began to favour a

⁴ By 1957 only 4.1 percent of pupils in England were attending technical schools, with 66.1 percent at Secondary Modern Schools and 19.2 percent at Grammar schools. (List 69, 1957, HMSO, Ministry of Education, Secondary Education in each Local Authority Area)

comprehensive idea of schooling before the idea was officially adopted and transmitted into policy by the Labour administration of 1965.

Proto-comprehensive schools

Boyle (1972), a conservative educationalist, argued that there is evidence implying that the idea of comprehensive schooling was contained within the 1944 Act itself, since it allowed for the possibility of different kinds of school operating within one building. He cites Lord Butler who, according to Boyle:

reminds us that neither the 1944 Act, nor the White Paper that preceded it, ruled out the possibility that different types of secondary school – grammar, modern or technical – might be ‘combined in one building or on one site’. This in Butler’s words, ‘forecast the comprehensive idea’, and the forecast was a conscious and deliberate one. (Lord Butler cited in: Boyle 1972, p. 28)

This potential for common schools was adopted by a number of Labour-run Local Authorities from as early as 1946, only two years after the tripartite system was officially implemented. These Local Authorities used the permission given by the 1944 Act to combine schools as a way to introduce common schools. Crook (1993) suggests that Local Authorities in London, Coventry and Anglesey had pioneered the development of comprehensive schools during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s. In addition, as early as 1947 Manchester Education Committee submitted plans for secondary school reorganisation, intended to be non-committal regarding the long term future of secondary education in the city. In London eight experimental comprehensives were set up between 1946 and 1949. By 1961 London had 59 comprehensive schools taking 54.3 percent of the school population, with similar reorganisation taking place in Bristol and Leicestershire⁵.

Whilst on introduction the tripartite system of the Norwood report and the policy in the 1944 Act were thought to widen access, remove class bias and provide equal chances for all, the tripartite system became viewed as an equally biased practise. Both Boyle and Simon argue that disquiet surrounding available schooling was increasingly heightened during the 1950’s when families were placing greater emphasis upon secondary schooling, expressing increasing concerns with notions of equality of

⁵ See Halsall (1970).

opportunity⁶. This was influenced by the newly developed welfare state and emphasis on the rights of all citizens post the Second World War. As Daunt argued:

The driving force at that time was negative and institutional: the 11-plus perceived as both intellectually disreputable in theory and humanly damaging in its practical effects, had to be eliminated, and this could and must be done, it was thought merely by substituting intellectually non-selective secondary institutions for selective ones. (Daunt 1975, p. 11)

Later commentators have supported this identified change in public attitude regarding the eleven plus exam system of selection. Pring and Walford (1997) suggest that concerns were centred upon an increasing desire for a fairer system of access to education:

This individual concern about sons and daughters was largely transmuted to a call for greater...equality of educational opportunity for all and greater national efficiency. (Pring and Walford 1997, p. 2).

Complex tensions and debates concerning educational ideology and policy existed both within and between the Conservative and Labour parties during the years between the Education Act 1944 and the Labour policy of 1965 which promoted the idea of multilateral and comprehensive schools.

There is disagreement among historians and commentators regarding the exact period when secondary schooling became a particularly important political agenda. Whilst Boyle (1972) claims that by 1960 the attention of Labour leaders was engaged, Simon (1992) cites evidence suggesting that within the Labour Party comprehensive schooling was on the agenda from 1952/3. For example, at the 1952 and 1953 Labour Party conferences comprehensive education was on the political agenda and the 1952 conference confirmed comprehensive education as party policy. In 1953 a draft policy statement proposed a nationally imposed two tiered system of comprehensive education. According to Simon (1992) this was unpopular in the party and among educational spokespeople. An amendment proposed that local authorities, on being *required* to submit a reorganisation plan to eliminate selection at eleven, would themselves propose how this would be implemented in their areas. The adoption, by the Labour Party, of the idea of comprehensive reorganisation was strengthened at the 1958 conference where a new policy statement 'Learning to Live' by M. Stewart stated that Local Authorities

⁶ See, for an example, extract by Lady Simon of Wythenshawe reporting on London Comprehensive Schools in Forum 1962:4:2 referring to an inspectors survey of London comprehensive schools commissioned by the LCC (London County Council) gives some indication of the position and feeling of those in favour of comprehensive reorganisation.

would plan and implement comprehensive education. By 1963 the Labour Party had pledged to set up a universal system of comprehensive education and to abolish the eleven plus by converting permissive into compulsory legislation.

Consideration of comprehensive possibilities was not confined to the Labour Party. The Conservative government's 1958 White Paper, *Secondary Education for All: A New Drive*, accepted the potential of comprehensive schools in rural areas and on new housing estates and the Leicestershire experiment was viewed positively. However, as Boyle (1972) notes, it opposed the closure of good grammar schools⁷.

Circular 10/65

Following Labour's win in the 1964 election, there is evidence of a hesitancy to implement their policies regarding comprehensive reorganisation. Anthony Crosland (cited in Dean 1998) delivered circular 10/65 which, instead of stating the direction and urgency of comprehensive reform, requested Local Authorities to produce plans for comprehensive reorganisation. The Circular *requested* Local Authorities to cooperate by looking into reorganisation but did not set out a clear time scale or expectation for such reorganisation. The Circular stated that:

1. It is the Government's declared objective to end selection at eleven plus and to eliminate separatism in secondary education.

That this House, conscious of the need to raise educational standards at all levels, and regretting that the realisation of this objective is impeded by the separation of children into the different types of secondary schools, notes with approval the efforts of local authorities to reorganise secondary education on comprehensive lines which will preserve all that is valuable in grammar school education for those children who now receive it and make it available to more children; recognises that the method and timing of such reorganisation should vary to meet local needs; and believes that the time is now ripe for a declaration of national policy. The Secretary of State accordingly requests local education authorities, if they have not already done so, to prepare and submit him plans for reorganising secondary education in their areas on comprehensive lines. (Circular 10/65 1965, p. 1)

The Circular did not set out clear principles for comprehensive schooling and showed little evidence of any consideration of the potential consequences of reorganisation. It focussed upon reorganisation as a way of making access to schools fairer for all with access not dependent on an examination at eleven, but gave little attention to issues of

⁷ The White Paper opposed the closure of a 'good existing' grammar school simply in order that a local comprehensive should enjoy a monopoly, and it expressed doubts about the wisdom of establishing very large schools. (Boyle, 1972, p. 31)

feasibility⁸. The tentative wording of the paper makes few grand claims or precise calls for action, avoiding directly challenging the previous system. Whilst the paper acknowledges the end of selection at age eleven, section three of the circular identified six different patterns of comprehensive reorganisation, which added to the tentative feel and allowed for diverse systems to develop⁹. The lack of any one clear system of implementation explains the disparate systems of secondary schooling across the country today.

Hesitancy in the implementation of comprehensive schools is used by Simon (1992) to argue that there was a lack of political momentum regarding the implementation of school changes. There is caution in the Circular: it leaves a great deal to the imagination of Local Authorities, raising the question of how thoroughly the achievement of ideas such as equality had been thought through. One must question whether comprehensive school organisation was about realising comprehensive ideas or about moving away from an eleven plus system which was politically unpopular.

The theoretical position and ideas of comprehensive education are evident in section thirty six of the Circular:

36. A comprehensive school aims to establish a school community in which pupils over the whole ability range and with differing interests and backgrounds can be encouraged to mix with each other, gaining stimulus from the contacts and learning tolerance and understanding in the process. But particularly comprehensive schools will reflect the characteristics of the neighbourhood in which they are situated; if their community is less varied and fewer of the pupils come from homes which encourage educational interests, schools may lack the stimulus and vitality which schools in other areas enjoy. The Secretary of State therefore urges authorities to ensure, when determining catchment areas, that schools are as socially and intellectually comprehensive as is practicable. In a two tier system it may be possible to link two differing districts so that all pupils from both areas go to the same junior and then to the same senior comprehensive schools. (Circular 10/65 1965, p. 36).

⁸ As Circular 10/65 states: There are a number of ways in which comprehensive education may be organised. While the essential needs of the children do not vary greatly from one area to another, the views of individual authorities, the distribution of population and the nature of existing schools will inevitably dictate different solutions in different areas. It is important that new schemes build on the foundations of present achievements and preserve what is best in existing schools. (Circular 10/65)

⁹ Firstly, The Orthodox Comprehensive System which required a common school catering for all students within the 11-18 age range. This was to become the most commonly implemented model. However, such a system had inherent problems for school reorganisation as it was commonly held that to cater for 16-18 a large yearly intake was required to result in enough students remaining at sixth form to make its operation viable. Gradually the need for such large schools was found to be less significant. The circular did not adequately address issues of internal grouping within the school, or the potential need for moderating student intake in order to achieve a wide range of abilities within each school. Some areas, for example London, had been working toward this model since the mid 1940's, and Bristol was also keen to implement this strategy.

This section of the policy contains evidence of the idea of social comprehensiveness and social mix as significant aspects of comprehensive schooling. Whilst the term inclusion is not used, the idea of including all pupils within a common school is evident. In the circular the notion of 'comprehensive' appears to refer to the idea of inclusiveness. The way in which notions of social inclusion are advocated in the 1965 Circular will be considered later in this chapter in relation to current policy. The Circular, whilst referring to ideas of socially common schools, failed, as Bellaby (1977) argued, to provide any 'standard formula' or guidance for determining intake, which resulted in a 'complex patchwork over the country as a whole.' (Bellaby 1977, p. 13)

Political motivations behind this Circular and its vague wording concerning social inclusion may have been designed to keep grammar school parents satisfied and to allow Local Authorities to design schemes to suit their communities. Equality as an educational idea is particularly problematic for the Circular which provides no explanation as to how it could be achieved.

Each Local Authority responded to the Circular differently resulting in a diverse system of schools. A number of case studies provide evidence of this (see Halsall 1970 and Kerckhoff, Fogelman, Crook and Reeder's account of reorganisation in Stoke on Trent (1996, p. 107)):

On reading these contributions one is left with an overwhelming impression of the plethora of problems and challenges that have faced many comprehensive schools...Some of these schools have made their way through unexplored seas. They have had to make their own sailing charts as they inched their way forward through the rocks and the shoals. (Halsall 1970, p. ix)

Examples of how different areas responded and adapted to comprehensive reorganisation casts light upon the diversity and complexity of current schooling arrangements in England. Similar complexities were faced by Local Authorities across the country with varying solutions being developed and adopted.

Circular 10/70

Five years after Labour introduced Circular 10/65 requesting LEA's to submit plans for reform, they were replaced by a Conservative government under Edward Heath. The Conservative manifesto had promised to withdraw Circular 10/65. Circular 10/70,

published on the 30th of June stated that Local Authorities were not under compulsion to implement comprehensive reorganisation.¹⁰

Circular 10/70 implied a lack of support for comprehensive reorganisation by the Conservative leadership. This explains some of the complexity and confusion faced by Local Authorities in implementing change and shows how comprehensive schooling has been largely dependent on political will. Despite the lack of political compulsion for reorganisation as expressed in Circular 10/70, Local Authorities continued to implement plans Crook (1993) notes that Margaret Thatcher left the Education Department in 1974 having approved more comprehensive school proposals, including a great many by Conservative-controlled authorities, than any of her predecessors (Crook 1993, p. 61).

Simon (1991) argues that following Labour's return to power in 1974, Royal Assent was given in 1976 to a Bill to complete the process of reorganisation on comprehensive lines. However, by May 1979 the Conservatives were back in power and within six months passed two Bills relating to comprehensive schooling. The first given Royal assent in July 1979 allowed LEA's to withdraw plans for comprehensive reorganisation, rendering it no longer national policy. The second Bill went further allowing the development of the assisted places scheme¹¹ and emphasising the right of parental choice.

For the Conservative leadership, comprehensive reorganisation highlighted tensions since they had not introduced the idea and had not sought to promote reorganisation,

¹⁰ Circular 10/70 stated that:

1. The Government's aim is to ensure that all pupils should have full opportunities for secondary education suitable to their needs and abilities. The Government, however believe it is wrong to impose a uniform pattern of secondary reorganisation on Local Education Authorities by legislation or other means. Circular 10/65 is accordingly withdrawn.
2. Authorities will now be free to determine the shape of secondary provision in their areas. The Secretary of State will expect educational considerations in general, local needs and wishes in particular and the wise use of resources to be the main principles determining the local pattern. Recent rapid changes in secondary school organisation have in many areas imposed considerable strains within the education system. Where a particular pattern of organisation is working well and commands general support the Secretary of State does not wish to cause further change without good reason. (Circular 10/70 1970, p. 1)

¹¹ The Assisted Places Scheme, was a system where children could apply for a place at a private school, where the place was paid for by the government. Simon 1991 argues that the scheme may have been away of siphoning government money into independent schools, many of whom were facing economic difficulties. (Simon 1991, p. 475)

despite the fact that a number of Conservative Local Authorities were active in promoting and developing comprehensive reform.

The unsettled, swiftly changing political arena created by rapid change of governments between 1964 and 1979 clearly affected the development of comprehensive school policy. The freedom initially given to Local Authorities by the Labour Circular allowed for a disparate range of secondary school systems, which given the often assumed aims of comprehensive education is surprising. Evidence considered, suggests that comprehensive schooling was viewed as the best alternative to a selective system but was not given adequate consideration as a nationwide practice.

Conservative era

Cox and Boyson (1975) claimed that within the Conservative party it was felt that the aim of social mixing was being achieved in the comprehensive school at the expense of academic success and that only a selective education system could meet individual academic needs (Cox and Boyson 1975 cited in Ball 1984, p. 5). The Conservative government began introducing policies supporting selection and increased choice from 1979. This first appearance of choice in relation to education policy reflected the wider move toward market involvement in public services and the adoption of neo-liberal small state market principles. For example, the 1980 Assisted Places Scheme gave overt support to the highly selective private sector and eroded consumer confidence in the standards and success of the comprehensive school. In 1986 the government introduction of a network of twenty City Technology Colleges, established as privately sponsored schools, which could select a proportion of pupils, further challenged the non-selective comprehensive idea and introduced the idea of privatisation and the ideology of a marketplace. The introduction of Grant Maintained or "Opted Out" status for schools from 1988 sought to increase diversity of educational provision and encourage competition and choice between schools. The Education Reform Act 1988 placed emphasis upon quality and standards across schools and the importance of greater accountability, inspection and appraisal, and allowed for the possibility of a choice market. The Act formalised a National Curriculum for all state schools against which schools could be inspected, measured and rated. Whilst the National Curriculum encouraged equal learning experiences and opportunities across schools, the criteria for

assessment of student attainment were felt by many schools to be met most successfully through the use of tiers or setting of students which itself counters any aims of equal access to the curriculum. The introduction of national testing with published league tables of results allowed greater parental choice of schools and allowed market principles to begin to play a more prominent role.

The 1992 White Paper 'Choice and Diversity: A new framework for schools' was particularly significant in relation to the notions of markets, choice and diversity and in turn to comprehensive schooling. This paper brought market place ideology into education and moved firmly away from comprehensive ideas. In the foreword the then Prime Minister John Major attempted to combine notions of choice with opportunities, however the notion of 'equal' was avoided:

Now this White Paper carries this great programme of reform further forward. Our reforms rest on commonsense principles- more parental choice; rigorous testing and external inspection of standards in schools; transfer of responsibility to individual schools and their governors; and, above all, an insistence that every pupil everywhere has the same opportunities through a good common grounding in key subjects. Few people would argue with these principles. They are all helping to shape a more open, a more responsive and a more demanding system of education. (DFEE choice and diversity 1992, p. 1)

Running through the 1992 White Paper was the theme that limited opportunities and limited choice had been replaced by greater choice and greater access. The idea of common comprehensive schools for all had been replaced by the idea of consumer or parent choice. The 1992 White Paper provides evidence of the value attributed to choice as a vehicle for a market mechanism of raising standards for all:

The Education Reform Act 1988, through its open enrolment provisions, secured more choice for parents, requiring schools to admit pupils up to the limits of their physical capacity. Finally, by specifying that the allocation of delegated budgets should be primarily pupil-led, the Education Reform Act 1988 ensured that parental choice directly influences individual schools- the more pupils a school attracts, the larger its budget. (DFEE Choice and Diversity 1992, p. 1.17)

The 1993 Education Act 1993 reinforced the emphasis upon parental choice by giving secondary schools the right to specialise and to select ten per cent of students. Whilst all schools had to follow the same curriculum, the specialist school status gave schools extra funding and gave parents the impression of a real choice between different kinds of school.

New Labour

The 'New' Labour government of 1997 placed education at the centre of its election policies, stating a mantra of 'education, education, education'. The Education Act 1997 phased out the Assisted Places Scheme and, as Whitty (2003) notes, the representation of specialist schools as community resources as opposed to elite institutions implied a commitment to partnerships and inclusion. However, the abolition of the Assisted Places Scheme was one of the only shifts toward less elitism and traditional Labour party policy. Labour appeared to be placing increasing emphasis upon diversity and parental choice and assuming that certain market principles are applicable to schooling, an assumption in tension with comprehensive ideas. As Whitty (2003) argues:

In practice, ... many of New Labour's changes to the conservative agenda were largely cosmetic. In some of its manifestations, New Labour's so-called Third Way looked remarkably similar to quasi-markets. The central thrust of the policies was probably closer to that of the Conservative agenda than to Labour's traditional approach. (Whitty 2003, p. 127)

Within first term Labour discourse and policy on schooling there are tensions and contradictions regarding ideas of comprehensive schooling, inclusion and equity. The Labour government's election manifesto in May 1997 stated that:

In education we reject both the idea of a return to the 11-plus and monolithic comprehensive schools that take no account of children's differing abilities. Instead we favour all-in schooling, which identifies the distinct abilities of individual pupils and organises them into classes to maximise their progress in individual subjects. In this way we modernise the comprehensive principle, learning from the experience of its 30 years of application. (Retrieved from <http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/area/uk/man/lab97.htm>)

This quotation shows evidence of policy confusion by trying to argue against both an eleven plus system and comprehensive schools, whilst failing to provide any explanation as to how 'all-in schooling' might practically be achieved.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998, enacted under Education Secretary Stephen Byers, set out a number of conditions for specialist and grammar schools which appear to be actively promoting diversity by allowing: schools with a specialism in a certain subject to admit ten percent of pupils on the basis of aptitude; grammar schools to retain their selective arrangements; and schools which already had partially selective admissions systems were allowed to continue¹².

¹² .See, The School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Part III, Chapter II, point 100, 102, 104-109.

This Act confirms that the legacy of the Conservative principles presented in the 1992 White Paper still exists in Labour thought. The current Labour government continues to emphasise the value of choice, diversity and testing and allows the patchwork of different kinds of secondary school to continue. Parental choice of secondary school is becoming increasingly central with LEA's encouraging the practice of choice. As the next chapter demonstrates there are practical problems surrounding choice and equity, with parents having differential access to choice. Confusion over ideas of equity, inclusion and comprehensive schooling continue to emerge from Labour discourse.

The 2001 Education White Paper, *Schools Achieving Success*, continued to emphasise the value of diversity, proposing a major expansion of Specialist Schools and Beacon Schools and encouraging schools to work with external partners.

The diverse system we want to build will be one where schools differ markedly from each other in the particular contribution they choose to make but where all are equally excellent in giving their students a broad curriculum and the opportunity to achieve high standards. Far from concentrating success in a few schools, diversity is about motivating individual schools, spreading excellence...
(HMSO White Paper 2001 *Schools Achieving Success*, Part 5.4)

The paper linked the ideas of choice and diversity with improved standards of attainment. This policy of encouraging greater diversity in schools would inevitably lead to increased choice by some parents and accentuate differences between schools, as is addressed in the following chapter. The discourse of standards became central to Labour policy. Whitty (2003) argues that the focus on standards was to the detriment of school structures, which he views as central to social inequalities. Whitty identifies the historical diversity of school structures as considered above central to issues of equity which is hidden or ignored by the policy emphasis on standards:

In arguing that the key issue was 'standards not structures', the government tried to wish away a history in which the selection of children for unequal provision has been the dominant principle on which English secondary education has been organised. In the light of that history, any attempt to foster diverse forms of schooling within a broader commitment to comprehensive secondary education demands that serious attention be given to ways of preventing legitimate differences becoming unjust inequalities.... The quest to raise standards for all could not sensibly be divorced from issues of structure. (Whitty 2003, p. 138)

A sense of confusion continued to be evident within policy which held both selection at eleven and comprehensive schooling as negative yet appeared to be attempting, in its use of choice and diversity, to retain elements of both. This was exemplified in comments by David Blunkett, the Education Secretary to succeed Estelle Morris, when addressing Members of Parliament in 2001:

Our policies are designed to develop the potential of and to offer equality to every child whatever their background and whatever school they attend, and further 'The comprehensive ideal is equality of opportunity, the comprehensive ideal is inclusion, ensuring that schools meet the needs of every child. (Mr. Blunkett 2001.¹³)

The confusion is again evident in comments from Tony Blair when addressing head teachers and other educationists at Downing Street:

The introduction of comprehensive education had seen "*inclusion*" becoming an end in itself, rather than a means to identify and develop the talents of each pupil,'. 'We want to make diversity not the exception but indeed the hallmark of secondary education in the future. (Tony Blair 2001¹⁴)

The Education Act 2002, one of the first major pieces of legislation in Labour's second term, implemented the legislative commitments set out in the 2001 White Paper. It allowed greater freedom for some schools from the National Curriculum and the Teachers Pay and Conditions Act¹⁵, and allowed schools to form companies to provide services and to join up with other schools to form federations. The Act introduced further requirements concerning parental choice by requiring LEA's to coordinate admissions within and across their boundaries, with a statutory requirement for each LEA to set up an admissions forum (previously a voluntary arrangement).

Within Labour education policy since 1997 there is some confusion and a lack of practical clarity surrounding notions of equity, inclusion and comprehensive schooling. This may be reflective of the swift succession of Education Secretaries. Evidence of this confusion is visible on Labour's web page section on education when it states that:

Education is central to Labour's mission *to deliver social justice and equality of opportunity*. We are committed to extending high quality education, personalised to each and fair to all. We believe there should be no cap on achievement and no limit to aspiration. (Retrieved from <http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php?id=education04>)

The recurring lack of clarity concerning common schooling in part results from the ways in which competing discourses concerned with equity and inclusion are being used. The role and value of notions such as equity and inclusion sit uncomfortably alongside the ever-increasing emphasis upon the idea of parental choice over secondary schools, which is in logical tension with the idea of comprehensive schooling.

¹³ retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/1164906.stm>

¹⁴ retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/1166246.stm>

¹⁵ See The Education Act 2002, Chapter Two. It states that qualifying schools, (where qualifying schools are maintained schools, a community, foundation or voluntary school) may apply for exemption from curriculum provision and from the teachers pay and conditions provision as is laid out in section 122 of the Act.

The current emphasis on choice and diversity diverges from comprehensive schooling since it makes no claims to be attempting to create schools with socially diverse intakes. Instead, the discourse of parental choice in theory accepts a quasi-market and the possibility that different parents may make different choices resulting in potentially socially segregated schools. Implicit in an acceptance of this is the assumption that such segregation in school populations is socially acceptable.

A recent White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More choice for parents and pupils* (HM Government October 2005) places choice explicitly at the centre of its agenda. The criticism levelled at earlier policy by Whitty, that it focussed on standards without addressing the problems of inequity in structure, may again be made here. The confusion and conflation of choice with the rhetoric of comprehensive education is also retained and, if anything, made more explicit.

The foreword to the paper by Tony Blair states that:

We must put parents in the driving seat for change in all-ability schools that retain the comprehensive principle of non-selection, but operate very differently from the traditional comprehensive. And to underpin this change, the local authority must move from being a provider of education to being its local commissioner and the champion of parental choice. (White Paper: *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All More choice for parents and pupils* HM Government October 2005, p. 1)

Parental choice is central to the document:

Parent choice can be a powerful driver of improved standards. Performance tables and inspections have given many parents the information that has enabled them to make objective judgements about a schools performance and effectiveness. This has been an important pressure on weaker schools to improve. (White Paper: *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All More choice for parents and pupils* HM Government October 2005, p. 3)

Whilst the White Paper expresses opposition to selection of students by schools, it allows and justifies selection by parents. It encourages within school division on the grounds of ability whilst implicitly acknowledging the potential of parental choice to lead to inequity. It attempts to justify this by providing choice advisers for parents who the paper deems less likely to be able to access choice. As studies discussed in Chapter Two and research in this thesis will suggest, there are complex reasons for choice which will not be readily addressed simply by a 'choice advisor'. The White Paper contains the means for schools further to diversify and gain greater levels of self government. It allows specialist schools to retain selection of ten percent of students and suggests ways in which schools may create admissions systems which would allow for a wider social mix of students. However, in the same way as Circular 10/65 did not lay out one system

for change, the White Paper leaves it open to schools and LEA's, hence allowing no sense of unity or equity of structure across the country.

The White Paper sets out its own historical account, arguing that comprehensive schools were never satisfactory due to their lack of emphasis on standards and ability setting. However, it does not mention the previous ad hoc and non specific Labour policy of 1965 which allowed for such diversity in comprehensive schools and the fact that ability grouping was used in many comprehensive schools.

Pressure, initially from middle class parents angry with standards in secondary moderns, led to comprehensive schools and the conversion of grammars and secondary moderns in the 1960's and 1970's. But, their introduction was often accompanied by all ability classes which made setting by subject ability too rare. Many retained their old secondary modern intake, and failed to improve. There were simply not enough pressures in the system to raise standards (White Paper: Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More choice for parents and pupils HM Government October 2005, p. 1)

From this passage it is evident that pressure from market forces of choice drive the White Paper, and it seeks to provide a specific history of the comprehensive school, which the Labour party itself had initially heralded. The use of reference to middle class parents in the document is telling of a policy discourse which appears to accept class inequities and is assuming its audience to be a middle class one.

The notion of ability is also central to the White Paper. As the thesis progresses, ability will be shown to be synonymous with choice discourse at the school level. The White Paper argues for fixed notions of ability and is pervaded by discourses of standards, choice and accountability. It places the solution of better standards firmly with markets and choice: 'but there is still too little choice and standards are not yet high enough' (White Paper: Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More choice for parents and pupils, HM Government October 2005, p. 3). The following chapter illustrates, the research, issues and questions which have arisen from the continuing emphasis on choice and markets in relation to education.

On the 28th February 2006 the White Paper was published as the Education and Inspections Bill. The main provisions of the Bill are that:

- All schools may become Trust schools;¹⁶

¹⁶ Trust Schools: Trust schools form 'links with external partners who will be able, should the school choose, to appoint the majority of the Governing Body. Trust schools will: Own their own assets, employ

- Local authorities will take on new roles, including: promoting choice and diversity, responding to parental concerns about quality of schools;
- A tightened admissions framework aiming to ensure fair access¹⁷

The research presented in this thesis was formulated and carried out prior to the 2005 White Paper and the 2006 Education Bill, so the Paper and Bill will not be discussed again until the concluding chapter, where implications of the research findings and thesis will be considered in relation to these developments.

Inclusion and equity

Equity

Equality, equity and equality of opportunity are often referred to in relation to considerations of education. The history briefly outlined here indicates that the meaning of equality in relation to education policy and history has changed over time. The concepts of equality and equality of opportunity require detailed analysis in themselves. Although there is not the space here, I aim to define what the notions mean in relation to the specific context of this thesis and the data it analyses.

An initial problem with defining equality in relation to education is that it rests on a number of value judgements concerning the role and value of schooling to the individual. This is problematic given that the policy and practices of education cannot be assumed to be free of discriminatory judgements and motivations of power, particularly given the way in which education policy is intrinsically linked to political ideology.

Starting from simple definitions, equality is defined as the state of being equal, where equal is defined as: ‘the same in quantity, quality, size, degree, rank, level etc, and having the same rights or status’(Concise Oxford Dictionary 1995, p. 456).

The notion of humans being equal is complex given that whilst there are certain constituents of individuals which are the same, implying certain universal human rights,

their own staff, set their admission arrangements, and be able to apply for additional flexibilities. (Retrieved on 4/9/06 from; <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/educationandinspectionsbill/>)

¹⁷ Summary retrieved on 5/9/06 from: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/educationandinspectionsbill/>

people are also inherently different from one another in subtle ways which do not negate the right to be viewed as being equally human and of equal value.

Equity, defined as fairness, and the application of general principles of justice, is a more helpful term in relation to schooling and this thesis. Given that it is most concerned with fair and just experience. If human beings have a basic level of rights to which they should have equal access, and if schooling is one of these, it implies that schooling should be equally available to all children and young people. This is an issue of equity or fairness and anything contravening this right becomes a source of inequity. For example, where a child is denied access to a school which is as good as the school her friend attends, this may be viewed as an inequity.

Equality of opportunity, whilst frequently used in relation to schooling, is particularly ambiguous. It may be defined as the right to have equal access to schooling without discrimination on grounds of particular attributes such as sex or race. (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1995, p. 456-457). However, in relation to education this is complex since one has to decide what counts as equal access. Is equality of opportunity concerned with equal access to a school itself, with equality of access to educational outcomes, or equal access to suitable learning opportunities, which may require differential treatment?

Historically, equality of opportunity has been used to justify different approaches. For example, the Education Act 1944 suggested that equality of opportunity was achieved by providing different schools to meet the needs and aptitudes of the individual, although later this came to be viewed by many as a source of inequity. A discourse of equity may itself legitimise discrimination, hence the belief that the eleven plus system was equitable may be viewed as a legitimising discourse hiding the inequity of taking a test with inevitable class and cultural assumptions.

The development of comprehensive schooling, as outlined previously, adopted a different sense of equality of opportunity. It was referred to by Peters (1966, p. 120) as 'no distinctions without relevant differences'. This definition allows for the fact that, to enable all children to be able to access opportunity equally, some children may need differential treatment, ie additional resources, help or support in order to achieve this. The problem with this definition is that it does not define relevant differences, and could equally be used to support the grammar and secondary modern system. Pedley (1978)

suggested that a concept of 'equal worth, that is, all equally deserving and needing such aids to personal growth as we can give' (Pedley 1978, p. 23) was a better way of considering equality of opportunity. This was taken further by Daunt (1975) in his comprehensive principle:

It is a principle of equal value... the guiding defining principle of comprehensive education is that the education of all is held to be intrinsically of equal value. (Daunt 1975, p. 16)

The problem with these attempts to define equality of opportunity in relation to the comprehensive school, is that because they focussed largely on individual differences affecting individuals' access to schooling, they did not lead to consideration of the ways in which schools themselves may restrict equality of opportunity through particular practices. Also the notion of equality of opportunity could still be used to justify different types of schooling.

The difficulty in defining what equality of opportunity means in practice may have contributed to the confusion and lack of clear policy concerning comprehensive schooling. Whilst the idea that all students should have equal access to a common school and educative experience was contained within comprehensive education, current policy is concerned with equity in relation to all children having equal opportunities for choice of a good school, and providing an education to meet the needs of the individual, where it acknowledges a fixed sense of ability and claims that equity will be fulfilled by choice and diversification of schools. This location of equity alongside choice is evident in the 2005 White Paper, Higher Standards, Better Schools For All:

We need to create a schools system shaped by parents which delivers excellence and equity developing the talents and potential of every child, regardless of their background..... to respond to parental demand, we need to expand choice, create real diversity of provision, and to ensure that the benefits of choice are available to all. (Higher Standards, Better Schools For All, White Paper, 2005, section 1.29)

The system we are putting into place through these proposals aligns incentives, accountability and funding in order to promote our goals of excellence and equity. (Higher Standards, Better Schools For All, White Paper, 2005, section 2.70)

Lynch and Lodge (2002) suggest that there are a range of factors affecting and creating educational equality and inequality. They suggest that reference to egalitarian theory, which has been lacking in sociology, provides a means of understanding the ways in which educational equality and inequality can be viewed. They refer to viewing equality and inequality as an issue concerned primarily with the distribution of resources, a distributive problem (p. 7). They suggest that the emphasis on equality of opportunity in

policy and education can be understood in relation to viewing the distribution of education as a good, concerned with equalising opportunities rather than resources. For example, the quotation from the 2005 White Paper suggests that equity is referring to access to opportunities but not to equal resources, as choice and diversity implies that schools will be physically different. Current policy appears to be concerned with students having equal opportunities with regard to accessing schools, but does not seek to challenge structural inequalities.

Lynch and Lodge identify a move to look at issues related to equality by recognising differences in status (recognition) between individuals and groups which 'are seen as derivative of equality rather than generative in the distributive fashion' (Lynch and Lodge 2001, p. 8).

Considering equality only in relation to recognition and redistributive factors misses out the role which power relations may also play in relation to equality and which may underpin unequal economic variables and inequity of certain groups. Lynch and Lodge also identify an affective aspect of teaching and learning which may be a part of constructing inequalities.

The denial of the emotional dimensions of the learning process means a denial of the totality of what it is to be a teacher and a learner in the first instance. By failing to engage with the affective we can do grave injustices to those students (and teachers) whose alienation from schooling stems from emotional considerations as well as, or apart from, considerations of social class, gender, disability, ethnicity or sexuality. (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p. 22-12)

Considering equality and inequality within schools and in relation to school choice inevitably requires consideration of issues of equity at macro and micro levels. This needs to bear in mind issues of both redistributive equity and recognition of the factors which may be creating the need for redistribution to begin with, including issues of power and affective aspects. As will become apparent in the thesis, issues of equity in relation to school choice need to be considered from several perspectives. The way in which certain groups are able to put their own resources to advantage in the education playing field requires consideration along with the ways in which schooling itself deals with, and possibly creates, inequities specific to certain individuals and groups.

Gillborn and Youdell (2000) consider the extent to which equality of outcome is a consideration in relation to issues of equity in schooling. They argue that if you accept that there is no inherent reason why members of one socially defined group (based on

class, race, gender etc) should not achieve average results, to the same extent as any other group, times when this is not the case may be taken as evidence of inequity. They identify that this approach is incompatible with hereditary notions of intelligence (p. 3). Regardless of whether their position is correct, it provides a starting point for consideration of equity and inequity. If enquiry begins from their proposition, one which makes no assumptions about particular groups over others, it allows all the aspects and factors influencing schooling and the process itself to be viewed in relation to equity and inequity. If you do not start by casting such assumptions aside it is far more difficult to view the construction of inequity or the ways in which inequity may be operating.

This thesis focuses specifically on issues of equity and inequity which arise in study locales in relation to differing levels of choice. It principally seeks to assess aspects of fairness and unfairness for different students in relation to school choice and their practical experience of schooling. This requires consideration of the range of ways in which equity and inequity may be being constructed and may operate. Consideration is also required of the extent to which issues are concerned with distributive aspects of wealth, recognition of social responses to group specific factors which may effect equity, the role of power and the affective aspects of the school experience.

When equity is referred to in this thesis it is used to mean an experience whereby students have equal and fair access to the curriculum, to schooling and to the outcomes of education, where schooling as an ideal operates to overcome explicit and inherent inequality which may result from different experiences outside of school, and from inequalities operating through and within the school system itself. Such inequalities may, for example, be caused by: institutional responses to ethnicity; gender; sexuality; disability; social class; the micro power relationships existing between teachers and students; teachers' stereotyping of particular student behaviours; or by school and wider policies which discriminate or prevent access based on a notion of ability. In this work equity is judged to be lacking when, for example, a minority ethnic student perceives that the teacher in the class ignores the quiet students, or when a student perceives unfairness when her teacher places her in a group who are unable to take humanities GCSE's. These are examples of situations when students are not being given the same chances to participate. Equity here is not just referring to equal treatment but takes it

further to justify differential treatment, within a common school¹⁸, if it leads to equity. Differential treatment in the school context is only justified if it is necessary to allow a student equal access to an aspect of schooling or education, for example, additional emotional support, support with writing or with learning English or providing bilingual resources.

Whilst equality of opportunity is also a relevant notion, particularly when considering ideas of comprehensive schooling, its use is ambiguous and changes with the historical and policy context. The thesis focuses specifically on considering equity and inequity, which at times requires consideration of equality of opportunity in particular contexts, where this context is defined.

Inclusion

The discourse of common schooling for all as an educational idea was used post 1944 in relation to the concept of multi-lateral schools, and was adopted by the Labour party as an idea which could overcome socially divisive schools. The notion of one school for all students regardless of level of attainment and social status became firmly entrenched within Labour policy culminating in Circular 10/65. I refer to this as **comprehensive social inclusion**, the aim of a common school, where:

A comprehensive school aims to establish a school community in which pupils over the whole ability range and with differing interests and backgrounds can be encouraged to mix with each other, gaining stimulus from the contacts and learning tolerance and understanding in the process (Circular 10/65 1960, p. 36)

This form of social inclusion is an ideal stemming from the radical left which argued that social inclusion was necessary for social justice. It was envisaged that a comprehensive school would be able to fulfil this ideal, overcoming visible social inequities at school level. In practice, in part due to the adhoc implementation of comprehensive schooling and the lack of policy detail concerning how this social mixing might actually be achieved, very few schools became truly socially inclusive. As a result, the idealistic aim of social inclusion and social justice being realised through the comprehensive school failed to become a reality. The development of comprehensive provision did not address, either theoretically or in practice, the deep complexities of social inequity and entrenched class assumptions. Comprehensive social

¹⁸ By common school is referred a school which does not select students.

inclusion is still taken as an ideal coherent with social justice, for example, Armstrong (2003) defines inclusion as:

A set of principles, values and practices which involve the social transformation of education systems and communities. It does not refer to a fixed state or set of criteria to be used as a blue print, but seeks to challenge deficit thinking and practice.....inclusion is concerned with countering oppressive and marginalising values and with understanding how these connect to practices and policies wherever they take place and in whatever form. (Armstrong 2003, p. 2-4)

In school practice, such inclusion has never been fully realised. As an ideal for schooling it operates in relation to a society which is at large socially divisive and exclusive, raising questions as to the extent to which schools are able to do anything other than reflect society. The way in which social inclusion may operate at school level requires greater consideration.

Inclusion is frequently referred to in current Labour policy discourse although its meaning has undergone several revisions. Whilst I use comprehensive social inclusion in this work to refer to the idea of socially inclusive common schools contained within the 10/65 Circular, inclusion is also adopted and used in varying ways. Inclusion has become a mantra for radical inclusive education and in relation to disability and Special Educational Needs inclusion, within both schooling and society at large, and in this context is often used without reference to social class inclusion.

New Labour have readopted the discourse of inclusion termed here **new social inclusion**. However, the meaning has changed from the idea of social inclusion presented by Labour from 1965 in relation to comprehensive schooling. Inclusion is now used by Third Way Labour policy¹⁹ as a term which can coexist alongside a neo-liberal model of an education market. This has been achieved by focusing on an individualised form of inclusion, rather than the idea of social inclusion. As the previous policy extracts illustrate the notion of the 'social' is missing from references to inclusion. Levitas (1998) argues that inclusion is ill-defined in New Labour policy and is viewed specifically in terms of inclusion within the labour market. One is socially included by learning to participate economically.

Labour understands social inclusion primarily in terms of participation in paid work. ..as employment is represented as something individuals must actively achieve, it is transformed into

¹⁹ The term 'Third Way' as applied here to Labour policy, describes the process whereby belief in economic privatisation, globalisation and the good of economic markets are incorporated into centre left politics.

an individual obligation. Inclusion becomes a duty rather than a right, and something which requires active performance. (Levitas 1998, p. 129)

The removal of the ethical dimension from inclusion appears to be an attempt by Labour to marry market concepts with ideas of social inclusion, by replacing the ‘social’ with emphasis on the individual. Whilst retaining the idea of inclusion is important as an ideological concept to many educational practitioners, Labour has subtly relabelled the package in a way which bypasses issues of social equity. This new meaning is not explicitly stated, allowing the potential for individuals to believe that an old idea of inclusion is still being upheld at the level of values. This is again supported by Levitas when she argues that:





This uneasy relationship between economy and community runs also through the rhetoric and policies of New Labour, where it is played out in profound contradictions. (Levitas 1998, p. 129)

These contradictions involve the relating of economic efficiency with social justice and the attempt to recognise the value of both markets and social structures. Inclusion becomes an exemplar of the contradictions and difficulties inherent within current educational policy and practice which appears to retain some of the legacy of comprehensive rhetoric whilst operating in a market influenced environment of competition and choice.

In summary, equity as an intrinsic right in relation to access to and experience within common schools and comprehensive social inclusion may be identified as the two tenets central to socially just comprehensive schooling. The current use of equity within policy, however, implies that diversification of school structures may be compatible with equity, which is a central idea for the thesis to investigate.

The following table identifies the ways in which notions of choice, comprehensiveness, inclusion and equity relate to each other and how they have developed and changed with policy.

Table 1:1: Summary of policy developments in the history of English schooling in relation to social inclusion and equity (from a current perspective)

Era	Policy content	Socially Inclusive?	Equity?
1. Pre Education Act 1944 	Elementary schools and Secondary schools	No, entry to school openly acknowledged as largely dependent on social class, although some scholarships to Secondary Schools.	No, school depended largely on familial status and financial situation.
2. Education Act 1944 	Eleven Plus examination to determine suitable school, tripartite system of grammar, Secondary Modern and technical schools	No, school populations derived from test results, hence schools not inclusive in terms of pupil backgrounds and test outcomes. (today it may be argued that 11+ success may be socially biased by cultural and social capital)	Proponents argued that it allowed equal chances to access education, with outcomes dependent on individual's attitude and ability. Discourses of aptitude hide largely class segregated school intakes
3. Labour Circular 10/65 (1965) 	Comprehensive school reorganisation	Yes, in theory. Idea of a common school for all children regardless of background, intelligence etc. But school intakes dependent on previous school reputation and levels of housing and surrounding community. Never fully realised.	Idea that education accessible to all, though did not consider different levels of capital on entry to school.
4. Conservative Education Act 1988 	Assisted Places Scheme Increased consumer choice School Accountability via published League Tables National Curriculum	Principles above retained by some schools and in rhetoric, but diversity of provision encouraged creating less socially representative and inclusive schools	Schools increasingly concerned with competition and outcomes, may impact on student equity
5. Post 1997 Labour School Standards and Framework Act 1998	Choice and diversity of schooling. Increased Consumer Choice	Less socially inclusive and increasing segregation via choice.	Equity in schooling understood as catering to the ability of each student.

The key historical and policy developments in English secondary schooling which have been discussed explain the current diversity of provision and the diverse patterns of secondary schooling. Political reluctance post-1965 to firmly establish a uniform system of comprehensive schooling accounts for a large proportion of this, along with the

hesitancy on the part of policy makers to make any dramatic changes. Instead successive policies appear to adopt the rhetoric of previous administrations, applying different meanings to the same terms, or often failing to specify exactly what implications and meanings such terms hold.

Educational change is dependent upon government and not owned by practitioners and students. Current emphasis upon diversity and choice resulting in diverse schools resonates with the Education Act 1944, as does the idea of specialist schools providing a focus for those with particular interests and aptitudes. Simon (1992) noted that there had been a lack of political will in relation to education. Labour policies from 1997 certainly do exhibit political will, given the mantra of 'education, education education' with which Labour came to power and the policy developments that have ensued suggest that education is a central part of their approach. However, I think that Simon's quote is still valid today in relation to the notion of equity. There has been political will concerned with education, but a lack of political will concerning issues of equity and evaluation of inequities within the education system.

Conclusions

Central to this thesis are the notions of equity, social inclusion and a school choice market. This discussion of the educational history, policy and structure of schooling identifies the complexities of schooling as a field of practice, which is dependent on political movements and where complex rhetorical terms are resorted to with little demonstration of what they may or may not mean for practice. Similarly, schools have evolved as social institutions interpreting policy in varying ways. The thesis pivots around this complex relationship between uneven historical development, rhetorical political policy and schools as human institutions at the level of practice. It seeks to address the real implications of the historical and policy contexts for school life. Armstrong (2003) supports this need to understand policy from the perspectives of lived reality:

Rather than referring to a simple top down process, policy needs to be understood in the wider social context in which it occurs and in terms of its relationship to people's lives. It is not something made by government and handed down through government agencies ready made. Policy is paradoxical, the product of struggles and contradictions. It is made at many levels in society through legislation, social and political structures, institutional and institutionalized practices and discourses and through the struggles which take place in classrooms, staff rooms,... arenas in which policies are made, reinterpreted and transmitted (Armstrong 2003, p. 5)

This study is necessary at this location in time since, as the above discussion illustrates, current government policy appears to be attempting to take the comprehensive legacy comprised of ideas of social justice and equity, and to overlay this with the current pattern of diverse schooling encouraged by market notions of diversity and choice. This creates an inevitable tension between issues of social justice and those of free choice, and resulting markets.

There is a need to address the effects of this political move on school practice itself, to discover what role comprehensive values may still be playing and to consider if and how choice and the language of marketisation might be changing this and any practical effects or implications for students, particularly in relation to comprehensive ideas of social justice and equity. For example, Whitty (2001) draws the distinction between consumer rights and citizens' rights, where citizens' rights may be taken to refer to concerns of social justice, for example equity and inclusion, whilst the language of consumer rights refers to an education market where the rights of the consumer may replace social rights. This relationship between the school as a value driven social institution and also as a market driven service provider needs exploration particularly as it is experienced.

By considering teacher and student experience in schools, affected to differing extents by parental choice and the market agenda, the study aims to gain insights into the lived reality of schooling for individuals and to discover how this relates to the complexities surrounding education policy in this area. This study is concerned to assess the role of comprehensive social inclusion, in terms of social class and familial status and the extent of social and racial inclusion within schools particularly in relation to choice.

Chapter Two

Choice markets and comprehensives: mapping the debate

Chapter One began to locate this thesis within the policy and history of secondary schooling. From this discussion the currently disparate provision of secondary schooling is explained not simply by recent policy but by the historical complexities; the lack of clarity surrounding the idea of comprehensive schooling; and the swift successions of governments exhibiting a marked lack of political will to take a clear and coherent position regarding secondary school organisation and practice, particularly in relation to issues of student equity. The changing role and value attributed to the ideas of social inclusion, and equity by policy developments has also been established.

This chapter provides a further overview of research literature concerned with school choice, market discourse, and comprehensive school practices, which makes the case for the research questions formulated at the end of the chapter. It assesses what is already known about the impact of choice policies on social justice and comprehensive schools and considers what questions have not been wholly asked or answered.

The complex nature of this area which is the concern of parents, educationalists, philosophers, sociologists, politicians, policy producers and, increasingly private companies makes the comprehensive schools and market debate very hard to map effectively, since concerns and analysis have been offered and are required at so many levels. Most of the studies which are considered here are either inevitably small scale studies limited in terms of providing overarching conclusions or larger scale statistical enquiries which do not address adequately what is happening at the school level. The concern of this thesis is with the practical experience of teachers and students in secondary schools in relation to market policy and practice and comprehensive ideas of inclusion and equity. This discussion maps the debate within the space constraints aiming to synthesise as many strands of the research as possible (to include both empirical work and its relationship to conjectured policy and sociological critique).

It is inevitably a broad discussion given that the research questions, whilst specific, seek to combine a number of areas at the level of teacher and student experience. Several strands of the field need to be brought together in this work including: historical and evaluative studies of comprehensive schooling; debate concerning the operation of an education market, much of which inevitably becomes hypothetical, philosophical and abstracted; empirical studies of how parents may operate as choice makers and the effects of markets; sociological analysis; and discussion of specific effects of choice and policy scholarship and critique in relation to all of the above.

What is evident at this stage and will be flagged throughout the subsequent discussion, is the need for further research at the level of individual practice and school experience in order to equate the larger number of macro policy and market discussions with the nuances and diversity of the micro lived reality of schools themselves. Gorard (1999) considered the breadth of research on school choice. He notes that research has looked at how parents choose schools and the impact of choice on outcomes, and suggests the need for a meta-analysis of the research. He does not identify any studies explicitly concerned with the impact and effects of choice as experienced by teachers and students.

Historically such work has been carried out by Ball (1981), in *Beachside Comprehensive*, and more recently Gillborn and Youdell (2000), in *Rationing Education*, sought to examine both policy and micro school practices. Given the diversity of schooling and, as will be subsequently seen, the at times sweeping statements made by research using large scale data sets, research at the school level is necessary to give meaning to patterns emerging from empirical data.

Comprehensive schooling: the idea and practice

Early sociological work relevant to this project focussed upon comparisons between comprehensive schools and a tripartite system (Ford 1969). Studies also addressed the functioning of comprehensive schools themselves and evaluated the operations of equity within such schools.

For example, Ball's (1981) study of *Beachside Comprehensive*, a single coeducational school, suggested that social class was a primary factor relating to student success and

failure within the school, a pattern similarly reflected by current studies. Central to early research was a tension between equality of opportunity and academic standards, reflecting the political tensions surrounding secondary schooling post Circular 10/65. Comprehensive schools became a specific focus of study since as Fearn (1983) argues:

Comprehensive secondary education policy is an example of policy innovation rather than policy maintenance, and that the relationships between the different factors illuminated in policy-making on this comprehensive reorganisation issue, may be different from those obtaining in cases where the issue on which policy is made is less controversial amongst the political groups involved (Fearn 1983, p. 43)

Ford's (1969) study comparing a grammar and a comprehensive school argued that there was a continuation of class bias in attainment in the comprehensive school. The results of the study suggested that selection and streaming within the comprehensive school mirrored the class bias of the grammar school with a relationship between social class and A-stream membership, a conclusion that Ball's later work supports.

Early work implies that class inequities continued and were not overcome by comprehensive schooling. This raises the question of whether the comprehensive school actually maintained the inequities of the grammar and secondary modern system but satisfied the middle class left-wing by providing an illusion of a highly equitable system. As Ford's study suggests, inequity may have continued within the comprehensive school. However, the comprehensive school prevented the harsh and visible segregation at the age of eleven and contained at least the potential for students to move between groups as they progressed, combined with the fact that children were being educated within a common school. Comprehensive schools were not, however, equitable in terms of experience across schools. The early research findings on comprehensive schools were problematic, particularly when making evaluative generalisations about comprehensive schooling as a practice. As the earlier historical overview illustrates, comprehensive schools were introduced in such a piecemeal fashion with much dependent upon how individual schools understood and actualised comprehensive ideas. For example, comprehensive schools developed widely divergent views on grouping and streaming of students. Further, student intakes varied dramatically. In some locales comprehensive schools existed alongside grammar schools, rendering the student intake of comprehensive schools within the area less than comprehensive.

Writing in 1977 Bellaby identified diverse development of secondary schools along with policy ambiguity regarding what comprehensive schooling should entail:

The debate seems very diverse, and the definition of comprehensive schooling seems as elusive as it was when we examined the patchwork of actual comprehensive organization in the country as a whole. (Bellaby 1977, p. 23)

Bellaby's sociological analysis of the development of secondary schooling identified a significant lack of evaluation and analysis of comprehensive reorganisation:

The development of comprehensive schooling must be guided by a theory of educational change, which people involved in the struggle to overcome inequality and divisiveness within society must modify as experience demands. From an academic point of view, research is sadly lacking in English comprehensive schooling. Its absence is important, but less so than that of a theory of how the comprehensive reform has emerged and where it might evolve. (Bellaby 1977, p. 118)

A lack of any clear evaluation of comprehensive schooling is evident, reflecting the political ambiguities and tensions surrounding its introduction. The rapid change in government and Conservative apathy towards comprehensive schooling surely contributed to this and explains why secondary schooling progressed in such an ad hoc manner and with such diversity across LEA's. This ambiguity and lack of use of research by policy makers continues to be relevant since, as subsequently discussed, current policy emphasis upon choice and diversity appears to have been introduced without adequate assessment of the current position of schools and the potential effects of such change. Benn and Chitty (1996) support this argument concerning a lack of research to inform policy making. They argue that in the last twenty years since Benn's first attempt to evaluate the operation of comprehensive schools (Benn and Simon 1970) there has been no full profile or evaluation of comprehensive education across the country and change has been implemented without satisfactory evaluation.

Comprehensive education, precisely because it does aim to encompass everyone, needs its own documentation, its own analysis, its own monitoring, its own pedagogy and its own development plans...Yet since 1979 plans specifically for comprehensive education- for its structure, its curriculum or its assessment- have not really been on the agenda. Even before this there was a marked lack of support, including effective legislation, for the development of the comprehensive education that was supposedly being reported by the governments of that day. Indeed very little official pacing of its progress overall has ever been undertaken. (Benn and Chitty 1996, p. ix)

Ten years on this position remains largely unchanged. Current policy is emphasising choice and diversity, yet appears to be trying to retain some comprehensive rhetoric of opportunity and meeting individual needs. Change appears to be on the political agenda without adequate recourse to the current diverse position of schools across locales. Despite being written ten years ago the following comments remain particularly pertinent:

At the heart of the national education service there seem to be two contradictory policies operating: one accepting comprehensive education, another actively undermining it. Yet nowhere is there information presented to permit an analysis of just how these policies are working. (Benn and Chitty 1996 p. ix)

There is a significant gap between the research community and policy producers. Comprehensive discourse and practice appears to have been pushed quietly ‘out of the back door’ by policy makers without adequate assessment of whether the discourse plays any role at school level. There appears historically to be a political fear to address comprehensive schooling. Conservative governments post 1965 failed to challenge directly the idea but allowed a number of amendments to prevent full implementation. Similarly over the last twenty years under both Conservative and Labour governments there appears to have been attempts to let comprehensive discourse slip away without having to assess it as an idea or consider its successes and failures. Policy makers have managed to change the emphasis on secondary schooling without having to confront directly comprehensive schooling. There is evidently the need for this project to assess whether notions of comprehensive schooling are remaining at school level and how this relates to a choice directed system.

The historical analysis and discussion have shown that comprehensive schooling has never been given the opportunity to fully exist and be implemented nationwide with clear aims, objectives and policies on practices such as intake. Comprehensive schooling has instead been an idea largely of rhetoric and this rhetoric of equality and inclusion continues to be used in policy discourse alongside one of choice. Research needs to assess to what extent the rhetoric of comprehensiveness exists at the school level and how this and school practice relates to and is affected by discourses of school choice.

Whilst the aim of comprehensive schools was initially to offer all inclusive schooling with mixed ability classes, schools interpreted the idea of comprehensive schooling in many various ways²⁰. Gradually grouping students within the comprehensive school by ability became viewed as more favourable. Some schools streamed students into separate groups according to ability and students stayed within their stream for all lessons. Streaming was in many ways similar to the division of students between

²⁰ One reason for this uneven development of comprehensive schools was that Circular 10/65 suggested a range of different options for comprehensive reform.

grammar, secondary and technical schools, with the exception that all students were within a common building. Other schools set students, whereby students were placed in groups according to their ability in each subject. Today there is a wide range of levels of setting in operation. Some schools set students for all subjects from year seven, some from year nine. Some schools only set students for core subjects and other schools continue to operate with mixed ability classes. Emphasis on school standards and outcomes has led many schools to set vigorously by ability, believing that this is the best way to raise outcomes, a move supported by the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE ,2001²¹).

There is a wide range of research and discussion debating the grouping of students by ability. Ideologically the debate focuses around whether students perform better when grouped according to ability and whether there are any detrimental effects. Ireson, Hallam and Hurley (2005) note that extensive international research on the effects of grouping found inconclusive evidence regarding the effectiveness of different systems of grouping. They carried out a comparison of GCSE results of over 6000 students, whom they tracked from year nine. They used multilevel modelling to estimate the impact of setting on GCSE outcomes, taking account of social disadvantage, gender and prior attainment. They found there to be ‘no significant effects of setting in English, maths or science’ (p. 443) They also found that in the three subjects students of similar ability to begin with gained higher grades when they were placed in higher sets. There is less research on the psychological and affective effects of setting on students self esteem and feelings regarding school. Ireson and Hallam (2005) considered the extent to which setting may affect students’ reported liking of school, using a large sample of year seven to nine students from forty five secondary schools. Their findings suggested that levels of setting did not appear to affect student liking for school. However, they found evidence of a decline in the liking of school reported by lower attaining students and ‘those in the lowest quartile were more negative in lower sets or tracks’ (p. 308). This finding is supported by other research (Gamoran and Berends, 1987 and Oakes 1985)

²¹ Reference to setting as a means of raising attainment may be found in: DFEE 2001, Schools Building on Success p7, 17, 53

Whilst the evidence is inconclusive concerning the effects of ability grouping on outcomes, this thesis considers how the notion of ability is used by teachers and students and their perceptions concerning ability grouping in relation to student equity. Further consideration of the concept of ability itself and discussion of this in relation to research findings is in Chapter Six.

At the start of this thesis in 2003 secondary school provision existed in a number of guises, illustrating the erosion of the notion of comprehensive schooling:

- Community (LEA controlled) comprehensive/common schools;
- Foundation/voluntary-aided (grant maintained) comprehensive/ common schools;
- Specialist Status schools/colleges (which can technically select ten percent of students according to aptitude); (may be community, foundation or voluntary-aided);
- Beacon Schools (Introduced from 1998, high performing schools funded to build partnerships with schools and share good practice- to be phased out by 2005);
- Faith Schools (may select on faith grounds);
- Grammar Schools (State controlled, selective schools);
- Secondary Schools in LEA's where the eleven plus selection system operates;
- City Technology Colleges;
- City Academies (newly developed with private sponsorship);
- Special Schools (for students with specific needs outside of mainstream provision); and
- Private/Independent schools.

The notion of common comprehensive schools for all has been eroded by the increased emphasis upon the role of parental school selection and choice, supported by the introduction of grant maintained status (now foundation schools), specialist status schools and challenges from LEA's opting to maintain an eleven plus grammar school system,²² and also from the continued existence of the private sector. This tension is

²² Grammar school systems continue to exist in a number of areas. The following LEA's have more than 10 percent of students attending selective schools: Barnet, Bexley, Kingston-upon-Thames, Sutton, Wirral, Trafford, Calderdale. Buckinghamshire, Poole, Bournemouth, Reading, Slough, Plymouth, Torbay, Southend-on Sea, Kent, Meway, Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire.

heightened by successive government policies (The Education Reform Act 1988, the 1992 White Paper: Choice and Diversity, the School Standards and Framework Act 1998) seeking to move away from ‘bog standard’²³ comprehensives with greater emphasis placed on parental rights, choice and autonomy. This is evident in the 2001 Labour election manifesto which sought to:

- Ensure every secondary school develops a distinctive mission including the expansion of specialist schools
- Diversify state schools with new City Academies and more church schools (Ambitions for Britain, Labour’s manifesto 2001, p. 5)

An education market: in theory

Initially one can question whether the language of ‘choice’ is appropriate. Concerns centre upon whether ‘choice’ in a school context actually describes something which exists, or acts as an illusionary tool of ideology. For example, is the use of the language of school choice correct when in many locales there is no, or very little real choice and when studies suggest that choice in any real sense is only available to certain social groups (Reay and Lucey 2000, Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995). Recourse to the language of choice is justified in this thesis on the grounds that members of society understand and use this notion, even though it may not refer to an actual choice. Choice as an idea is understood, and in relation to schooling the language of choice is becoming accessible and adopted by a wide cross section of society. School choice is a discourse currently integral to discussion of secondary schooling. In urban and rural locales there are often two or more schools available and parents may make a choice in relation to these. However if parents cannot access information regarding this and if intakes for particular schools are oversubscribed the choice may not exist in reality.

One danger in employing the language of choice is that its importance and the extent of its practical application may be assumed and overstated. Employing the notion of parental choice may make particular, situated, class-related and biased assumptions regarding choice. For example, introducing the language of choice into questions asked

²³ The ‘bog standard comprehensive’ was a phrase coined by Alistair Campbell who was the Prime Minister’s spokesman in 2001. It was used in relation to Labour’s plans for secondary school reform, to exemplify what Labour believed was wrong with comprehensive schooling, that it was average and mediocre.

about schooling immediately frames the situation in terms of choice, which the respondents may reply to in this language without it having any real significance for them. However, as the following consideration of research suggests, choice is a firmly embedded concept regardless of whether people feel that they have access to it

Whilst current policy firmly identifies parental choice in relation to secondary schools, the potential for selection of students by schools, antithetical to the idea of comprehensive schooling, also continues to exist. Current education policy as stated in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 has allowed a number of schools to retain selective methods of student intake. The 1998 Act sets out the conditions whereby selection may continue. The act allows grammar schools to continue with selective admission arrangements; allows schools which have existing partially selective admission arrangements to continue; and allows schools with specialisms in certain subjects to select up to ten per cent of students on a basis of their aptitude for a specialist subject (School Standards and Framework Act 1998 ch31 pt. 3). This rests somewhat uncomfortably with the Labour governments' frequent references to social inclusion and highlights one of the tensions within the government's position, which appears to desire *social inclusion, choice and diversity*. (Whitty, Halpin and Power 1998)

Parental choice implies that there will be varying standards and quality between schools for parents to choose between. Active choice of schools by parents inevitably allows for the development of 'quasi markets' (Whitty 2002). The notion of a quasi market is used here since, unlike other free market systems, education is still controlled and funded largely by a single state monopoly. As Chapter One identified, market discourse inherited from Conservative policy has become entrenched within Labour education policies which appear to be built around a tacit acceptance that markets will inevitably create competition which will drive up standards in schools, possibly resulting in the closure of less successful ones, and the development of the most satisfactory outcomes. There is a need to consider whether the gradually increasing emphasis upon parental choice and education as a commodity is affecting the way in which education is socially valued. Empirical research discussed subsequently has begun to assess the potential impact of market discourses on social equity and inclusion commonly associated with comprehensive schooling. It is evident that the underlying assumption of much of this

research is that market led parental choice will inevitably result in increased school diversity and challenge to social justice. This is reflected by Apple (2001) in relation to the US context. He raises concerns over the market as an arbiter of social justice and the potential social effects of a market on certain social groups and individuals, in particular the poor.²⁴

Tooley (1997) seeks to defend the principle of markets in education:

Choice in education is desirable for the sake of, inter alia, equity, because it acts as a check on a monopoly power; and a diversity of educational opportunities is likely to arise if sympathetic account is taken of human differences (Tooley 1997, p. 103)

He suggests that one can be in favour of a market position without endorsing the current policy approach. He agrees that recent choice and diversity reforms do not satisfy calls for equity given that individual's cultural capital affects how different people are able to access choice. He suggests that this can be overcome through weighting resources available for certain groups and reconsidering school rating and inspection systems. However, the crux of his argument is that these solutions will be inadequate given that current school choice cannot be said to operate as a market given the degree of state funding and regulation. He does not resort to the intrinsic value of parental choice to support the position, but argues that choice in education is in fact desirable to ensure equity, as it acts to prevent a power monopoly, whereby lack of any choice allows a monopoly supplier, in this case the state, to have sole influence over the goods being produced with potential to abuse the position. Competition, he claims, ensures that quality is kept high provided that there is a weighted voucher type scheme with genuine, not contrived, consumer information, and with remedial measures for failing schools (Tooley 1997, p. 107). Tooley suggests that a consumer may decide not to choose, but as long as there are significant numbers of consumers who are discriminating choosers the suppliers and producers cannot take the risk so good quality and service are ensured. He argues that genuine competition and choice do not lead to poor quality suppliers limping along. It is impossible currently to assess the practical validity of these arguments in England given the disparate range of market conditions which exist. However, an intrinsic problem with Tooley's recourse to a totally free market for education is that such a market will inevitably be driven by profit rather than an intrinsic

²⁴ For a fuller account of market effects as envisaged by Apple, see *Educating the "Right" Way, Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*, (2001) Chapter Two pages 59-62.

idea that education is a fundamental human right. This carries the danger of schooling becoming a free for all with no measures, controls or minimum standards to ensure that particular groups are able to gain equal access or experience.

Emphasis on parental autonomy and consumer rights in relation to school choice has resulted from both the reduction of fixed catchment areas and the increased weight given to school standards and the public accountability of schools as evidenced through national testing and the publication of school league tables and Ofsted reports. These have given parents a number of new choice-making tools. The prominence of parental choice may have a number of pragmatic and social effects. The publication of league tables and the reduction in catchment area intake rules has allowed at least a minimal level of market forces to enter the school arena, with parents and their children becoming educational consumers. This practice of parental choice implies diversity of school provision. Raising the question of whether choice-promoting policies such as the publication of national test results, have been considered in relation to the ideas of social inclusion and student equity. Are these ideas compatible with a choice directed system?

The National Curriculum, league tables and associated, publicly-available school data may be viewed as a means of achieving greater transparency and hence equality in educational provision. However, when combined with parental choice it is possible that these may implicitly contribute toward greater disparity between schools. Parental choice has, in theory, an inevitable effect on education providers. There is an increased likelihood that parents may select schools which they perceive to be successful, resulting in popular schools gaining in pupil numbers and hence financial benefits. This has complex effects at several levels, given the fact that a number of studies have suggested that families have differing levels and means of power as choosers (Reay and Ball 1997; Parsons, Chalkley and Jones 2000).

Parents as consumers and choice makers

Research by Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995), and Parsons, Chalkley and Jones (2000) has considered the relationships between families choices of schools, education markets, social class and the varying strategies available and considerations made by parents in selecting schools. Qualitative evidence suggests that school choice is related

to particular social class patterns such that the socio-economic status of parents can be related to the kinds of school choices which they are both likely to make and have available.

Parental choice of schools cannot be viewed solely in relation to recent policies emphasising choice and diversity. Evidence suggests that some parents have always sought to make some kind of school choice for their children, using housing as a means of accessing a desired school. Studies by (Downes, T Zabel, J (2002), Gibson, S and Machin, S (2003), Haurin, D and Brasington, D, (1996)), for example, have identified a positive relationship between house prices and the perceived quality of the local school. Further, residential segregation will inevitably impact on school populations. In the early 1980's research identified the role of parents as a significant factor in rendering schools less than comprehensive. Heath (1984) used census data to show that class differences existed between comprehensives. His main thesis, significant to current work on choice and diversity, claimed that:

The introduction of comprehensive schools sets up complex dynamics of parental action which render naïve comparisons between school types valueless. What is surely more useful is to ask whether the new 'rules of the game', which is what comprehensive reorganisation amounts to, changed the scope for competitive families to play the system to their offspring's advantage. (Heath 1984, p. 119)

Heath's work implies that whilst the eleven plus provided a biased but external system of selecting students, the comprehensive system allowed certain parents freedom to choose between schools for themselves, which has come increasingly to the fore in recent policy.

Gorard, Taylor and Fitz (2002) also refer to evidence of the practice of parental choice observable in patterns of types of housing and house prices around particular schools. Access to comprehensive schools from 1965 onwards appears to have operated largely on the basis of proximity of school to home (catchment area). Although the Education Act 1944 had allowed for the possibility of parents stating a school preference Taylor (2000) suggests that the majority of school intakes were regulated by LEA's based on catchment areas. The Education Reform Act 1988 with its emphasis upon choice, diversity and competition brought the discourse of parental choice to the fore.

Whilst parental choice is commonly viewed as a new phenomenon and one directly related to a quasi education market and school inequalities, it is important to take

account of Heath's observations and the historical account of secondary school development. These imply that schools have long experienced a biased distribution of students on the grounds of social class. This suggests that comprehensive schools themselves, due to their slow and diverse introduction, have not been able to adequately overcome this. There is no doubt that some parental choice operated alongside comprehensive schools. Comprehensive schools in England never fully achieved their aims of equality of experience and comprehensively mixed student intakes.

Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) argue that families from lower socio-economic groups often favour school proximity over league table position and A*-C grades and may use different choice criteria to the middle class parent. They suggest that parental choice is unlikely to be a straightforward affair. 'Messy, multidimensional, intuitive and seemingly irrational or non-rational elements of choice' need to be considered. They interviewed 137 parents about school choice, aiming to:

[E]xamine how in the specific case of school choice, cultural resources are used and with what effects. [They argue that research has only looked at input and output] rather than the values, processes, patterns and relationships which constitute educational provision. (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995, p. 8).

Their research suggested that socio economic status, social class and available cultural resources are factors affecting school choice decision making:

Our central point throughout is that choice is thoroughly social [and that] class selection is revalorised by the market. (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995, p. 23-24)

From their research into school choice they categorised parents into types of chooser. Whilst there is a danger in distinguishing such discrete categories, given that school choice is an exceedingly complex and personal operation (Swift 2003) with both rational and irrational factors at play and the social judgements it may implicitly cast, combined with the small sample size which may not readily reflect choice making in different locales, their categories at least highlight a number of points and concerns. Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) categorise parental choice into three kinds: the privileged or skilled chooser, the semi-skilled chooser and the disconnected chooser each of whom relies on different abilities and cultural resources. Central to their argument is the notion that:

Social groups engage with and decipher schools in different ways. What they 'see' and 'know' of school is different and is related to different systems of values and relevances. But their degree of confidence, their ability to use the language of schooling and their depth of perception are also different. The role of de-coding is, we suggest, fundamental to the relationship between class and choice that is evident in our study and others. (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995, p. 38)

According to their analysis, the privileged chooser seeks to match their individual child with a school which they feel best meets the child's needs and that is also successful according to market and high stakes testing criteria. With the semi-skilled chooser the careful child-matching of the privileged choosers is missing and they are more disconnected from, and less likely to engage in, the market. Further, they suggest that disconnected parents want a good education for their children in their local school and see no need to seek a good education elsewhere.

Similar issues were identified by Reay and Ball (1997) who observed that social class differences were reflected and recreated through the operation of choice as many working class parents had to consider different issues in relation to school choice, often related to their own experiences of schooling and their perceptions of their children.

Reay and Lucey (2000, p. 83) in their study of school choice focussing particularly on children's experiences of secondary school choice making again found that despite both individual and family differences there remains a strong pattern of class related orientations to choice. Lower socio-economic groups favoured safety and proximity of school over and above academic outcomes, which they viewed as inherent to the child and not the fault of the school.

Research by Denessen, Driessen and Slegers (2005) considered 10,000 parents' reasons for school choice in the Netherlands where there is total free choice of school and found counter to the studies above that:

[P]arental level of education produced no relevant differences in the ratings of reasons for school choice, which indicates that no social milieu differences could be identified with respect to reasons for school choice (Denessen, Driessen and Slegers 2005, p. 358)

This difference may be explained by the existence of different cultural expectations and traditions regarding school choice or it may be due to the increased sample size of the Netherlands study. The difference could also have methodological origins, since in survey data it is possible that similar responses may hide differences in meanings.

Assessing parental choice is complex due to the personal and individual nature of decision making and the number of social and community factors which may influence this. Bagley (1996), for example, found discrepancies in parental responses concerning choice in relation to interviews or questionnaires. In interview data parents referred to racial aspects of choice which they did not refer to in questionnaires.

Current evidence of inequity in English education

Before discussing the potential effects of choice markets in more detail it is useful to consider current evidence concerning inequity within English education. There is evidence to suggest that there are some inequities in education in England. Green (2003) argues that two studies carried out by the OECD²⁵, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) suggest that educational outcomes 'are highly unequal relative to most OECD countries, as all the evidence in IALS and PISA shows'(Green 2003, p. 67). Green notes that Smith and Gorard (2002) suggested that the PISA data demonstrated that schools in Britain were no more exceptionally unequal. Green argues that whilst Smith and Gorard showed this to be the case when comparing data from England with five other European comparator countries, the data from PISA still highlights a number of inequalities within the system. For example, he argues that they only compared English data with Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain, and given that two of the countries operate selective school systems it is not a particularly useful comparison. He argues that data from IALS and PISA show that educational outcomes in England are 'highly unequal relative to most OECD countries' (p. 67). He notes that 61 percent of differences in school outcomes in the UK can be matched with school social intake characteristics, compared with an average of 34 percent in other OECD countries. There was also an exceptionally wide spread of school outcomes in the UK. Green argues that the data from PISA shows that 'the UK currently has one of the most inequitable systems both regarding equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes.' (p. 68). The extent to which these inequities are related to the choice and diversity agenda requires consideration.

A recent research paper by the DFES (DFES research topic paper 2006, Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils aged 5-16) found differences in exam success among ethnic groups. Black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and mixed white and black Caribbean pupils consistently perform below the national average for all pupils (p.

²⁵ OECD, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For their studies referred to by Green (2003) see: OECD (2001) *Knowledge and Skills for Life: first results from PISA 2000*. Paris. OECD, and OECD (2000) *Literacy in the Information Age: final report of the International Adult Literacy Survey*. Paris: OECD/Statistics Canada.

40). The paper suggests that most minority ethnic groups gain good value added scores at secondary school. However there is still an attainment gap (p. 50)

The research paper found higher school exclusion rates for Gypsy/ Roma, traveller, black Caribbean and black and white Caribbean and black other students and that a higher than average proportions of these students are eligible for free school meals. This implies that issues of inequity may exist in relation to both minority ethnic status and socioeconomic status of families and it may be difficult to disentangle the effects or relationships between these.

Larger than average differences were found between English teacher assessment and English test results at key stage two and three for Asian and black students and for students for whom English was an additional language (EAL). It was noted that the discrepancy in outcomes between the tests and teacher assessments could not be entirely related to having EAL given that the findings were the same for black Caribbean children who did not have a high percentage of EAL (p. 70).

This finding may have its origins in an aspect of the teacher assessment task which may be biased in favour of white students. It is unlikely that the teacher assessments are lower as a result of students having EAL, given that there were minority ethnic students in the sample with English as a first language. A serious possibility which is raised in the paper is that:

It could also imply more negative teacher expectations of EAL pupils which are reflected in teacher assessments. (DFES research topic paper 2006, Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils aged 5-16, p. 76)

This raises serious questions concerning the ways in which inequity may function within schools.²⁶

Choice markets and their effects

Taylor (2001) suggests that England is an example of the largest experiment of market reforms in state education which has been accompanied by surprisingly little research. This continues the historic pattern of a lack of large scale assessment and evaluation of secondary education in Britain despite prolific education policies. The role and effect of

²⁶ These findings will be considered further in Chapter Seven in relation to school choice.

market values in education is particularly complex as Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) suggest:

It is our basic contention that there is no one general education market in operation in England. Education markets are localised and need to be analysed and understood in terms of a set of complex dynamics which mediate and contextualise the impact and effects of the government's policy. These dynamics can be identified and one of our concerns is to articulate a model for the analysis of local markets. (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995, p. 3)

This argument, mirrored by Taylor (2001), is appropriate given the extreme diversity of secondary school provision between LEA's and also the huge diversity of school locales.

Gorard, Taylor and Fitz (2002) analysed whether school choice leads to 'spirals of decline', where spirals of decline imply that less popular schools within a market system will lose numbers and increase their proportion of socially disadvantaged pupils over time. They suggest that this is one criticism often levelled at choice led systems since:

[T]he popular notion of how market forces could lead schools into spirals of decline rests heavily on two key components: a fall in numbers and an increasingly disadvantaged intake of children. Occurring cyclically these factors could have serious implications for the distribution of resources, the ability for schools to improve standards and social justice in general. (Gorard, Taylor and Fitz 2002, p. 381)

They carried out an empirical analysis of school sizes to assess whether less popular schools were losing students, and the extent to which markets give rise to changes in the social composition of secondary schools in England. They devised a segregation ratio to assess levels of segregation within schools in each locale based on the number of disadvantaged children in each locale (as assessed by those in receipt of free school meals) in relation to the population of the school and the proportions within other schools in the area. They found a decline in school segregation between 1989 and 1996 and a subsequent rise between 1997 and 2001, and concluded that schools did not go into spirals of decline as a result of choice. They use this evidence to counter arguments that markets will increase levels of segregation. They argue that patterns of housing appear to be central to levels of school segregation. Whilst this may be the case with the data suggesting that a market system does not itself lead to sink schools, there are other possible explanations. School markets vary hugely across LEA's. Further, low achieving schools may appear not to be in decline despite having low test scores due to the fact that parents choosing to send their children to these schools may not use league table data and the like to choose the schools. This coheres with studies of school choice

patterns (Gewirtz, Ball and Bow 1995) and implicitly suggests that a choice led system will not necessarily drive up standards for all schools. Whilst this data appears valid one problem is that patterns vary enormously between locales as Taylor (2001) notes. Despite the fact that overall segregation has not risen dramatically, this does not rule out the existence of a number of locales where a choice market is creating segregation. Burgess' (2005) macro economic modelling of choice and sorting drawn from a data set of all English state secondary schools found a number of patterns. For example, the better the standard of the local school the less likely children on free school meals were to attend the school. Burgess identifies a lack of explanation for this and other choice related patterns apparent in school data. He comments that, 'we don't know what's inside the black box, we're just explaining the data'. The black box he refers to is the micro level analysis of what apparent patterns of choice look like on the ground.

This research seeks to assess what is happening within a locale where there appears to be high levels of choice in operation compared with one where choice does not appear to be so significant. The findings of Taylor and Gorard (2001), implying that markets are not resulting in between-school socio-economic segregation of schools, are expected since certain parents have long been able to operate choice in the comprehensive system through moving house to gain access to desired schools. However, this does not mean that an education market will have no consequences or implications for social equity of secondary schooling. Whilst the comprehensive ideology sought actively to challenge issues of social inequity a choice directed market accepts that if parents choose differentially, schools may as a result become socially segregated and a quasi education market contains no means within itself to challenge this possibility.

This renders a choice led approach problematic, particularly given that school choice is only beginning to be made available and accessible to parents in many locales and so the full outcomes of choice cannot yet be assessed. Whilst Taylor and Gorard's (2001) quantitative findings imply that segregation has not radically increased, they fail to address serious issues of inequality which exist in some locales. The development of a parentally driven market is evidently not entirely responsible for this, but this does not imply that existing inequities need not be addressed, nor does it imply that parental choice does not have a role in creating such inequities.

League table data showing school results in public examinations have failed to take account of the disparity in levels of student attainment on entry across schools, meaning that schools are not competing on equitable terms. For example, Taylor (2001) argues that due to the current diversity of schools they do not compete on a 'level playing field'.

Many schools, particularly denominational and selective schools with very high positions in the examination league tables, are in little or no competition with other schools who typically rely on a 'local' intake of pupils. (Taylor 2001, p. 211)

The introduction of value-added data on league tables may address this. However, considering Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe's and Reay and Ball's studies of parents as choice makers it is unlikely that changes to league table data will have much effect on the parents who do not use such information in order to make their choices, combined with the fact that parents who use league table data to select schools are likely to be most concerned with examination results. This implies that a number of schools will be less desirable to middle class parents, leaving them isolated from the positive aspects of a market.

In some areas there is evidence of parental choice creating *school competition spaces*²⁷ as identified by Taylor (2001) and Taylor and Gorard (2002). Taylor (2001) suggests that in analysis of six locales, distinct types and patterns of competition were evident. He claims that competition and choice is largely hierarchical and that the position of schools within these hierarchies is related to their relative examination performances within 'local' markets or spaces of competition. Taylor and Gorard (2002) further identify large differences in school competition spaces both within and across locales. This is considered further in relation to the sampling methods used in this project. Initial analysis of school league tables and information provided by schools suggested that school competition spaces are complex and vary enormously across locales. In some areas there is a very minimal or non-existent competition space, for example in rural locales, and in urban areas there appear to be a number of different kinds of competition space. Taylor further identifies complexities in defining competition spaces and their potential transience over time but notes the importance of considering competition

²⁷ Competition spaces refer to the geographical space in which schools are in competition for students. The competition space is naturally bounded, given that there will be a maximum desirable travel distance, outside which choosing a particular school would be unfeasible. Other factors specific to locales may also affect competition spaces.

spaces in relation to potential social segregation. School competition spaces will inevitably be important to this project since their existence may have particular bearing upon issues of parental choice, comprehensive ideas and school intakes.

The research and discussion raises questions concerning the effects which choice and education markets may have directly on schools. How do schools respond to parentally self-selected intakes, particularly in terms of equity and social inclusion? Do schools actively work towards particular pupil outcomes in order to ensure specific student intakes and if so what impact does this have on student equity? The increasing evidence of the growth of an A*-C economy²⁸ as identified by Gillborn and Youdell (2000) is an example of national testing and schools striving for desirable outcomes, impacting directly upon student equity within schools. The extent to which Gillborn and Youdell's findings apply to schools in rural locales and to schools where school choice and outcomes are not significant to parents requires further assessment. Consideration of the extent to which an A*-C economy is occurring across a wider range of schools; whether this is a factor in schools that are more frequently chosen by the 'disconnected chooser'; and the extent to which this varies across locales, would provide further evidence of the effects of national testing and parental choice.

Although this thesis focuses on the operation and effects of choice at the secondary level, it is important to recognise that choice is operating throughout the school career, from nursery to higher and further education. Vincent, Ball and Kemp (2004) studied the process of parental choice of pre school childcare, focussing on middle class parents in London. They found that whilst there is some evidence of differences between middle class groups in terms of values and perspectives in relation to childcare, overall the similarities between the middle class groups were high. Parents in their study appeared to be very aware of choice and the effect which a good or bad school might have on their children, and appeared to be giving it considerable thought whilst their children were still of nursery age. They were aware that they may want to move house to access a school they deemed more desirable or invest in private schooling. Comparative work comparing the educational trajectories planned for the middle class children by their parents, as evidenced in Vincent, Kemp and Ball's work, with the

²⁸ The A* to C economy a phrase coined by Gillborn and

approach to schooling trajectories of infants living with families in social accommodation, would provide evidence of the extent to which choice trajectories may vary and the possible methods and means of class advantage.

A number of case studies of young people in London by Ball, Maguire, and Macrae (2000) provide insights into post sixteen choice making where the options are, employment, education and training post sixteen. Their work suggests that choice post sixteen is even more complex given the range of options and how these relate to the specific situations and identities of individuals. It suggests that class differences in educational participation and class divisions are as apparent at this stage, as they are in relation to earlier school choice, invisibly binding and constructing opportunities. Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall (2003) also track choices and progress of students navigating secondary and further education. They focus entirely on the middle classes, suggesting that within this group the choices are still diverse and complex. Education and schooling is seen as a significant positional good for the middle class students of the study, whose parents know how to work education to the advantage of their children in terms of academic outcomes.

A number of arguments (Brighouse (2000), Tooley (2005) and Sexton (2002)) claim that parental choice and inter school competition will necessarily work to drive up standards overall. They support the use of a voucher system similar to the system used in the Netherlands with which to implement a market led system. Parental choice over schools, it is argued, contributes to raising standards, since in order to attract students, schools will inevitably have to raise their standards and performance. Whilst in other market systems this would necessarily be the case, the current education market is significantly different due to the central role of the state, the wide range of student abilities, their uneven distribution across schools and the fact that parents do not all use uniform choice criteria.

Consideration of social class-related differences in both parental school choice and student achievement and attainment patterns raises questions of whether middle class perceptions of educational success in terms of academic attainment are appropriate criteria for judgment of an education system. If these studies concerning parental choice are accurate they imply that choice will only increase the disparity of pupils in schools, moving away from common socially inclusive schools to schools largely segregated on

class lines, unless strategies can be developed to make common schooling attractive to all social groups. Currently the education market appears to be a predominantly middle class tool and one that leads to the demise of comprehensive schooling. Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe support this claim, arguing that:

In particular the form taken by the market in education, created by these acts, is producing attritive change in the culture, structure and practices of education. The effect of this is to replace attempts at comprehensivism with a system that is increasingly differentiated and stratified. (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995, p. 178)

Further, Ball (1994) argues that the actions of the middle class are particularly pertinent to school choice because:

Their actions produce or contribute to the perpetuation, inscription and reinvention of social inequalities both old and new.... [and that] Education as a field of distinctions and identities is crucial in high modern society in changing and reproducing the borderlines of class and distributing unevenly and unequally forms of social and cultural capital. (Ball 1994, p. 5-8)

This is echoed by Regan (2001) who argues that a number of government initiatives do not support equality and inclusion:

Comprehensive education is certainly not: [and she includes] The private finance initiative, action zones, beacon schools, specialist schools city academies, fresh start, foundation schools, excellence in cities, league tables, naming and shaming [and she argues for the need to bring issues of equality to the fore] (Regan 2001, p. 36).

Research evidence implies that giving parents greater choice over schools will result in them using this in different ways and with different success criteria. As a result, schools have the potential to become increasingly unrepresentative of the population in their student bodies, although this may be localised, given that the extent of choice available across locales varies enormously. Increased choice may in some cases alter the student population of schools, which has implications for the comprehensive notion of social inclusion: that all students regardless of social background or abilities may be educated together in a common school. Further, choice may affect the extent of opportunity available to different students.

Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall (2003) argue that:

The logic of seeing social exclusion as a dual process [involving middle and lower classes] is that any programme for social inclusion must also be a dual process. Strategies are needed to include 'the top' as well as the 'bottom' of society within the mainstream of public provision. (Power, Edwards, Whitty, Wigfall 2003, p. 157)

This is an important point in relation to an educational market. It is easy to focus only on the disadvantages experienced by certain groups, even though these are often related to the actions of other groups. Addressing issues of social inclusion within schools requires consideration of how to make schools simultaneously attractive to all parents.

This highlights some of the range of issues requiring consideration in relation to choice and diversity of schooling. For example, Ball

(1994) argues that referring to 'opportunity' in relation to a highly inequitable system operates to normalise inequity rather than to challenge it.

This notion of educational discourse serving a particular social function is supported by Whitty (2001) who suggests that:

[E]ducation reforms couched in the rhetoric of choice, difference and diversity often turn out to be sophisticated ways of reproducing existing hierarchies of class and race. (Whitty 2001, p. 289)

Ball's and Whitty's arguments pose the question of how such apparent inequities are actually experienced by students and teachers within schools and in relation to academic achievement. The suggestion that the rhetoric of equality operates to make acceptable the continuation of inequities is particularly pertinent to examining the current position of comprehensive discourse. Under this argument it is possible to suggest that comprehensive schooling was never particularly successful at improving equity but was a rhetorical tool for promoting, at the least, the appearance of equity which the previous tri-partite eleven plus dictated system failed to do. If this is the case, then it is possible that the movement away from the rhetoric of comprehensive schooling may allow inequalities to become more visible. Jeynes (2000) attempted to assess the effects of school choice and concluded that:

[T]here is a dearth of research material adequately testing the effects of choice on academic achievement. (Jeynes 2000, p. 223)

Research is evidently required to consider similarities and differences in the experiences and opportunities that schools provide in relation to student equity and academic attainment.

There are currently a number of government initiatives seeking to overcome some of the educational exclusion and inequities outlined above, for example the Sure Start Early Years Programme, Education Action Zones and City Academies. It is too early to evaluate the effects of such interventions. However, Power and Gewirtz (2001) have examined Education Action Zones (EAZ) and applications for zones and suggest that applications and aims for the zones do not take into account the different forms of injustice experienced by people in those areas. They suggest:

[That zones] actually *contribute* to rather than *address* the cultural injustices experienced by the zone communities...Cultural problems are phrased in terms that reflect rather than challenge the

cultural injustices that these groups experience. ...the particular strategies that the zones want to develop to raise the confidence of parents and students may well serve further to pathologise the intended beneficiaries. (Power and Gewirtz 2001, p. 47)

These considerations imply that parental choice will be problematic if the ideal end is common socially inclusive secondary schools. Besides social inclusion, there is the need to consider whether school choice impacts upon equality of educational opportunity and hence students' academic achievements, or instead makes pre-existing inequities within comprehensive schooling more apparent. Prior to emphasis upon school-choice policies, affluent parents have always been able to move to locales with particular schools or enter their children for remaining grammar school places and also to opt out of the state system altogether.

A further issue highlighted in empirical research by Burgess, Wilson and Lupton (2005) is the relationship between school choice and ethnic segregation across schools. Burgess, Wilson and Lupton's work provides evidence of the extent of ethnic segregation experienced by children across secondary schools. Using 2001 School Census and Population Census data they used indices of dissimilarity and isolation to compare patterns of segregation for ethnic groups, comparing school and neighbourhood data. They found that overall, students were more segregated in school than in their neighbourhoods and that in areas of high population density, ie cities, there were higher levels of segregation between schools. South Asian students also appeared to experience higher levels of segregation than black students. Whilst this data does not necessarily show an effect of choice, the higher degrees of segregation in areas of high population density appear to support an argument for a choice effect, assuming that the effect is not caused by segregated patterns of housing.

High density suggests that distances between schools and neighbourhoods are relatively short. It also suggests a thicker 'market' of school-age children within a small area. These might lead to two pressures towards greater school segregation. First parents and children have more schools to choose from within feasible travelling times. Suppose parents have different preferences in terms of the ethnic mix they want for their child's school. Given more choice in an urban environment, they are more likely to be able to realise that preference. Secondly, schools have more scope to segment the market in a large market. (Burgess, Wilson, Lupton 2005, p. 1043)

They argue that there has been little research addressing the issue of segregation or in analysing the impact of segregation on educational outcomes or the implications for social inclusion. The experiences of particular communities and locales may be discrete and there may be different reasons for the data depending on the situation within specific locales.

Subsequent work needs to provide interpretation for these results. All writers in the field acknowledge that 'segregation' results from a complex and multifaceted set of processes....we need a greater understanding of the consequences of segregation. (Burgess, Wilson, Lupton 2005, p. 1053)

Relationship between choice and comprehensive practice

School choice as it is currently operating for parents inevitably conflicts with the ideas associated with common comprehensive schooling, since choice has the potential to lead to greater rather than less, inequity due to the fact that parents do not have the same opportunities regarding the choices accessible to them. It may be possible that under certain conditions choice may not inevitably lead to inequity as held by Brighouse (2000) and Tooley (2005). The challenge to comprehensive ideas by parental choice directed schooling is identified by Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe as resulting in a 'values drift' due to:

[T]wo very different discourses. [comprehensive discourse and marketisation] However this vocabulary [comprehensive eg needs, equality of access and relationships] and its associated values are increasingly being combined with a market-oriented lexicon which gives emphasis to what is easily visible and can be quantified, in particular student performance and examination results. This discursive shift is part of a process of *values drift* which the market appears to be effecting in schools. (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995, p. 49)

So, comprehensive and current market values might be seen as diametrically opposed. However, consideration of current secondary provision suggests a less extreme picture, largely due to the fact that in many locales parents do not have the choices available in the first place. In rural locales extreme distances between schools prevents the operation of choice. It appears that market place practices and issues are most pertinent to southern cities where there are large discrepancies between schools in terms of socio-economic status and ability of student intakes, which is then represented by school league tables. In such contexts parental choice may also result in changes of school attitudes where schools, successful in terms of league table position, wish to continue to attract the same kinds of students. Research is required into the different patterns of choice in differing locales. A further issue arising from this discussion is the way in which teachers' themselves view the relationship between parental choice and comprehensive values.

The preceding discussion has begun to clarify an area in need of further consideration: what is currently happening to the discourse of comprehensive schooling, given the increased policy and consumer emphasis upon choice and market ideology? This

assumes that a comprehensive discourse existed to start with, which, given its complex development is not straight forward. However, assessment of the value and role of social inclusion and equity at the level of school practice is important in relation to market discourse which makes no claim to such positions. Analysis is required of whether the government's drive toward choice, performance data and marketisation is having any effect on teachers' practices at school level.

This review emphasises the current complexity and ambiguity surrounding discourses of both comprehensive education and parental choice. The identified area of uncertainty concerns how the discourses of 'choice' and 'comprehensive-ness' function at the school level, across schools and locales and how parental choice affects school intakes. Are comprehensive ideas outdated and unhelpful and how do schools and teachers address issues of inclusion and equity? Considering the relationship between theory, policy and school practice, a number of questions emerge. These require school based research in order to address how the concepts, which have been considered, are being interpreted and experienced by schools, teachers and students and the implications that this may have.

Research questions

There is a clear need to examine parental choice and its effects, if any, upon a sample of diverse schools in terms of their student intake and whether this is the same across locales. At a theoretical level this thesis aimed to investigate whether school choice policies impact upon ideas of comprehensive schooling, in particular upon the ideas of social inclusion and equality of educational opportunity. It aimed to consider whether parental choice impacts upon equity and inclusion. At the pragmatic level the questions concern how schools and teachers feel they are able to meet the needs of their students and how they view both school choice and comprehensive ideas in their current setting.

This work addresses these questions by focussing particularly on teachers' and students' experiences and perspectives in a sample of schools of differing status in diverse locales. The project explores differences and similarities between the schools and locales in order to examine what common schooling is actually like and how ideas pertinent to common schooling may be affected by parental choice. This undertaking may seem fundamentally flawed given the unique nature of each school and locale.

However, there is the need for a wider perspective on what effect choice policies and market values are having upon individual teachers' and students' experiences, and a consideration of how schools themselves respond to their diverse intakes and to the pressures of parental choice.

Ideally this project would consider a large and varied sample of schools. However, given inevitable time and resource constraints it was a small scale project, considering schools in two diverse locales with potentially different patterns of choice in operation. The project avoids areas where there are grammar schools and eleven plus systems in operation as these account for a small proportion of regions. Using two locales allows the study to compare them in terms of their teacher and student perspectives. This study focuses particularly on the current situation, and in analysis uses this to inform and reflect upon policies promoting choice and diversity.

Before considering the design and methodological implications it is necessary to summarise the focal aims and objectives of the project:

Aims

1. To consider similarities and or differences in choice patterns, student intake and issues of equity within and between school competition spaces.
2. To examine teacher and student perspectives and experiences of school choice and comprehensive ideas of inclusion and equity.
3. To examine at school level the existence of comprehensive and choice discourses.
4. To examine the impact that school choice and market policies may have upon secondary schooling and comprehensive education.

Questions:

What are current teachers' and students' experiences and perspectives of school choice and comprehensive schooling?

What effects, if any (as identified by teachers and students), does parental choice and an education market, have upon secondary schools in relation to:

a) their student intake?

b) the particular needs of their students?

c) different locales?

d) comprehensive ideas of equality of educational opportunity and social inclusion?

The following chapter outlines the ways in which these questions are addressed and the paradigmatic framework used.



Chapter Three

Methodology and design

Methodology

As Chapter Two illustrates, there is developing sociological theory regarding the diversity of parental choice and its relationship to socio-economic status and economic based work, modelling how choice and school markets appear to be operating theoretically (Taylor 2002, Burgess 2005). Less work is concerned with how teachers and schools themselves perceive and experience the interplay of comprehensive ideas and school choice policies in school practice (Gorard 1997). The need for qualitative work to explore and explain economic models of choice underpinned the development of a methodology and design for the study.

The thesis uses qualitative data to consider how micro level school experiences relate to the macro picture. The study, is based on interviews with students and teachers conducted in locales where there appeared to be differing degrees of school choice in operation. As the thesis has thus far illustrated, the structures and types of secondary school in England are diverse and complex. This work could not address all the variations but sought to paint a fuller picture of secondary school experience for teachers and students within a sample of schools within two diverse locales.

The first half of this chapter discusses the considerations, intentions, starting position and initial assumptions of the research, along with theoretical positions relevant to the project. The second half describes the design used to acquire the data.

At policy level this is inevitably in part a critical project, looking at how political policies and theories of parental choice, diversity and education markets are experienced at the school level by teachers and students. Equity and social inclusion, often viewed as ideas central to comprehensive schooling, required examination in relation to the previously mentioned policy developments, along with the sociological considerations of parents as diverse educational choosers and the effects of market values and parental choice upon schools.

Initial expectations and assumptions

School choice literature implies an expectation of possible relationships and or differences between schools in relation to both the amount of competition and choice which they perceive and experience, and their student intake. There was also the potential for different expectations amongst both teachers and students, possibly correlating with socio-economic status and the extent to which particular schools were concerned with accountability, regardless of the degree of choice operating within a locale. Initially I expected a degree of disparity and inequity of experience between schools, as league tables, Ofsted reports and the media implied. The extent of this and its relationship to parental choice as experienced by teachers and students in schools required further consideration.

There was a particular need to consider school experience in relation to socio-economic status since, if the choice studies referred to are correct, choice may have resulted in a disparity of intake between schools. Whether the existence of choice markets in education had the effect of raising standards as is theorised (Brighouse 2000, Sexton 2002, Gorard, Taylor and Fitz 2002) was held as speculative prior to the research due to different choice strategies and the diversity of local markets (Taylor 2001). Studies of parents as educational choice makers suggested that school diversity and different academic expectations varied across schools in relation to socio-economic status of student intakes. There was evidence of uncertainty regarding the extent to which equality of educational opportunity and new social inclusion were important to and valued by schools. Examination of this uncertainty was an initial research aim. It was important to consider the extent to which current choice and diversity arguments had potentially devalued comprehensive ideas, which for the purpose of this project meant old comprehensive social inclusion, equality of experience and opportunity, and teachers' experiences of this.

The role of theory and practice in the study

Previously I argued philosophically²⁹ that equality of educational opportunity and social inclusion are fundamental educative principles central to the idea of comprehensive schooling and to all forms of just common schooling. This argument took place at the level of definitions and considered notions of social justice, implying that all students should have equal opportunities available to them and that social inclusion is an important idea. At the level of ideas, this argument is appropriate and assisted in clarifying important aims and ideas of education. However, it fails to address the nuances of school practice, the current move toward diversity of provision and school choice, and more applied sociological concerns. Here, the current value of equity and social inclusion is considered in relation to choice and school diversity, focussing particularly on experience and practice at the school level.

The extent to which apriori educational theory, principles and aims: choice, diversity, equity and inclusion are appropriate in relation to the lived reality of schooling requires attention. Central to this work is the question of whether the aims of equality of educational experience and opportunity, social inclusion and diversity are practically important, or applied top down to schooling, which developed from a particular social and historical position to meet local need, rather than fulfil social, political or ideological aims. Hunter's (1996) arguments based on a Foucaudian interpretation imply that the top down imposition of theoretical ideas and principles conflict with the ways in which schooling historically evolved.

This study addresses the relationship between comprehensive and market theories and school practice. This is inevitably concerned with how theory and policy meet practice, and the extent to which this is multi-directional. At a critical level this requires a multi-layered consideration, 'top down' and 'bottom up' with the locus of concern being primarily the space where theory and practice meet, which is open to both structural and post-structural interpretation.

²⁹ See Heath, N (2003), A philosophical analysis of the central ideas underpinning comprehensive secondary education, Thesis (M.Phil.) - University of Cambridge, 2003. Faculty of Education

Assumptions and objectivity

Several epistemological assumptions underpin this project and require consideration. Firstly, the project is inevitably a political one due to the fact that systems of secondary schooling are inherently dependent upon government policy, and any considerations and analysis will have implicit implications for secondary school policy. The work is also positioned, beginning with equity and social inclusion as two theoretically central and positive ideas. In justification of this position, my initial analytic and philosophical analysis of common schooling was concerned with discovering which ideas were important to common schooling and could be supported through rational argument where the premises and conclusions were open to rational scrutiny and their logic open to test. This work provided logical support for the aims of social inclusion and equity.

The notion of objective educational research is itself complex, inextricably linked with empiricist ideas. Very little educational research can be truly positivist due to the nature and scale of the subject matter and the aspects being considered. To assume that educational research can and should be objective in a positivist sense, and to apply objective-subjective binaries to education is, I think, to make a category mistake (in a sense similar to that used by Ryle (1949) when referring to the mind being viewed as more than its quantifiable attributes). To fully understand the multifaceted nature of education requires consideration at macro and micro, objective and subjective levels. This does not render all qualitative educational research entirely subjective, arbitrary and of little actual use. Instead, educational research requires different kinds of parameters and conditions. One can be objective in research, for example, by analysing large scale school data sets, but research solely of this nature is reductionist, failing to take account of school practice and experience from the perspective of human social actors. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) note:

Human behaviour, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities. Qualitative data, it is asserted, can provide rich insight into human behaviour (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p. 106)

This project considers subjective personal opinions and individual school practices in order to evaluate how these relate to a number of theoretical positions and policies. The qualitative interviews conducted with teachers and students in this study are unique, subjective and not open to large scale generalisation. This is valuable as a means to

consider and understand how personal perspectives and experiences relate to theoretical ideas and also to consider recurring themes among participants, which could be used to support and explain, for example, statistical analysis of school choice patterns. Education and schooling is an area where theory and practice inevitably impact upon one another and the human aspect of this cannot be overlooked, despite the fact that it raises problems for empirical research approaches.

It may be argued that only objective empirical research is of useful pragmatic value, suggesting that there is no place for consideration of personal experience in education. However, given that personal relationships and individual experiences are central to human life and hence education, to rule out the study of these on the grounds that they have no objective use for policy is to overlook education at the most fundamental level. Further, education is an exceedingly complex enterprise open to analysis at different levels, both structural and post-structural, quantitative and qualitative. As referred to at the start of this chapter, Burgess' (2005) economic analysis, whilst conforming to an empiricist ideal, is only able to hypothesise reasons for the data patterns and lacks the rich in-depth analysis necessary to provide support for or to negate the statistical models. This provides evidence of the need for multi-method perspectives and communication within and between forms of educational research.

This study began with a number of framing research questions. However, a positive absolute answer to these questions, comparable with scientific questions open to empirical test was not expected, since the nature of the subject matter is different. The research was not concerned with universal laws but with observing and investigating what was happening at the level of human players. How were policies being interpreted and adapted by teachers, how were schools responding to selective policies and what were student perceptions of their experience?

In this work a number of traditional distinctions regarding research approaches were unhelpful: positivism and anti-positivism was not a useful distinction here; similarly the approach required inevitably fell between determinism and voluntarism. With this field of study one cannot develop conclusive laws or theories, which would be to misunderstand the very nature of the subject. An approach relevant to the lived reality of schooling, as an exceedingly complex social phenomena, was instead required. All educational research inevitably involves a degree of compromise. This project, for

example, was only able to acquire snapshots of pragmatic experiences, rather than an in depth and fully idiographic ethnographic account of each school. Further, it was not just concerned with direct experience taken at face value, instead, analysing the experiences in light of a number of themes and post-structural discourses. Of particular concern to the project was the issue of how practical experiences related to policy and theory, which took the research beyond an entirely interpretive phenomenological or ethno-methodological approach.

The aim of the research was to explore and collect data which could be used to draw tentative working conclusions concerning the initial questions, which may be resonant with other settings and locales. A point is inevitably required between objectivity and subjectivity, otherwise educational research is practically meaningless and potentially useful questions will be ignored. This work was concerned to address this multiplicity, by focussing particularly on the overlap between theory, practice and experience. This raises a number of methodological and paradigmatic complexities, addressed in the following discussion. Critical educational research (Carr and Kemmis 1986), for example, views positivist and interpretive approaches as neglecting political and ideological contexts within which this study is inevitably rooted. Most paradigmatic approaches could be used to investigate an aspect of the questions the research asks. A critical perspective provides greater depth. However, the project was critical but not emancipatory.

Validity, reliability and reflexivity

As the initial methodological consideration acknowledges, classical empirical validity is problematic for educational research. The objectivity of positivist empirical work, whilst often viewed as the correct position for any research, can be challenged on the grounds that it is itself a socially constructed position, built on a number of fundamental assumptions. With regard to this project it was impossible to identify, yet alone control, for the multitude of variables which may or may not have been at play. However, the study was concerned with looking at a number of schools in a particular instance and in interviewing and gaining opinions and perspectives from students and teachers. It was not concerned with drawing hard and conclusive causal conclusions or results, which could necessarily be generalised to larger populations but instead with painting a rich

qualitative picture of how a number of schools, students and teachers experienced and responded to both school choice and comprehensive ideas. A basic comparison of sample schools was possible through the use of Ofsted and league tables. Analyses of respondents' experiences were inevitably qualitative and tentative, since personal experience was open to interpretation and there were too many extraneous factors to be able to provide complete or conclusive analysis. This kind of project requires a different understanding of the notion of validity, to take account of its concern with examining subjective human experiences. Miles and Huberman (1994) support this suggesting that verification of qualitative data occurs through a number of processes whereby stories and their analyses are discussed, reviewed and debated. They argue that meanings which are drawn from the data have to be considered in relation to 'their plausibility, their sturdiness, their "confirmability"- that is their validity' (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 11)

Research of this nature requires a sense of honesty on the part of the researcher and a willingness to allow the voice of the data to be exposed and explored. The researcher is inevitably part of the researched world and needs to reflect on this and their relationship with that being researched when considering the data gained. This qualitative project was concerned with understanding the perspectives of those interviewed and with providing as authentic an account as possible. Recourse to post-structural analysis acknowledges this entrenched place of the researcher. The following quotation from Stronach and MacLure (1997) in relation to their postmodern resistance to define educational research and to distinguish between research approaches, acknowledges, I think, the inescapably entrenched nature of the researcher and the inevitable need for constant reflection.

From within this space of partial connections, there is no absolute 'free space', no 'point of exteriority' on which to stand in order to tell the difference and assign positions. Whatever space this book [or in this case this research] opens up, it is also located *within* a pre-existing, highly complicated space. It cannot be a question of stepping outside; but rather an operation of 'spacing', which forces a space within. (Stronach and Maclure 1997, p. 12)

The research questions attempted to avoid leading questions or questions implicitly implying a research position. Interview data was gathered and examined in the spirit of authenticity rather than empirical validity, where authenticity refers to a commitment to view the data in its own context and with sensitivity to what is actually being observed.

From a purely objective, scientific frame of enquiry this work would be critiqued for its lack of generalisability, uncontrolled design with extraneous variables, potential researcher bias and so on. To try to apply these categories to the study is, however, as this discussion has shown, to misunderstand the nature of the research which can only claim to offer a reflexive and honestly positioned account.

This has implications for the ways in which knowledge produced by the research is perceived. It is not concerned with pre-existing truths but with discovering how a number of individuals experienced the particular socially constructed phenomena of schooling, choice policies and more abstract ideas of inclusion and equity. The knowledge produced by the project is therefore of a specific and situated nature.

Theoretical research perspectives and their relationship to the study

The use of grounded theory³⁰(Glaser and Strauss 1967), to consider teachers' and students' experiences and the position of the ideas of equity and inclusion initially appeared useful in attempting to step outside of theory and consider that which emerged. The apparent autonomy of this was appealing and would have been an interesting tool for examining whether theories and practices overlap. But comprehensive schooling and parental choice issues are not theory neutral. There is too much existing theory intertwined with the project to step outside in a grounded fashion. This research is embedded within educational policy and current sociological theory. There are multiple theories already in play and this work is concerned with evaluating them in relation to practice and relating them to the personal, which inevitably requires an acknowledgement of the current rooted position.

The project was inevitably critical, starting from a position which valued the ideas of equity and social inclusion, and which sought to examine the relationship of these ideas

³⁰ Grounded Theory in this context refers to the process of systematically generating theory from within the data, letting the data speak, and theory emerge as opposed to applying and testing hypotheses and theory in relation to the data gained. The aim is to conceptualise what is going on in the field. The theory developed from the data may be of either a substantive or formal nature. For further clarification and evidence of the ongoing debate concerning the methods of grounded theory see: Glaser BG, Strauss A. (1967) *Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*; Strauss A, Corbin J.(1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*.

with parental choice mechanisms and school practice, focussing particularly on the experiences of those in the field. Critical Theory³¹ was pertinent to this consideration, since it sought to address inequities in relation to an idea of an equal and democratic society by giving voice to the perspectives of teachers and students.

The ideal of Praxis, adopted by critical theory, of refusing to separate action and reflection, theory and practice, and to instead see them happening simultaneously, is a helpful notion leading to the Aristotelian sense of phronesis or practical wisdom. This idea was useful since this work was particularly concerned with the interconnection between theory and practice. One needs to consider whether teachers were alienated by policy and whether they were hindered in fulfilling their educational aims. What was the relationship between policy and phronesis, between policy and alienation? Through considering and understanding teachers' experiences and perspectives the hope was that it would be possible to consider the effect of policies upon teacher experience.

Habermas'(1974) critical approach contained a number of helpful tenets, outlined below by Carr and Kemmis:

a social process that combines collaboration in the process of critique with the political determination to act to overcome contradictions in the rationality and justice of social action and social institutions. A critical social science will be one that goes beyond critique to critical praxis. (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.144)

The sense in which Critical Theory does not wish to explain or account for the social world but to transform it is problematic. I argue that critical work may not necessarily have to be actually emancipatory and instead may be used in an evaluative and assessment capacity. Habermas' claim that reflection without action is just verbalisation, is interesting here since much rests upon how the term action is understood. With education, in particular, there are limited channels of action. This research implicitly sought dialogic solutions, aiming to give space to teachers' and students' perspectives and to their feelings regarding change, although there was limited space to consider their solutions to the problems they identified.

³¹ Critical Theory developed from the work of Horkheimer, a member of the Frankfurt school in the 1930's. In his essay Traditional and Critical Theory (1937) he set out a theory concerned with critiquing society rather than simply observing and theorising from what was there. Habermas developed critical theory further suggesting that its aim was to develop knowledge exposing contradictions and injustices in social actions which would allow individuals to emancipate themselves through their own critical awareness. For an account of critical theory see Carr and Kemis (1986) *Becoming Critical*.

Habermas wanted a democratic and creative opportunity for all voices to be heard in the public sphere and recognised that no one theory alone could be completely adequate, therefore requiring an eclectic approach. This is particularly relevant to this study, which inevitably traverses between a number of interconnected themes and theories. Whilst aspects of Critical Theory are important to this work, post-structural positions provide a means to further address the experiences of teachers and students and to analyse these in terms of the discourses which both shape them and which they deploy. It also allows insight into the ways in which educational policies and structures are both created and themselves exert discursive influence. These aspects of Foucauldian analysis provide different tools and ways of understanding the complex relationships between theory and practice.

The notion of power is central to this work, particularly in relation to social class, government policies and ideas of equity and inclusion. There is an inevitable tension between understanding power as that which is held and viewing it in a dispositional sense. The way in which power is understood within subsequent analysis is defined in Chapter Four.

Foucault (1976) provides post-structural tools to address the research questions, by focussing data analysis upon the discourses themselves, how they are created and operate. Such analysis allows for detailed work at the level of teachers and students and seeks to address the data itself outside of grand theories which may also be imposed. A thorough account of how this analysis operates in this project is provided in the following chapter as the tools and position of the analysis were further developed following initial data collection. This allowed the initial themes in the data to become apparent and avoided imposing an inappropriate structure on the data. Instead themes and theories relevant to the data are addressed in Chapter Four prior to analysis.

In relation to the process described above it is useful to consider Hunters' post-structuralist argument that:

[H]istorical phenomena are seen to emerge not as realizations of underlying principles or developmental laws, but as contingent assemblages put together under blind historical circumstances (Hunter 1996, p. 147)

This implies the need to view the data gained from the schools initially as a result of a 'contingent assemblage' of experiences, discourses and circumstances. This provides a different, and perhaps overlooked, perspective upon the actual role and value of

educational principles and theories. For example, whilst the ideas of social inclusion and equity are now often related to a comprehensive idea, there was a considerable lack of any clearly principled idea of comprehensive schooling when it was first introduced. It is therefore useful to keep this in mind when considering how comprehensive ideas relate to practice.

Hunter further identifies, in Foucault's work, the idea of moving away from analysis based upon the idea that pre-existing principles are evolving and influencing development, to the position that many phenomena are actually not the result of the gradual application of laws and principles but instead emerge from a particular temporal situation.

[In] *Discipline and Punish* this shift in the axis of analysis is marked in the subordination of educational principle to a concern with what might be called the habitus of the school itself... Foucault's concern is to describe not the ideals of education or its hidden class functions but the detailed organization of the school. (Hunter 1996, p. 147)

This raises questions concerning whether the study addresses the right areas and categories, since it gives weight to ideas and theories of comprehensive schooling and choice. Hunter's analysis is particularly relevant to the case of comprehensive schooling where there exists a clear divide between theory and practice. Considering the practical assemblage of the school, Hunter suggests that:

[R]ather than conducting themselves on the basis of unrealised and uncompromising principles, analysts are given the opportunity to temper their demands of the school system and to situate their analysis in relation to the kinds of problems that the system has actually been improvised to cope with. (Hunter 1996, p. 148)

This supports the importance of focussing upon the lived reality of school experience and viewing current conditions as a response to a particular set of problems and issues, rather than pre-empting what may or may not be happening by viewing teachers' and students' experiences only in terms of how they may relate to theory. This argument justifies this work, which developed from an initially theoretical project. If data analysis focussed solely on the relationships between theoretical ideas of choice, equity, inclusion and practice it would fail to take account of within school factors and the extent to which the current situation may be a response to a particular set of circumstances. Analysis therefore needs to be aware and reflexive upon both the relationships between theory, policy and practice and specific school circumstances and experiences. Chapter Four justifies this from a post-structural perspective by arguing that theory and policy may themselves be analysed in terms of discourse and in relation

to the extent to which they both create power and allow it to function. This discussion has begun to identify why a multi-layered analysis considering post-structural accounts alongside more structurally based sociological research is central to the project, since to adopt either one of these positions in their entirety negates some areas of experience.

Conclusions

In this project, interpretive analysis of teachers' and students' experience is considered and, where appropriate, related to policy and theory. Application of a Foucauldian notion of discourse to the data provides another level of interpretation and explanation. The relationship between these methods is addressed more fully in the subsequent chapter.

Given the nature of the research and this discussion, an integrative approach was necessary drawing upon a number of perspectives. The project was fundamentally critical, concerned with accessing teachers' and students' perspectives as a tool for re-evaluation of current comprehensive and choice theories and practice. However, it did not extend to aiming for practical emancipation as an end. This critical consideration of practitioner experience had also to recognise the post-structural importance of the participant's voice and the operation of discursive power in both policy and practice in relation to school experience.

In critique, it may be argued that in attempting this kind of multi-layered and multi-levelled analysis, one weakens and devalues the individual approaches. However, given the complex nature of the area investigated, to adopt one methodology restricts and fails to acknowledge the complex relationships between educational theory and practice. The discourses of comprehensive schooling and parental choice at the levels of theory and practice necessarily require both individual and combined analysis. Ball (1994) used such an approach when considering education reform, in particular the Education Act 1988, by seeking to combine post-structural, ethnographic and critical analysis. He argues that:

Three epistemologies or analytic perspectives fight to be heard in this theory-work. They are employed as interpretive resources in an exercise in 'applied sociology'. At times they clash and grate against one another, but the resultant friction is, I hope purposeful and effective rather than a distraction. (Ball 1994, p. 1-2)

Further Ball argues that:

The challenge is to relate together analytically the ad hocery of the macro with the ad hocery of the micro without losing sight of the systematic bases and effects of adhoc social actions: to look for the iterations embedded within chaos. As I see it this also involves some rethinking of the simplicities of the structure/ agency dichotomy. (Ball 1994, p. 15)

Ball's position coheres with this work, which took account of theoretical, political and philosophical concerns, when seeking to examine and assess these in relation to school practice and to teachers' and students' experiences. The work was also concerned to give weight and value to individual school, teacher and pupil voices and experiences. Hunter and Foucault, provide strong arguments for not overlooking this level of analysis, particularly as the theory-practice binary proposed and used in this project may in practice at the micro level not be in operation to the extent proposed. To ignore analysis which considers this possibility limits research findings. A complex multi-levelled analysis was clearly appropriate here and required what Ball terms a 'toolbox of diverse concepts and theories'. (Ball 1994, p. 14)

Further support for this complex and somewhat unusual approach is provided by Ozga (2000) who argues for the need to bring together macro and micro-level analysis.

An integrated model supports this analysis by providing a number of perspectives and reflections upon the data. The experiences of teachers and students require both critical and post-structural consideration in their own right. Teachers' and students' perspectives are considered in relation to the associated theories, principles and policies related to the project, which are themselves considered discursively.

Chapter Four outlines in greater depth the theoretical positions referred to in the thesis. Foucauldian analysis is used as the primary data analysis tool, whilst Bourdieu's work and Critical Race Theory support this. Before outlining these approaches in greater depth it is necessary to explain the limits of and the extent to which certain positions are used within the analysis. Within the thesis a Foucauldian account is taken as the primary tool of analysis. When beginning to analyse the data, issues of race and specific aspects of class and familial transmission of cultural values and properties were visible themes. Hence, reference to Bourdieu allowed notions of capital to be considered, enabling analysis to focus on areas which a Foucauldian analysis alone might have overlooked.

Whilst Bourdieu's concept of capital is used alongside the Foucauldian analysis, it is not developed as fully as it might be. Foucauldian analysis was initially used, with Bourdieu's capitals referred to when it added to and developed the account. For the sake of this analysis the notion of capitals is used to think about structural and cultural factors, rather than developing an analysis concerned with the minutiae of individual's habitus, a line of analysis that has the potential to work well with a post-structural account. Capital is used as an explanatory tool to explain aspects of the data which may have been overlooked or else inadequately explained solely in relation to a post-structural account. Conflicts and tensions result from this, particularly in relation to considering how far to develop an account based on Bourdieu's work. At times the reader may feel that Bourdieu's work is not taken far enough or could have been explored in greater depth in relation to the data. Whilst this may be the case, I was faced with the difficulty of deciding how far to take each analysis. This has resulted in a Foucauldian account being given primacy. However, the data may be analysed in future work to a greater extent in relation to aspects of capital and habitus. Such analysis would provide a useful comparison for evaluations of the roles and values of the two approaches. I could have carried out the analysis solely from a position of capital, however I felt that this carried the danger of overlooking discursive issues.

Project design

To address the questions and aims of the thesis, teachers' and pupils' perspectives in three schools in each of two different locales were considered. Individual teacher interviews with a range of teachers within each school were conducted along with student interviews of year eight and year ten students. The reasons for choosing these year groups are explained on page 20. The student interviews were conducted with students in small friendship groups of between three and six students. A pilot study in one school was carried out to trial and assess the interview questions and to consider the possible use of a questionnaire.

As the study was concerned with looking at the relationships between comprehensive theory, choice policies and school practice, it was important to consider as diverse a range of schools as possible. However, given the emphasis upon school choice it was necessary to look at teachers' and students' perspectives in a number of schools with

shared competition spaces, or in close proximity, depending upon the degree of competition and school choice in operation in the locales selected. Schools were considered in East Town, a locale where parental choice is a significant factor, and in North Town, a locale where there appears to be less drive for parental choice. A number of studies have considered schools in London, where there are a number of diverse locales and competition spaces. This study focussed instead on provincial locales outside of London in an attempt to gain information about how choice is operating and affecting schools in different regions. The field work was carried out in schools between March and December 2004.

Sampling

As noted in Chapter Two, Taylor (2001) identified and examined the existence of competition spaces in a number of locales. Competition spaces were important and relevant to this study since parental choice appeared to be a factor directly contributing to and maintaining competition spaces between schools. Obviously school accountability structures, league tables and national testing may also be contributing factors. For this project to examine the effects of choice upon teacher and pupil experiences it was important to sample schools in locales where there appeared to be different levels of competition and in turn differing levels and types of parental choice. Initial analysis of published league table data suggested a number of possible patterns of school achievement, types of school and possible patterns of parental choice across locales. The initially identified patterns are outlined below.

It must be recognised that characterizing areas in relation to levels of school choice using GCSE results and levels of free school meals is a working approach, and is by no means a direct measure of parental choice. It was used here as an initial way to consider locales, where there might be particular levels of choice operating. This was then assessed in relation to the perspectives of teachers in the schools.

The following analysis is a tentative one. It makes a number of assumptions about the nature of school choices, which are inevitable due to the limited scope of the league table data being considered. Further, the analysis does not take account of local geography, distances between locales, school choice preferences and local economics, for example house prices. The patterns that emerge illustrate the complexity of current

secondary schooling and the extent of regional variations in both school results and student intakes.³² The current analysis has not been statistically analysed, however the apparent patterns are useful to this project.

Consideration of league table data for a number of locales suggests that there may be different patterns of school attainment and student intake across locales. Percentages of free school meals for each school in a number of locales were considered and compared with the percentage of A*-C GCSE results gained by each school. From this a number of inferences concerning how parental choice might be operating in different locales were made. There appeared to be three potential patterns of parental choice and school achievement emerging. These patterns are outlined below and examples are provided in the appendix. Statistical analysis is required to examine the validity of these apparent patterns. They assume that league table data is both used by parents and influences parental choice which itself requires further evaluation.

Type 1: High level choice and highly disparate school results

- This pattern appears in a number of locales, eg Bristol, Leeds, Sheffield, Cambridge.
- There is much diversity in school type. For example independent schools, specialist schools, religious schools and non-specialist schools.
- There is much diversity in percentages of students receiving free school meals.
- A wide range of A*-C GCSE results between schools, implying possibly a high degree of parental choice with some parents choosing private schooling or attempting to send their children to schools perceived to be successful in terms of A*-C pass rate.
- Potential correlation between results and numbers of students receiving free school meals.

Type 1b: Moderate levels of choice and moderate disparity of school results

³² League table data for examples of regions conforming to these patterns is included in the appendix and the full extent of the nationwide data may be viewed at:
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/performancetables/schools_03.shtml

There are a number of other locales that appear to mirror the patterns identified in Type 1a, but to a lesser extent, because the locales are smaller or have a much smaller independent sector. Examples of locales which appear to fit this pattern include Swindon and Liverpool.

Type 2: Low level parental choice and low disparity of school results (with generally LOW results)

- This pattern appears in a number of northern locales including Calderdale, Doncaster and Hull. Schools appear to be fairly comprehensive and there are few if any independent schools.
- Low diversity in student intake in terms of percentage of students receiving free school meals.
- Low diversity in A*-C GCSE pass rates between schools, which are generally around or below national average.
- Some evidence of parental choice of a few schools (Eg church schools) but overall evidence of less parental choice between schools as in terms of published school data there are less disparities. The average results for schools in these locales are uniform and all generally lower than the national average.

Type 3: Low level parental choice and low disparity of school result (with generally HIGH results)

- There are a number of locales where the patterns of results and intake appear to be similar to type 2. However these are largely rural locales where there is little choice due to geography in the form of distances between schools, eg Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, North Somerset, Shropshire and Bedfordshire.
- Low diversity in student intake in terms of percentage of students receiving free school meals.
- Low diversity in A*-C GCSE pass rates between schools which are usually high, above national average.
- Student intake appears more comprehensive than in type 1 locales.

Sample locales

Provincial locales which appeared to fit the identified patterns and which covered the north and the south of the country were considered. Initially the aim was to study a sample of three schools within a competition space within each of the three types of pattern. However, this was reconsidered following the initial pilot study within one school, which suggested that the amount of data and the extent of issues and themes within it would render the use of three locales too much for the scope of the PhD (see p.26). Two similar sized locales were selected where choice appeared to be having different effects. A full description of the sample locales and each of the sample schools is found at the beginning of Chapter Five.

Purposive Sampling to Access Competition Spaces

The aim was to use a purposive snowball sample of schools which shared competition spaces or competed with neighbouring schools for students. This was assessed by each school's perception of which schools they were in competition with and, where available from school choice preference data which indicated how many pupils place each school as their first, second or third choice. From this the aim was to select three schools that constituted a competition space within each locale. The schools varied in terms of specialist status and up to one faith school was considered in each sample. Senior teachers in the schools were asked about the schools they perceived themselves to be in competition with. This led to the sample being acquired in an incremental fashion. In North Town where there was no clear sense of a competition space, schools were selected on the grounds of geographic proximity and variety, which resulted in a Catholic school being included within the North Town sample.

The sampling method, although subjective and small scale, was justified on the grounds that the study was concerned with the effects that parental choice may be having upon schools, particularly in terms of competition. Using schools within a competition space allowed for consideration of schools which were more and less successful in attracting students, how schools responded to this and any effects upon students in terms of inclusion and equity. Whilst the aim was to obtain a sample of schools from within a competition space in each locale, this assumed that such schools would be willing to participate in the study. The sample obtained was as close as possible to schools within

a competition space, however where some schools declined to participate, as was the case in both East Town and North Town, additional selection criteria were used, to include schools in closest proximity, and schools which were identified as gaining students from the areas surrounding other schools in the sample.

Access issues

Schools in the main sample were initially contacted by telephone and asked for the appropriate person to contact regarding a research project. This person, usually the head teacher or deputy was then e-mailed about the project. After establishing positive contact a formal letter outlining the project was sent to the school. During initial conversations and meetings with the head teacher or senior teacher, schools perceived to be in competition were identified. In acquiring a sample for the pilot study a number of methods of contacting schools were tried. Letters received a low response rate and were difficult to follow up whilst e-mail contact provided a much higher and more positive response rate. Three potential schools for the pilot study in East Town were identified in this fashion.

Within school sampling

Within the three schools in each locale the following data was required:

- Teacher interviews;
- Student interviews; and
- School performance and intake data.

1. Interviews with senior managers and head teachers

- 2-3 from each school.
- Concerned with how they felt about school choice and their own school intake and inclusion and equity within the school.

2. Interviews with a sample of teachers from each school

- New and experienced teachers, equal numbers of whom taught arts and science subjects, in order to avoid potential bias arising from possibly different responses by different subject teachers. A range of age and experience to account for the possibility that perspectives may vary according to these factors.

- Semi-structured interviews with guide questions to access teacher opinions regarding ideas of comprehensive schooling, the role of choice and any impact which this may or may not have upon their teaching and the school population.

3. Interviews with students

- Interviews with groups of students in friendship groups of three to six students. Students were interviewed in friendship groups as the project was concerned with accessing student feeling and experience which is most easy to access when students are with their peers rather than in a teacher selected group.
- In each school students from one year eight and one year ten, mixed ability tutor group were interviewed. Year eight students were chosen because it was hoped that the experience of school choice was still fresh to them. Year ten were selected because they had made option choices and started on these courses and so would be able to reflect on the outcomes of their choices. Further, year ten students were easier to access than year eleven students in their examination year.
- Examining student perceptions of their own school in relation to other schools, their experiences of school choice, and the opportunities, which they felt they were given was discussed in small focus groups, with a series of questions to guide the discussion.

The following tables illustrate the actual sample size of teachers and students.

Table 3.1: Sample size and distribution: student and teacher interviews

Interviews School	East Town (high choice locale)			North Town (Low choice locale)			Sample Totals
	East Town Secondary	Poplar School	Median School	North Town Secondary	North Town Sport	St Mary's	
Teachers	7	6	1	6	7	5	32 teachers
Students *	8 groups	7	8	9	8	6	46 groups of students
Sample Totals	15	13	9	14	15	11	78 interviews

* Students in small groups from one year eight and one year ten tutor group from each school.

The sample of teachers from each school is clarified in the table below according to their position within the school and subjects taught.

Table 3.2 Break down of teacher interviews by gender and position/ subject.

School	Teacher	Senior teacher	Class teacher
East Town Secondary		Head teacher, white male	SENCO white female (English)
		Head of year, white female (English)	Language teacher, white female
			PE teacher white male
			Maths teacher, white male
			Physics teacher, white male
Poplar School		Head teacher, white male	Art teacher, white female
		Deputy head, white male	English teacher, white female
		Senior teacher, white male	Maths teacher, white female
			DT teacher, white male
			Teaching assistant, white female.
Median School		Head of year, white male (foreign languages)	

North Town Secondary		Head teacher, white male	Music teacher, white male
		Senior teacher, Head of transition and marketing, white female (music)	Drama teacher, white female
		Head of year, white female (maths)	Newly qualified teacher, white female (science)
North Town Sport		Deputy head, white male (ICT)	Geography teacher, white female
		Senior management team, white male (science)	Geography teacher, white female
			History teacher, white male
			Science teacher, white female
			Maths teacher, white female
St Mary's North Town		Deputy head teacher, white, male	Art teacher, white female
		Head of year, white female (science)	English teacher, white female
			Science teacher, white male
			Science teacher, white female

School data

School performance and intake data was acquired to allow for comparisons between schools. This included: standard test results; league table positions; value added data; socio-economic intake of the student population, measured by the number of students receiving free school meals; number of special needs students; number of empty or surplus places; and percentage of students putting the school as their first choice preference. This data was then used to inform comparisons and consider how parental choice patterns and judgements actually applied to the schools themselves.

The project aimed to allow for some flexibility within the sample locales, given that some schools allowed greater access than others, or had particularly interesting features requiring further consideration. There was the potential within the design for sample sizes and time allocated to each school to change proportionately. However, in practice each school allowed similar access, with the exception of Median School East Town where it was not possible to interview a sample of teachers.

Interviews

The main source of data with which the study was concerned was gained through interviews with a sample of 34 teachers and 204 students, in small groups. Due to the complex nature of the questions and aims that this work addresses, structured interview questions were initially used in the pilot study. The questions to be asked fell into distinct categories. The interview schedules took account of these categories and the distinct themes contained within the research questions overlap across the questions for each respondent group (senior managers, teachers and students).

The interview schedules were divided into the following thematic areas:

For students:

Section 1: School choice

Section 2: Opportunities

Section 3: Inclusion and equality

Section 4: Comprehensive schooling and student selection

For Senior managers and teachers:

Section 1: School population and choice market

Section 2: Catering for student population, equality and inclusion

Section 3: Comprehensive schooling

Under each of these categories were a number of specific questions.³³ Some overlap is apparent between the questions. This was designed to ensure that each question was covered fully. The additional replicating questions were used as a safeguard to ensure that: areas were not accidentally omitted; that the necessary information was accessed; and to provide alternative ways to access the required information. When piloted, the interview schedules were adapted in order to be most accessible to the interviewees. The interview schedule as designed worked best as an interview guide and initial pilot work found that often teachers covered a number of questions and themes in answer to one question. This required a flexible use of the interview questions to prevent replicating questions and information. The interview schedule remained flexible to allow for additional discussion if and when this was appropriate. Given the projects critical aims of accessing teachers' and students' perspectives, a degree of flexibility was both coherent with the methodology and necessary in order to access as fully as possible discourses regarding equity and choice and to allow access to teacher and student voice.

Data and analysis

School data comparisons and analysis of league table data and school choice preferences were related to the qualitative analysis of the interview data, which was analysed initially according to the research aims and interview themes, and subsequently in relation to these and any additional areas emerging from the study. The data analysis was ongoing as the project developed and different schools were incorporated into the study. Analysis began at an individual school level examining how the schools' statistical data and teachers' and students' responses related to one another and to theoretical work on comprehensive ideas and school choice, along with any issues and themes arising from this. The analysis was then developed to consider all the

³³ See full interview schedules in the Appendix.

schools within the sample, and more general comparisons between the locales. This analysis aimed to consider similarities and disparities within and between schools and to use the data to re-evaluate the role and value of comprehensive ideas at the school level and any pragmatic effects of parental choice.

Ethics

The ethical considerations pertinent to the research concerned matters of participant confidentiality and informed consent. I followed the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association with regard to these.³⁴ Teacher, student and school confidentiality was assured and informed consent was gained from teachers taking part in research interviews. The only exception to this was regarding students where I told them that if they told me anything which meant that they were in any danger that I may have to speak to someone about it, but that I would discuss it with them first. Teachers were given a letter outlining the project and were asked to sign a consent form before taking part in the interview. With regard to informed consent for students this was decided in conjunction with the head teacher of each school. Where possible letters were sent to parents requesting their consent, with an 'opt in' clause. One school wanted an 'opt out clause' and in two schools the head teacher of the school gave informed consent in 'loco-parentis' for students to be interviewed. This was because they had difficulty in getting forms returned by the students, and the head teachers felt that the subject matter was not controversial or likely to have any impacts on the students.

Whilst the aims and content of the student interview schedule did not involve any particularly difficult or sensitive material there was the potential for some of the discussions to raise issues for the students in relation to their own self esteem, for example when discussing how they felt about equality and school choice, which for some of the students had been a negative experience. The pilot study found that students were willing to discuss their experiences and, when asked about the questions, they were asked responded positively about them. As an interviewer I tried to be sensitive to

³⁴ For full details see: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/guidelines.html>.

the students and did not prompt them for answers to any questions which they appeared unwilling or unhappy to give.

Pilot study

The pilot study to begin to investigate teacher and student perspectives, and the best ways in which to access these, was carried out in one school in East Town.

The situation in the pilot locale, East Town, was particularly pertinent to the proposed study. School choice and schools situated in diverse socio-economic and ethnic locales had resulted in an un-comprehensive set of schools across the city, with a high degree of variation of league table results. Due to parental choice policies some schools were heavily oversubscribed whilst others had large numbers of surplus places and difficulty recruiting and retaining staff and students. There were plans for changing secondary provision in the city using the Private Finance Initiative³⁵. The proposals, at the time of the pilot study were nearing the end of the consultative phase and involved closing a number of schools, amalgamating others and creating a City Academy. The proposal documents were concerned with raising school standards and improving facilities but made no reference to exactly how this was to occur. Similarly no reference was made to achieving more balanced intakes or to addressing localised socio-economic disadvantages. Carrying out the pilot study in this locale provided a particularly interesting insight into issues of parental choice, comprehensive ideas and socio-economic disadvantage. This locale may be criticised as a locale due to the current emphasis within it upon radical change. Whilst this may have resulted in particular issues being of greater relevance to teachers and students within this locale, any bias was as far as possible overcome by focussing primarily upon the current situation, student intake across schools and how teachers and schools are currently managing their

³⁵ The Private Finance Initiative was established by the Conservative government in 1992. Now renamed the Public, Private Partnership (PPP). The aim is to use private investors to fund construction and renovation of school buildings and the operation of facilities. The private sector finances the operation and is then repaid by the state over a period of time for the use of the buildings, facilities and services. For full details see the Treasury's detailed PPP webpage: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/public_private_partnerships/ppp_index.cfm

student intakes. The early stages of the process meant that it was infrequently referred to by teachers.

Initially I conducted semi-structured interviews with a self-selecting sample of teachers. The perspectives gained from these interviews were used to assess the interview schedules and to consider whether a questionnaire would be a valid means of assessing perspectives of a wider sample of teachers. The questionnaire would have been largely based upon the interview schedule themes and questions, containing a small number of restricted answer questions and a greater number of open-ended response questions. From assessment of the initial data gained through semi-structured interviews with teachers in the pilot school it was apparent that interviews were the most suitable medium with which to access teachers' opinions. Whilst questionnaire data would have allowed triangulation and access to a greater number of teachers, the concepts and ideas being considered as expressed by teachers during interviews were too complex to adequately access via a questionnaire, which was omitted from the design.

Student opinions and ways to access these most effectively were also investigated through semi-structured interviews of year eight and year ten students in small friendship groups. Having carried out the initial pilot study, the interview tools were assessed and the data gained considered in order to identify any common or recurring themes and possible further areas to develop, clarify or focus upon in the actual study.

The data gained from the initial pilot study conducted within one school suggested that the wealth of data would be too great for thorough analysis if three schools in three locales were used. As a result two locales were selected one from Type 1b, moderate Level Choice and Highly Disparate School Results and one from Type 2, Low Level Parental Choice and Low Disparity of School Results (with generally LOW results).

Locales conforming to Types 1 and 2 were selected over Type 3 as initial work suggested that schools in rural areas mostly conformed to a type 3 choice pattern and did not share competition spaces in the same manner as patterns 1, 1b and 2.

It was not possible to gain a suitable sample from locales confirming to the Type 1 pattern. It was decided instead to use East Town, which had moderate levels of choice in operation, and the pilot study had shown that choice was an important issue for the area. Access to schools in North Town, the Type 2 locale was unproblematic and North

Town was similar in size to East Town the pilot locale. Analysis of pilot study data for the school in East Town identified a clear choice market in operation with many consequences identified by students and teachers. The depth and quality of the pilot study data and the issues it raised concerning the operation of choice within East Town implied that East Town would itself be a suitable study locale. The pattern of choice in operation in East Town appeared to be similar to Type 1b, moderate levels of choice and moderate disparity of school results.

Table 3.3 : Sample schools in the study

Locale	Choice pattern	Schools
East Town	1b	3 Schools
North Town	2	3 Schools

Research time scale

A detailed outline of each stage of the project, research decisions and time scale is clearly illustrated on the flowchart in appendix three. The project allowed for a degree of flexibility with regard to time scales and the extent of data collected within each school. The initial pilot study confirmed that the time scales outlined on the flowchart were appropriate and feasible. The longer time scales for data collection in the main project allowed for a greater time to be spent in each school and for the possibility of additional data, for example school observations to be gained.

A familiarisation day for each school was initially undertaken. This involved visiting the school, being given a tour by the students and meeting with the head or senior teacher to discuss how the research would be carried out, issues of consent and the questions to be asked. During the familiarisation day I tried to gain as much as a feel for each school as possible, by talking to teachers, students and support staff, observing assemblies and the general routines of the school, such as break times, lesson times and the ways in which the students moved around the school. Interviews were conducted over the course of five to ten days for each school, although I had to be flexible with regard to this as some schools gave me freer access than others. Going to the schools over a number of days allowed the opportunity for initial assumptions concerning each school to be reflected upon. Ideally I would have liked to spend a more extended period in each school but this had to be balanced against the schools' own wishes. The time of

year at which schools were visited may be viewed as a potentially confounding variable since teachers' perceptions may be influenced by, for example, being tired at the end of a long term, being stressed by impending exams or feeling positive about their school after a holiday period. Due to gaining schools in an incremental fashion and having to be adaptable to the wishes of each school, it was not possible to visit each school in the same time period. The bulk of interviews and school visits occurred in the summer and autumn terms. Despite this being potentially problematic the strength of teacher opinion in each school was reinforced by or cohered with the perspectives of teachers in other schools in the same locale.

Operationalising the design in the field

Few adaptations to the initial design were required. It was not possible to gain access to all the desired schools within an immediate competition space in both locales. Where this was the case I selected schools which were geographically closest. It was also not possible to gain access to teachers in one East Town School. The findings and data analysis does not claim to be wholly representative but to provide an example of some of the experiences of a sample of teachers and students, a micro look at effects.

Given the nature of the research in the form of interviews with groups of students, I had little time to get to know the students before interviewing them. I explained to the students that I was interested in what they thought about their school, to which they responded positively, in part because they were missing lesson time! From my experience of youth work I found interviewing the students a fairly comfortable and relaxed experience, and after the early interviews, found that many of the questions elicited discussion. I was very aware of ways in which as a white female teacher I may inadvertently manage the group, through eye contact and so on. I was concerned that this may affect the ways in which the students shared and discussed their views. Being aware of this I tried not to actively manage the students in any particular way allowing them to give responses. Each interview felt quite different, largely due to the differing personalities and style of friendship groups. There was a marked difference to the feel of the interviews with students in North Town and East Town. East Town students were very willing to discuss and reflect on their experiences and often had strong feelings in

relation to the questions asked. North Town students were much less communicative, often giving monosyllabic replies. Just being asked questions seemed to surprise them and they were in general much less articulate about the questions asked. Whilst there was an obvious accent difference which may have made the students less comfortable to chat, most students seemed to identify much less with the questions, probably because they had not had strong experiences of school choice either negatively or positively.

Teacher samples were largely dependent on which teachers had free periods when I was in each school or were prepared to speak to me after school. Teachers with free periods were asked whether they would mind taking part in a short discussion for a research project. Most teachers agreed to do this, and I tried to select from teachers who had agreed so as to get as wider spread of experience and subject as possible. Most teachers interviewed were willing to discuss the questions and many commented that reflecting on the questions was interesting in relation to their school. The teachers expressed strong feelings about the questions and found the chance to reflect on ideas and practice interesting.

There were a number of dilemmas and difficulties in obtaining a similar range of teachers in each of the sample schools. The aim was to gain a sample of teachers from both arts and science subjects in order to take account of the possibility that the subjects teachers taught may influence their perspectives and values on the topic. For example, it may be hypothesised that teachers with degrees in arts subjects may be more reflective on the ideas discussed in the interview schedule than maths or science teachers. Whilst this may in fact not be the case, having a sample of teachers from a range of subject areas takes account of this potential issue. However, in practice it was difficult to gain an exact sample in terms of the proportion of teachers teaching arts and science subjects and of those, equal proportions of male and female teachers. The head teachers of all six sample schools were male which itself may have acted to confound the data gained from each school.

There are also issues surrounding the teachers who agreed to be interviewed. Teachers initially volunteered to be interviewed rather than being selected, as this was preferred by the head teachers. There may have been particular characteristics of those teachers

who are likely to participate in research which in turn may have affected the data gained.

In addition to the sample outlined in tables 3.1 and 3.2 some teachers, school secretaries and teaching assistants chatted with me informally about the topic of school choice. Whilst I have not included these discussions as interviews and for ethical reasons have not used their comments, these discussions along with initial telephone and email contact with contacts in the schools helped me to gain a richer picture in relation to the issues facing each school and how these were seen by people working in the school in a variety of roles.

Data

The interview data was transcribed and initially sorted into categories according to the interview questions. Different colour highlighting was used on the computer to categorise the data, and where data fell into multiple categories it was accorded multiple colour codes. Having read and reread the transcriptions a number of themes emerged from the responses and the data was again coded according to these and copied to separate folders. It was then possible to look at the way in which themes and responses occurred in a particular interview, and also to take a specific theme and see what references to the theme or examples of it there were.

Initial analysis of the data gained from teachers and students within the first locale of East Town identified a number of central themes and issues. Some of these concerns were not envisaged in the initial literature review and have emerged out of engagement with the data. To have pre-empted all the themes would have been to ignore the voice of the data itself. The data across schools contained issues which may be attributed to the choice market and others to schooling more generally. The centrality and recurring nature of certain issues dictated that these be addressed alongside the research questions since they appeared to form a central part of the students' and teachers' experience.

As the evaluation in the conclusion will highlight and discuss in greater depth the small teacher-sample size in the study is problematic and a particular limitation of the work. In the analysis, when East Town and North town teachers are referred to this, is in

relation to the actual sample itself, rather than East Town and North Town teachers as a homogenous group outside of the specific sample.

The following chapter considers the theoretical aspects of the themes which emerged from the data and explains how they are used in the subsequent analysis.

Chapter Four

Understanding power, race and class: theoretical tools

Power, race and issues concerning social class differences and ability were evident across the data. For example, in the data set, assumptions are made by both teachers and students concerning relationships between class, school choice and ability. These are subtly expressed or implied, yet are of central concern to the analysis. These frames of reference appear as an integral part of much of the interview data and an understanding and position in relation to these issues is necessary prior to in depth analysis. Instead of theorising this at every point, the following chapter lays out the themes and applicable sociological theories resonant with the data, providing a clear theoretical framework for the analysis. This locates the theory behind the often micro analysis of experiences personal to the actors, and identifies the theoretical tools, enabling a nuanced consideration of the micro in light of the macro theoretical terrain. This chapter provides a synopsis of the relevant theories to be held in mind when reading the subsequent work, which draws both explicitly and at times implicitly on the theories expounded here. All research is inevitably positioned paradigmatically and within discourses of theory and modes of representation of knowledge and experience. Weaving a path through the conflicting epistemologies and applicable theories is complex, requiring openness to the difficulties encountered and the inevitable compromises made in a field where theory, policy and practice are so inextricably intertwined.

Social class assumptions, material inequalities, and tensions associated with race pervade the data across schools. Central to this are a number of implicit and at times explicit references to power. For example: students perceiving certain racial groups as exercising most power within the school; students feeling that certain actions were perceived as threatening to the power hierarchy of teachers; teachers feelings of a lack of power regarding their relationship with policy; and further implicit references to ideas of power on multiple levels.

The chapter begins by exploring the notions of power applicable to and evident within the data and considers how a Foucauldian reading of power provides insights for analysis. This inevitably requires a sojourn to explore relevant notions of discourse and

agency. Attention is then turned to consideration of theories of race and class applicable to the data. Finally, the ways in which the positions attributed to power, race and class interrelate and frame the subsequent analysis is explained.

The position attributed to power within the analysis

Within sociology and wider theories, power is a complex polymorphous term, historically changeable and understood in diverse ways at both macro and micro levels. The ways in which differing approaches to power may be viewed in relation to each other is problematic. The fundamental question concerns whether power is constructed, in a Foucauldian sense, through discourse or exists outside as an empirical entity. Power has so heavy a history of usage, from Marx to Nietzsche, Weber to Foucault, that the notion of power itself brings multiple aspects to mind. It is difficult to distinguish and separate specific analysis from certain mental connotations of power. This renders the reading and interpretation of work on power complex and open to misunderstanding. Analysis of early data made apparent the centrality of power as a concept for both teachers and students, hence the need for a guiding position for the work.

In the data it is apparent that power is operating at different levels and fulfilling diverse functions through distinct kinds of discourse. This reflects the centrality of the notion of power within the social world and its functioning within and through the operation of social groups. There are two key concepts of power within the data, representing the way in which power appears, outwardly at least, to function at multiple levels within a democracy. Firstly, power as a socially inferred phenomena, for example in the form of authoritative power granted by society to government and law. The second conceptualisation views power as a personalised operation functioning within each social interaction. The following list identifies the ways in which manifestations of power are evident at different levels within the initial data. It provides a useful way of considering power as an idea and illustrates the complexities inherent in using the notion.

1. Power constructed on the basis of socially agreed authority, or organisational power, tangible factually based powers, where power lies in shared discourse and social cohesion. Eg:

- Institutional and positional power

- Power of government to create, impose and enforce policy upon schools (power given by, but not directly controlled by voters) eg policies of comprehensive schooling, specialist schools and choice
- Power of school to control teachers and students
- Power of teachers via their authority over students
- Power of parents to exercise choice of school

2. Social Group Power: power of one social group over another:

- Class power (groups holding implicit status power over one another based on economic or cultural capital)
- Power maintaining group status quo
- Power as ideology; way of certain groups maintaining their position eg white colonial power (race power)
- Power maintained through discriminatory practices

3. Personal and individualised power of social actors, created and maintained in specific experience, through language and action:

- Power of individual created within, by or through the situation
- Language mediating, allowing and creating power. (linguistic power)
- Power perceived, inferred and suggested from discourse, not obviously apparent to the actors themselves but a means of surviving social situations and creating identity and means to thrive eg power of oppressed students through specific actions creating personal power and identity.

As this list illustrates, power can be viewed as being held, or as operating, at a number of levels which is reflected by theorisations of power, some of which seek to provide a way of explaining all of the above. There is a clear divide between structural and post-structural accounts. Whilst Marx and Weber afford power an objective position in grand theory they fail to account for the workings of power within the minutiae of socially constituted contexts. Giddens (1984) seeks to bridge this gap, to conceive the entirety of power relations via structuration theory, which suggests that human agency and social structures are related to and affect one another. So that repeated individual acts will in turn affect the social structure.

Giddens argues that power is 'the means of getting things done and, as such, directly implied in human action' (Giddens 1984, p. 283). Power for Giddens is a primary concept in the relations between actors and the social structure. He argues that:

It is a mistake to treat power as inherently divisive, but there is no doubt that some of the most bitter conflicts in social life are accurately seen as 'power struggles'. Such struggles can be regarded as to do with efforts to subdivide resources which yield modalities of control in social systems. By 'control' I mean the capability that some actors, groups or types of actors have of influencing the circumstances of action of others. In power struggles the dialectic of control always operates, although what use agents in subordinate positions can make of the resources open to them differs very substantially between different social contexts. (Giddens 1984, p. 283-4)

Giddens' account, whilst providing space to address social inequities and moving away from an analysis of power solely in relation to means of production, fails to address the functioning of power through discourse outside of relations of resources, capital and authoritative power. Giddens argues that Weber and Foucault refer to differing procedures in power relations from macro and micro positions respectively and suggests that they require 'interrelation' in order for social systems to be conceived in their entirety. Giddens tries to do this by focussing upon administrative power, systems and authoritative resources.

Attempts to address power through recourse to general systems and resources alone is, from a Foucauldian perspective, problematic. Such attempts avoid fine grained analysis of how power operates within and through individual actors and through social discourse.

Hence ..my main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behaviour .
(Foucault 1998a, p. 11)

Power is an entirely human construct dependent on a society of individual actors for its existence. Any account which fails to address how power is constructed and operates at the simplest level of two actors itself ignores or misunderstands the operation of power.

As Butler (1997) argues:

The customary model for understanding this process goes as follows: power imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalise or accept its terms. What such an account fails to note, however, is that the 'we' who accept such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for 'our' existence. (Butler 1997, p. 2)

Foucault's conception of the 'polymorphous techniques of power' entrenched in, yet created by discourse goes beyond any static or unidirectional operation of power, as Butler identifies:

We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are. (Butler 1997, p. 2)

It is easiest to accept Marx's, Weber's or Giddens' positions in relation to power, all of which externalise power by transforming it into a separate entity functioning through its own social structures. This externalisation of power, the objectifying of a social construct, was identified by Foucault when examining the prison as an example of how social institutions function. He referred to institutions such as the prison, factory and school which appear to remove the notion of individual power. Power appears instead to operate and exist within the mechanical operations of the institution. He describes how in eighteenth century schools implicit sexual discourse appeared to be removed from the individual and controlled through the institution of the school:

The internal discourse of the institution- the one it employed to address itself, and which circulated among those who made it function-was largely based on the assumption that this sexuality existed, that it was precocious, active, and ever present. (Foucault 1998, p. 28)

In this case the 'performative' discourse of the institution appears to construct power as an external and objective force. However, power as a social dynamic is necessarily held and constructed by individuals both alone and collectively.

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... And "Power" insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self producing, is simply the overall effect that emerges from all these mobilities. (Foucault 1998, p. 93)

Whilst power as an objective entity residing within institutions and systems of capital is easy to grasp and useful as a means of seeking understanding of the social world at a macro level, the externalising of power ignores the central conundrum contained within power itself. Power appears to operate on individual human beings through pre-existing social structures (eg society, rules and systems) into which they find themselves. However, power is fundamentally a human enterprise composed of individual actors. At its simplest level the problem of power for all social commentators is one resembling the age old 'chicken and the egg debate'. Whilst macro accounts of power as an external set of structures or systems are useful they fail to address the very construction of power itself, which must inevitably involve the discursive life of social actors.

[I]nternal power of state consists not only in the Republic in general and in each of the members who constitute it, but also in the faculties and talents of those belonging to it. (Foucault 1998, p. 25)

[A]nalysis, made in terms of power, must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of domination are given at the outset; rather, these are only the terminal forms power takes. It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transformations, strengthens or reverses them. (Foucault 1998, p. 92)

It is for this reason that post-structural accounts are required to deconstruct traditional views of power; for example, in relation to government and policy, by considering how particular views of power are themselves discursively constructed.

Whilst it is argued that post-structural approaches to power fail to address the more global functions of power and the grand narratives associated with it, this is not inevitably the case. Discourse may be identified in relation to the material effects of power such as: disciplinary power; accountability structures; policy production and performative power. Post-structural accounts also explain social experience by giving value to experience at the level of actors, allowing a fuller account of ways in which discourses function and create within specific settings. For example, certain students may be affected by policy discourse as experienced by their teachers or may exercise their own discursive power in particular ways in relation to external discourses of the school, to legitimise their own experiences.

This post-structural difference in ways of viewing the operation of power is expressed by Lynch and Lodge (2002):

The conceptualisation of power as a static entity, divided between those who have it and those over whom it is exercised, has been deconstructed and problematised. There is a realisation that power is not simply localised in a person or a position, that it is not a possession. Power is increasingly regarded as a series of relations that may be neither readily visible nor observable, but which are of profound educational importance none the less. (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p. 148)

For Foucault, discourse as a system of representation of language allows power to circulate, it creates power yet power may also operate through it. This again reflects the post-structural realisation of the contradictory nature of power.

This is criticised, by Giddens for example, for taking a reductionist view of power in the social world: 'Foucault see[s] power as above all a property of society or the social community'. (Giddens 1984, p. 15) This for Giddens fails to address the duality of structure between intent and social structure.

Foucault's idea of institutional power is not centralised or approximated to any sovereign and can be seen as failing to consider global application or social experience

at a macro level. However, in response to this criticism, consideration of how policies and large scale social systems operate in terms of how they are discursively created and the effect which they have upon individual discourse is as far as one can reasonably go in addressing or drawing conclusions regarding any social system.

Whilst Giddens identifies a problem with trying to marry structural accounts of power with Foucault's work, he argues that such accounts do need to be interrelated in order to conceive social systems in their entirety. This discussion has attempted to suggest that large scale structural models misunderstand the operation of power itself and ignore the contradictions inevitably at the heart of the notion of power. Whilst structural theories provide useful generalisations and ways of practically working within the field of education they cannot be bound too closely to post-structural analysis, since the two are based on logically incompatible premises.

Post-structuralism can however accept that structural theories exist and that they provide a tool for explaining a social scene and are, themselves, discourses open to deconstruction. The use of a post-structural account of power and discourse allows the subsequent analysis to address the micro level experiences of teachers and students.

Before moving on to address the ways in which concerns over the role of race, class and ability relate to this post-structural account, further consideration is required of the ways in which a Foucauldian analysis may be related to the field of this thesis which is concerned with both individual lived realities and the larger sphere of policy and practice.

Foucauldian analysis: discourse and agency in relation to the individual?

Within initial data analysis tension emerged between the desire to address the particular and specific motives and *intentions* of individual actors³⁶, and the intended post-

³⁶ For example, how does the teacher herself or a particular student interpret and respond to an experience.

structural method of analysing the discourses that frame the contexts studied, their deployment and effects³⁷.

The role of the individual in post-structural analysis was initially overlooked in the methodological discussion. The need to address it has arisen from the data, where consideration of the way students and teachers think, feel and act seems a valid and useful interpretation as does analysis of the discourses which shape teachers and students and which they deploy.

Tension between analysing the *intentions* of actors and the *effects* of discourse requires consideration of Foucault's position concerning the individual and the extent to which the individual is discursively constituted. Recourse to Foucauldian interpretations of power and discourse immediately raise the following challenges and questions: is recourse to power and discursive constitution of experience an adequate explanation and analysis of an individual's own particular response to an experience? How do the discourses circulating and their own effects relate to the interpretive meanings of actors? How does Foucault address questions concerning what one does inside discourse in relation to what discourse itself does and how it operates, assuming that such a separation of the individual is itself possible? Where and how do agency and individual responses, for example to oppression, fit within a framework of productive power?

The role and position of the individual and the self in relation to discourse is complex in Foucault's work and at times contradictory. Extrapolating his position from his largely genealogical accounts and applying this to my present analysis is difficult given that many of Foucault's significant comments concerning discourse, power and the individual relevant to this account are discussed in relation to particular historical examples, which Foucault would argue are not templates or the only kinds of example, but emerge from particular moments. As Butler (1997) identifies, there is tension evident between Foucault's works:

Two sets of questions emerge from the above analysis. First, why can Foucault formulate resistance in relation to the disciplinary power of sexuality in the *History of Sexuality*, whereas in *Discipline and Punish* disciplinary power appears to determine docile bodies incapable of resistance? (Butler 1997, p. 101)

³⁷ For example, what discourse is the teacher expressing, how are her responses discursively constituted and how does this operate.

Butler's comments perhaps reflect the development of Foucault's position on the relationship of discourse to the individual. Certainly, as will be shown, the individual becomes of greater significance and concern to Foucault's later work, particularly when he considers ethics.

The discursively constituted self in Foucault's early work

Butler (1997), in considering the idea of subjection in relation to Foucault and Freud, clearly identifies Foucault's early thought on the discursive constitution of the individual. She argues that:

The individual is formed or, rather, formulated through his discursively constituted "identity" as prisoner. Subjection is, literally, the *making* of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject. (Butler 1997, p. 84)

Butler refers to *Discipline and Punish* where Foucault outlines the discursive constitution of the person, suggesting that power through discourse constitutes the person:

If discourse produces identity by supplying and enforcing a regulatory principle which thoroughly invades, totalizes, and renders coherent the individual, then it seems that every "identity", in so far as it is totalizing, acts as precisely such a "soul that imprisons the body. (Butler 1997, p. 85)

The notion of the soul in *Discipline and Punish* becomes a way of explaining how power operating through social and linguistic discourses shapes the individual, investing the person with identity, culture and expectations, and implies that this shaping by discourse is an inevitable and inescapable part of socialisation.

'In a sense, it acts as a power-laden schema that produces and actualises the body.' (Butler p. 90) Further resistance to disciplinary power, for example by the prisoner, becomes itself an inevitable part of power, implying that human agency is itself discursively constituted through power.

Butler identifies a development in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* where discourse and power are considered within the body itself rather than just acting upon it:

He suggests that power acts not only *on* the body but also *in* the body, that power not only produces the boundaries of a subject but pervades the interiority of that subject. In the last formulation, it appears that there is an "inside" to the body which exists before power's invasion. But given the radical exteriority of the soul, how are we to understand "interiority" in Foucault?

.... Although Foucault wants on occasion to refute the possibility of a body which is not produced through power relations, sometimes his explanations require a body to maintain a materiality ontologically distinct from the power relations that take it as a site of investment. (Butler 1997, p. 89)

Butler identifies the central difficulty with Foucault's conception of discourse central to the initial data analysis: the role of interiority or perhaps agency of the body, in relation to power and discourse.

Foucault: ethics and the self

Davidson, Bernauer and Mahon, cited in Gutting (1994) when commentating on Foucault draw attention to his later work on ethics, expressed in *The Care of The Self* (1998) in which Foucault considers the individual self to a greater extent than in previous work. Davidson defines Foucault's approach to ethics as 'that component of morality that concerns the self's relationship to itself' (p.119) and he identifies four distinct aspects of this:

The ethical substance, that part of oneself that is taken to be the relevant domain for ethical judgement; the mode of subjection, the way in which the individual establishes his or her relation to moral obligations and rules; the self-forming activity of ethical work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself into an ethical subject; and, finally, the teleos, the mode of being at which one aims in behaving ethically. (Davidson 1994, p. 119)

Foucault appears to view the 'technologies of self' as the mode by which discourse constitutes and subjects the body, at a point where subjectivity and governmentality intersect. Davidson quotes Foucault in support of this:

The government of the self by the self in its articulation with relations to others (as one finds in pedagogy, advice for conduct, spiritual direction, the prescription of models of life etc)' [and clarifies it further by claiming that]....

Our "technologies of the self," the ways in which we relate ourselves to ourselves, contribute to the forms in which our subjectivity is constituted and experienced, as well as to the forms in which we govern our thought and conduct. (Davidson 1994, p. 119)

However, Foucault's approach to ethics is complicated by his claim that there are no universal standards or human nature that can be appealed to. This identifies a central difficulty faced in this analysis of a project which began with an ultimately critical question and one looking at issues of inequity which by its nature makes critical assumptions. It is worth bearing in mind, however, as Bernauer and Mahon note, that despite Foucault's acknowledgement of no ultimate standard:

Foucault committed himself to the cause of human rights, to the transformation of the plight of prisoners, mental patients, and other victims in both his theory and his practice.(Bernauer and Mahon 1994, p. 155)

Foucault suggests that ethics is concerned with the way we fashion ourselves and our freedom which is itself, dependent on discourses being deployed. This implies a sense of individual agency functioning from within these discourses and Bernauer and Mahon support this position:

The liberty to transgress modern power-knowledge-subjectivity relations differs for the philosopher, the head of state, or the bureaucrat, and an ethics of stylization invites one to engage in struggle according to one's unique rootedness in the world and history. Rather than promoting self-absorption, moreover Foucault deprives the self of the illusion that it can separate itself from the world. Medical, economic, political, and erotic dimensions of life shape the moral experience of the self, as his last works show; thus, Foucault always presents his notion of self-formation as a struggle for freedom within the confines of a historical situation. (Bernauer and Mahon 1994, p. 154)

Foucault attributes a degree of agency to the individual. Comments by Foucault in extracts from an interview where he reflects on truth imply that he acknowledges that he can exert some reflexive agency over himself, even if this is inevitably located within and shaped by particular discourses:

In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration- or between a dominating and a dominated class power relations having specific forms of rationality, forms which are common to them, etc.

.. In studying these power relations, I in no way construct a theory of Power. But I wish to know how the reflexivity of the subject and the discourse of truth are linked- "How can the subject tell the truth about itself?"- and I think that relations of power exerting themselves upon one another constitute one of the determining elements on this relation I am trying to analyse..... In many instances, I have been led to address the question of power only to the extent that the political analysis of power which was offered did not seem to me to account for the finer, more detailed phenomena I wish to evoke when I pose the question of telling the truth about oneself. If I tell the truth about myself, as I am now doing, it is **in part that I am constituted** as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others. I say this in order to situate what is for me the question of power. (Foucault in Interview, cited by Kritzman 1988, p. 38-39) (Emphasis added)

Foucault's reference to self 'in part' constituted across power relations, hence through discourse, appears to be an implicit acknowledgement of some role and value for agency of the human subject. He does not say that he is wholly constituted by power relations as the prison genealogy of the construction of the prisoner would imply. Foucault is able, as an individual, to reflect upon power and thus is exerting individual agency within and through the discourses operating on him, even though the process of doing so is inevitably comprised of discursive constituents. Similarly, each person attempting to consider themselves or reflect upon truth will do so within the particular discourses which are both operating on them and have shaped them. However, discourse will inevitably shape and be shaped by the experience of the individual, for whom discourse will function upon and affect them in a unique way. Being exposed to

and operating within the same discourse does not render all individuals identical, given the range of discourses constituting the individual at any given time.

This argument can perhaps be used to justify the importance of individual agency alongside post-structural analysis. If analysis only considers discourse in a classically Foucauldian sense by addressing discourses which frame a specific situation and shape responses, it fails to address how specific discourses have resulted in specific individual intentions. This justifies the use of modern interpretive analysis of actors' intentions alongside analysis of their discursive constitution.

This discord, apparent when attempting to define the relationship between discourse and agency, reflects the tensions at the heart of all post-modern projects, which whilst seeking to move beyond structuralism do so by pursuing perspectives which are not readily open to structural and rational interrogation. For example, this attempt to define the relationship between individual agency and discourse when taken to extreme lengths, ends up attempting to impose a rational analytic structure on a post-structural account by examining it in the frame of a structural discourse, which would result in the conclusion that for Foucault discourse is itself acting as a structural interpretation of the world. This is using a rationality which Foucault rejects in arguing for 'multiple transformations' of reason and rationality.

I think, in fact, that reason is self-created, which is why I have tried to analyse forms of rationality: different foundations, different creations, different modifications in which rationalities engender one another, oppose and pursue one another. Even so you cannot assign a point at which reason would have lost sight of its fundamental project, or even a point at which the rational becomes the irrational. (Foucault in interview, cited by Kritzman 1998, p. 29)

...the question I asked myself was this: how is it that the human subject took itself as the object of possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price? (Foucault in interview, cited by Kritzman 1998, p. 30)

There are evidently tensions across Foucault's work concerning the role of the self and body and the operation of discourse and power. As this discussion illustrates, any attempt at applying Foucauldian ideas to analysis must stake its own position concerning the individual's self and agency given what can only be described as Foucault's playful account which raises as many philosophical questions as it answers.

In this analysis I argue in favour of using Foucault's discourse regarding the role and function of power through and in discourse. The use of Foucauldian notions of power allow for greater insight into how experience is socially and discursively created and

how power operates discursively through discourses to create effects. All actions are inevitably inside and within discourse but individuals responses within and framed by discourse can be interpreted as individual actions unique to the actor, as well as in terms of discourse. This is possible and justifiable because each human subject is inevitably the product of different kinds and levels of discourse filtered through different experiences of discourses operating at different levels, within the family, school, community, and the ways in which these resonate with one another.

There are further tensions within Foucault's accounts in terms of the power of the individual, and the relationship between discourse, agency, self and body, which are inevitable to a post-structural interpretation. Individuals are ultimately socially and discursively constituted and no part can be separated from or devoid of this. Modernist interpretive discourse takes at face value responses, intentions and motivations of the individual and values these outside of their discursive constitution. I argue that this has validity as an interpretation of the motivations of actors, yet this is not looking inside into the discourse itself and the way that power has created this response. However, at the level of the school and government policy, how the individual responds personally within a wide frame of discourse is critical, particular for examining issues of individual equity and inclusion.

A Foucauldian notion of discourse and power allows analysis to be multi-directional looking at multiple power relations able to go beyond traditional and unidirectional perspectives. One has to acknowledge that the relationship between discourse, the self and human agency is not easily surmised from a rational or analytic frame. Indeed, if it was, Foucauldian analysis would itself be in danger of becoming a structural account!

This project, whilst drawing on post-structural tools in order to explore how power may be operating through discourse, cannot be truly post-structural in a Foucauldian sense, given that it began with a critical question which by its nature is inevitably rooted in modernity. This is inevitable given the structural nature of the research context. However, abandoning Foucault's post-structural account on the grounds that it cannot be applied fully to this project would fail to expose and analyse the discursive construction of the situation being explored and the multiple and complex dimensions of power. It is an unavoidable case for compromise, given the structured nature of the educational field.

In the subsequent analysis this compromise will take the form of a 'tool-kit' approach, whereby analysis will move to and fro between discursive frames and consideration of the actors' intents as interests and questions demand of the analysis. This inevitably raises questions of which discourses and whose intentions. Analysis of discourses and intentions will inevitably be incomplete as alternative discourses may exist in subtle forms not always evident. Multiple readings of discourse will be made where appropriate and useful to the aims of the study, but it is obviously impossible to examine absolutely every discourse at play. Instead analysis will be guided by the discourses and intentions which appear to be most central to teachers and students experiences and applicable to the research themes. Reflexive awareness of these choices will be evident within the analysis.

Conceptions of race and class are now considered prior to addressing how these theories will be used together.

Understanding race

Race appears in both locales to be a prominent and significant factor. Explicit and implicit reference to issues concerning race, racism and minority ethnic students are a central and enduring feature of the comments made by teachers and students. The sample schools in each locale appear to have intakes which are similarly self-segregated by race. The students own experiences and perspectives raise issues concerning racial equality and racist attitudes within and between the schools and concerning the role of the school in addressing racism and racial inequities both at implicit and explicit levels. It is necessary to locate and theorise the concept of race in relation to the theoretical framework of this study prior to subsequent data analysis.

The field of race theory appears to be in continuing flux, hardly surprising given the complex nature of racial and ethnic identities and the additional complication of trying to theorise about different social identities. Despite differing and changing perspectives regarding race and multicultural ideas recent debate in the US and UK appears to acknowledge the socially constructed status of race:

Race is a system of socially constructed and enforced categories that are constantly re-created and modified through human interaction. For this reason some critics prefer to use the term 'social race' , to highlight the constructed nature of the categories (Gillborn 1995, p. 4)

Omi and Winant (1993) support this perspective defining racial identity as a 'racial formation process', emphasising its constructed nature. They argue that:

The concept of race is neither a purely ideological construct nor does it reflect an objective condition. (Omi and Winant 1993, p. 4)

They suggest that racial formation provides an alternative approach which finds a way between the ideas of race as an objective condition and race as 'illusionary'. They quote Fields' (1990) argument for race as an ideological tool to reconcile freedom and slavery and criticise such approaches on the grounds that race is a socially enduring feature which is inseparable from individual identity. At the opposite end of the spectrum race as an objective epistemology is flawed given the complexity, relational character and at times conflicting conceptions of race which individuals may hold. They argue instead that the racial formation approach allows for a critical theory of race and a way between the two inaccurate extremes. This is achieved by acknowledging the importance of historicity, contemporary political relationships and the global context, in order to develop a critical approach to questions of race.

For it may be possible to glimpse yet another view of race, in which the concept operates neither as a signifier of comprehensive identity, nor of fundamental difference, both of which are patently absurd, but rather as a marker of the infinity of variations we humans hold as a common heritage and hope for the future. (Omi and Winant 1993, p. 10)

Omi and Winant's hopes appear optimistic in relation to practice where many communities are still racially segregated and where in popular culture race falsely signifies a number of objective differences interpreted at the level of personhood. The idea of a current move toward a more critical approach to race, critical anti racism and Critical Race Theory (Gillborn and Ladson Billings 2004) seeks to address the current lack of critical thought at the level of social institutions for example the school. Particularly given that schools verbally and in policy at least appear to address the discourses of multi culturalism and racial equality but in ways which may still be allowing power to function to the advantage of certain groups. Critical Race Theory seeks to acknowledge and address these tensions.

The development of a Critical Race Theory, according to Ladson-Billings (1998), stems from a legal movement in America in the 1970's. Critical Legal Studies sought to challenge traditional legal scholarship by refocusing emphasis upon social and cultural contexts. It analysed legal discourse as a social construction, examining the potential role of ideology in legitimising social class structures and hegemony. However it did

not provide pragmatic strategies for change. Critical Race Theory (CRT) developed in response. It rejects biological models of race, and supports the idea of race formation, arguing primarily that the existence of racism in US society is normal and socially entrenched.

This inevitably requires subtle analysis of language, discourse and narratives, hence CRT acknowledges the role of story telling and the importance of voice and discourse to analyse common culture, constructions of race and experience. It also critiques liberalism which it views as not containing mechanisms for sweeping change advocated by CRT and argues that in American culture civil rights legislation has in practice worked to the benefit of white people. Ladson-Billings argues that there is no canonical work central to CRT but a general acceptance of the common themes by those working within it:

The aim of Critical Race Theory thus becomes one of addressing the possibly hidden aspects of race by ‘unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations.’ (Ladson-Billings 1998, p. 12)

Our notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to “make sense” we continue to employ and deploy it. I want to argue, then, that our conceptions of race, even in a postmodern and/or postcolonial world, are more embedded and fixed than in a previous age. However, this embeddedness or “fixed-ness” has required new language and constructions of race so that denotations are submerged and hidden in ways that are offensive though without identification (Ladson-Billings 1998, p. 12)

Critical Race Theory contains a number of powerful aspects applicable to this analysis. Whilst the overall structure of this work is critical it does not critique liberalism to the same degree and also acknowledges that Critical Race Theory in a British context requires interpretation. CRT is itself a discourse subject to and creating power and the extent to which it does this needs to be considered in relation to the data it seeks to explain. Central themes within CRT cohere with a post-structural approach to the data. For example the emphasis on narrative, story and discourse at the level of actors will be echoed in this analysis to address conceptions of race at the school level and how this relates to the wider view of policy.

The extent of emphasis upon race and related inequities within the data set requires specific attention, particularly given the current absence of emphasis upon this in government policy which appears to be hiding and legitimising issues of racial segregation within the rhetoric of opportunities for all, inclusion, choice and diversity. As identified by Gillborn and Ladson Billings (2004):

Educational policy tends to adopt a colour blind rhetoric that enthusiastically asserts the benefits of change for all children. On the rare occasions that children of colour and/ or those living in poverty receive any dedicated attention, it is usually through compensatory or marginal programmes, separate to the mainstream which trade on deficit models that further exacerbate the problems. (Gillborn and Ladson Billings 2004, p. 1)

Defining and addressing the role of race within the data is complex since the language with which knowledge of the field is constructed is itself problematic:

The words that are used to frame these debates are part of the debates themselves and reflect the contested nature of the issues that are at stake in this work. These problems are not mere questions of semantics, they are political issues that address questions of meaning and power. (Gillborn and Ladson Billings 2000, p. 4)

Awareness of the discourses and power expressed through and shaped by the technology of race language needs to be considered in subsequent analysis. By considering Critical Race Theory and Foucauldian analysis of power and discourse the complexities and nuances of the data are exposed through awareness of the ways in which knowledge and participant perspectives are created and function.

Understanding class

Social status appears alongside references to race as a central theme within the data. Implicit and explicit references to class are apparent across the identified themes of school choice, opportunities at school and comprehensive schooling. Social status, social class and related inequities are implicitly referred to by teachers and students, requiring recourse to sociological theory as an aid to wider explanation and understanding of where and how the perspectives and opinions expressed in the data originate. This project is inevitably positioned and influenced by critical theory, it also seeks to apply a Foucauldian approach to analysis of school data. Other sociological theories need to be considered in relation to this framework.

Issues emerging in the data resonate with Bourdieu's (1977) work in relation to education. Bourdieu's work provides an additional lens through which to view the social functions investigated. It may be criticised in a post-structural account for acting as a grand narrative of the social setting focussing largely on the structural phenomena of class patterns and linguistic structures and drawing perhaps too sharp distinctions between classes. Robbins (2004) argues however that Bourdieu came to articulate a post-structural position:

He argued that it was not possible for structuralist analysis to remain *hors de combat* so as detachedly to disclose patterns in disparate primary existence. There had to be a second

'epistemological break' by means of which structuralist knowledge could itself be subjected to sociological scrutiny so as to reveal the covert social purpose behind the imposition of certain frameworks of conceptual order on the behaviour of individuals and societies possessing their own inherent motivations and self understandings. (Robbins 2004, p. 422)

Whilst Bourdieu's work may be interpreted in this fashion, it is largely used and applied more structurally and in this form provides useful insights.

As argued previously, whilst structural and post-structural positions are incompatible, structural concepts, if viewed as constructions themselves, may act as useful explanatory tools. Bourdieu's work is used and understood here as a discourse with explanatory power; one which explains the operations of power through a discourse of class structures, and by theorising a number of socially observed patterns. The patterns and phenomena referred to by Bourdieu can be understood as being discursively constituted. Foucauldian analysis allows for further analysis of multi-levelled power operations, created in and through discourse and is not confined to capital and class power.

Cultural capital

Bourdieu's use of the idea of cultural capital, that each individual has a cultural history accumulated through socialisation processes which can be advantageous or disadvantageous in specific contexts and situations, is particularly relevant to this project. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital exists in a number of forms, economic, cultural, social, linguistic and symbolic, which can be used to provide practical explanation of inequities in school experience for children from different social groups, although these distinctions may also be operating discursively to constitute class differences. For Bourdieu, the school operates as a context for cultural reproduction, such that the school as a social institution helps to perpetuate social and economic inequalities by not addressing situational constraints and differences resulting from cultural capital. This may be due to the school's function as a political or ideological superstructure, itself dependent on the economic infrastructure which requires social reproduction which maintains the status quo. This is of course taking structuration to the extreme.

The extent to which social inequity may be reproduced or transmitted through education has significant implications for school choice policy. The use of 'capital' in a wider

sense as applied to culture and the social, linguistic and symbolic as distinct from the economic use, is particularly interesting in relation to the growing role of school choice and the economic market in relation to schooling. For Bourdieu each kind of capital requires a particular investment to be made, not for any intrinsic good but in order to gain a particular kind of capital necessary to obtain a particular return:

In the case of cultural capital the major institutional form of investment is in formal education measured by quality and duration. What is acquired is the formation of a distinctive habitus that can equip an individual with embodied social attributes that confer 'distinction' upon the individual and legitimacy upon the hierarchy of social inequality and the stratification of taste. In the case of social capital the investment is in appropriate forms of sociability that entail reciprocal obligations. This capital is embedded in social networks and membership is the key to participation and the enjoyment of its benefits. (Moore 2004, p. 446)

The language of investment and return is significant to this work where the literature suggests that the notion of an education market driven by choice may create the need for teachers to use such discourse and to classify and assess their intake in terms of investment (student ability as perceived by teachers) and return (academic outcomes). Similarly, certain parents may appear to be actively investing in particular schools as a means of investing in their children and receiving the best return.

Habitus

Habitus is a concept used by Bourdieu to explain the embodiment of cultural capitals, for example gained through forms of education, which may be embodied in both mental and physical ways:

[A] socialised body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of the world or of a particular sector of that world- a field- and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world. (Bourdieu 1998a:81, cited by Reay 2004, p. 432)

Reay (2004) argues that habitus is conceived by Bourdieu as a multilayered concept, both collective and individual, which can be used in a general form in relation to society and in a more complex fashion at the level of the individual. Reay argues that the concept of habitus is particularly helpful in relation to education since it allows for multilayered analysis at both the level of society and the individual. This is pertinent to this attempt to consider choice at the level of policy and practice. It also provides a useful concept for assessing the school itself, in terms of the cultural values and political ideas which it may embody, and how this might be reflected at the level of teachers and students. This can be used to provide a further perspective on the operation of school choice as Reay suggests that:

Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds himself/herself in, her external circumstances. (Reay 2004, p. 435)

It also provides a mechanism for explaining why choice may be used and accessed differently:

Within Bourdieu's theoretical framework he/she is also circumscribed by an internalised framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable. (Reay 2004, p. 435)

This sense of habitus is directly applicable to school choice, providing a structural explanation for the ways in which choice both allows and legitimises inequality. How, for example, does the habitus of students and teachers reflect the values and position of the school and to what extent does the habitus of the school itself construct the notion of student ability? Despite Bourdieu's lack of reference to race, habitus provides a tool for considering the influences of both race and class. For example, it will be applicable to school data where students refer to bodily habitus in relation to ethnic minority groups.

Bourdieu's account provides a position from which to reflect upon social and institutional differences, although it provides only one explanation of the operation of power, which for Bourdieu is intricately related to capital. The notion of cultural capital may itself be analysed as a discourse, possibly one which creates a deficit account, whereby certain cultural capital is valued over others, with potential issues for social justice and value assumptions concerning the most desirable capital.

Utilising theories of power, race and class in data analysis

The previous sections summarise the theoretical accounts significant to analysis of the data set. The following discussion explores the role and relationship of post-structural analysis to theories of race and class.

The ways in which cultural capitals and habitus may frame parents' approaches to choice and students' school experiences can be considered in relation to the extent to which capital may itself be discursively constituted. Cultural capital and habitus provide conceptual, sociological and interpretive tools for studying how the social world and social actors are operating at the school level. Foucauldian analysis allows the possibility that such sociological approaches are discursive, constructing a particular reality. In analysis it is necessary to consider cultural capital and habitus of students alongside an awareness of how the notion of cultural capital is itself making a number

of assumptions, for example concerning how certain students may experience a particular school environment.

For Bourdieu, cultural capital may be interpreted at least partially as a product of economic capital, since economic capital dictates some of the kinds of cultural capital invested in. For example, buying a child music lessons involves using economic capital to invest in a specific cultural capital and subsequent habitus. Economic status may affect the kinds of social networks which one is able to make and also one's identity. Bourdieu implied that symbolic forms of capital are disguised in order to replicate power relations and argued that the cultural capital valued by schooling is itself an arbitrary means of power:

Once it is acknowledged that the positions and relations of the cultural field are valorised by power relations rather than by aesthetic qualities intrinsic to them, then they can be recognised as arbitrary and their imposition through pedagogic action seen as constituting 'symbolic violence'. (Moore 2004, p. 447)

This is applicable to data concerning comprehensive schooling, which may be viewed as masking the operations of power through the ideal that a common school provides equality of opportunity. Reproduction of inequity appears to be less hidden and rendered justifiable by the operation of perceived parental choice and free will. The explicit emphasis upon economic capital in relation to schools appears to be legitimising reproduction of power relations in a less hidden way than Bourdieu would suggest. The inequity is being addressed in the language of freedom and choice, making it and reproduction visible but legitimate. Sociological theory provides conceptual tools for examining the data in relation to policy at this level.

Foucauldian analysis assists here by examining the extent to which changing discourses may themselves constitute the power relations identified by Bourdieu and provides a means to analyse the operation of power outside of the economic and capital sphere used by Bourdieu. Identifying shifts in discourse and allowing for theory and habitus to be seen as discursively constituted constructions will inform exploration of how comprehensive discourses of equality and inclusion may be being redefined or subsumed by those of the choice market.

Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault 1981, p. 101).

Power is inevitably situated within social practice. Recourse to analysis of discourse in Foucault's sense provides a means to explore both visible power, such as that expressed

by grander theories of social reproduction, along with hidden powers only evident from analysis of discourse itself. Power is not just held by dominant groups and requires consideration in terms of both its collective and individual forms, for example the functioning and creation of power through educational policy and the role of power at the level of individual actors. This position provides a dimension for analysis overlooked by positivist drives for wider theory. Post-structural consideration of the role of power within social research provides a framework whilst also itself remaining a discourse. Accepting a post-structural Foucauldian approach to power within this analysis removes the search for a grand explanation of power and allows subtle consideration of how power is both created and experienced within the social context. This individualisation of power is problematic for education when research may ultimately want to explain and provide practical suggestions applicable across schools.

The field of education is inevitably a structured system and research wishing to inform or change policy has to fit within that structure. Despite these complexities, post-structural analysis provides space for reflexivity and makes it possible to unearth power operations and inequities which may be overlooked in any solely structural analysis. For example, this work seeks to address the pragmatic question of school choice and the possible effects directly relevant to the structured education system, at levels of policy and practice. Analysis of how power is both operating and created through discourses of choice and 'comprehensiveness' will take place at multiple levels, from national policy to individual experience, alongside analysis of the effects which such a policy may have at the level of individual power. The following comments from Ball summarise this discussion, identifying the potential of post-structural analysis for this work:

The emphasis in post-structural analysis is on the discourses and texts which come into play in the make up of social institutions and cultural products. Post-structuralism offers very different ways of looking at and beyond the obvious and puts different sorts of questions on the agenda for changeDiscourses partake of power and knowledge; that is to say, power and knowledge are fused in the practices that comprise history. (Ball 1994, p. 2)

Data analysis will also draw on the notions of race formation and Critical Race Theory as post-structural ways to assess and critically challenge the meanings, roles and values of race and the real relationships between race and the school as a social institution. Whilst race theory acknowledges the complexities of race and the intricate, social and historic processes of racial formation there appears to be tension between theory and practical conceptions and understandings at the level of social players. For example, there is evidence in the data of teachers who appear to have confused perspectives on

issues relating to race. Critical analysis of how power is operating in relation to race and how it is being constructed through individual discourse will help to explain this. Omi and Winant (1993), for example, comment on how taking a critical and formative approach by considering the global context of race in relation to an institution allows:

previous assumptions [to] erode, white identity loses its transparency and the easy elision with 'racelessness' that accompanies racial domination . "Whiteness" becomes a matter of anxiety and concern (Omi and Winant 1993, p. 9)

Although this perspective perhaps summarises the current theoretical position central to Critical Race Theory, at the level of social institutions in the data set, the discourses of race used appear to continue to express particular aspects of white power. Critical Race Theory and post-structural analysis provide a tool with which to examine and expose these. Gilroy (1990 cited by Gillborn 2004, p. 39) critiques approaches to anti racism which seek to provide a 'coat of paint' theory of racism (Gilroy 1990, p. 74) which sees racism as a superficial problem not requiring a critique of basic social structures. Instead Gilroy places race at the centre of power and politics and argues for an understanding of race which addresses the historic and social complexities of culture as a constructed and changing discourse.

By acknowledging the centrality of race to the social world, the role of voice as identified in Critical Race Theory, and the operation of power from a post-structural perspective, this analysis seeks to provide a fair account of the role and function of race within the data set. Similarly it draws on the explanatory power of sociological models of social class to explore and explain aspects of the data, whilst acknowledging a post-structural critique of these.

In the following chapters, particularly six, seven and eight, I employ these theoretical tools to analyse the data gained from the schools. Through the utilisation of these theories in the analysis I explore the extent to which they may work together or act as distinct explanatory thrusts.

PART TWO: The Data

Chapter Five

School choice

*Rachel: I did not choose this school. I didn't really want to go to this school coz,, I just didn't want to go and I didn't get the other places so I had to come here.
(Year eight, white girl, East Town Secondary)*

This chapter opens the analysis with a narrative account introducing the locales and schools. It then focuses specifically upon choice in relation to the research questions concerned with the effects (as identified by teachers and students) of school choice and a comparison of the ways in which choice appears to be operating in the two locales.

A macro level overview of how choice operates within the locales is provided by comparing school intakes and outcomes across locales. Teachers' and students' perceptions are considered specifically in relation to choice. This develops the argument that different kinds of choice are in operation in each locale: An overt New Labour mode of choice and a veiled comprehensive choice, each with their own specific effects, and both allowing continued inequity to operate in different fashions.

At the outset the centrality of issues concerning race and ability for both teachers and students in the data is acknowledged. This chapter provides a wide angled lens through which to understand the broader operations of choice within the locales and in relation to policy. Chapters Six and Seven narrow this lens, focussing on detailed readings of race and ability discourses which are central to the teachers' and students' accounts. Chapter Eight considers the ways in which teachers and schools retain the discourse of comprehensive schooling which conflicts with the New Labour discourse of school choice. Chapter Nine draws together the micro and macro aspects of the data arguing that equity of experience and opportunity is currently not being achieved for English school students in either locale but for differing reasons. It argues that increased parental choice is not, in the study locales, reducing inequity just refocusing it.

A portrait of two towns

With so much educational research focussed on London, the seat of policy making, and with increasingly centralised government control over education, little research attention is paid to the towns and cities across the country, their responses to and the effects upon them of policies largely created by London-centred policy making. The following illustration of the locales chosen for this study highlights the diversity of English cities and, in turn, the differing kinds of school, educational and aspirational chances and opportunities on offer.

East Town

East Town is a city with a population of approximately 157,000 located in the East of England. It is a multicultural city with Asian, African-Caribbean and Italian communities. From initial analysis of school league table data it was possible to infer that at least a moderate level of parental choice would operate across schools in the city. A relatively small private sector indicated that choice was largely confined to schools within the state sector. This city is particularly pertinent to this study since school choice and schools situated in diverse socio-economic locales has resulted in an un-comprehensive set of schools across the city, varying in league table results and student intake. The city is well below the national average in terms of school results and school provision is diverse. Due to what initially appears to be parental choice some schools are heavily oversubscribed whilst others have large numbers of surplus places and difficulty recruiting and retaining both staff and students.

The city council in consultation with the DFES has produced plans for changing secondary provision in the city using the Private Finance Initiative. The proposals, at the time of fieldwork, nearing the end of the consultative phase, involved closing a number of schools, amalgamating others and creating a city academy. The proposal documents were concerned with raising school standards and improving facilities but made no reference to exactly how this might occur. Similarly no reference was made to achieving more balanced school intakes or to addressing localised socio-economic disadvantages. This may be a reflection of educational triage at the local government and LEA level, similar to that identified by Youdell (2004).

The current diversity in school intakes and the variation between schools with surplus places and those over subscribed suggests that parental choice, comprehensive ideas and the effects of socio-economic disadvantages upon schools, are particular issues for some schools within the locale. For teachers in the undersubscribed schools, choice is a central issue. This locale provides an extreme example of the potential outcomes of choice. Looking at such an example provides clearer evidence of the potential outcomes of choice which may not be as extreme in other locales.

The pattern of secondary provision in East Town appears to be divided between old schools of long standing and status among parents and newer schools built to serve 'township communities', as areas of East Town are known. The township communities were developed post 1968 when the locale was designated a 'New Town' with a development corporation formed in conjunction with the city council to double the city's population by building township housing developments linked by 'Parkways' (roads) linking the townships. Between 1961 and 1991 the population grew by 45.4 percent. Each township community had a school serving the residents.

The notion of townships adopted by the development corporation as part of the design of the new communities implies discrete and bounded areas which are distinct and separate from other areas of the town. The use of the term, (historically associated with South African apartheid legislation to designate official areas for black occupation), by the development corporation in the 1960's has implications for the ways in which the new developments may have been viewed by existing residents. The townships were designed as self contained communities, possibly because existing residents of the locale were keen to keep their part of the city unaltered by the new developments and population influx. This notion of the township community resulted in the city becoming compartmentalised both socially and racially as people had differential access to the city locales, depending on transport links and whether or not they had access to a car. This pattern is still apparent, especially in relation to schooling. The newer township schools appear to have student intakes largely segregated from schools in the older parts of the city upon race and socio-economic lines. The most desirable schools are the old schools near the centre of the city and the schools on the edge of the city which take students from both the city and neighbouring villages.

Three schools were selected from East Town. The sample began with East Town Secondary because the school was identified from city council literature and league table data as a school with surplus places and below average results, suggesting that it was a school not actively chosen by students or parents. Starting with this school allowed easy identification of schools which were in competition with it and those able to attract more students. The intention was to add schools to the sample which were in direct competition with East Town Secondary and which were hence in close proximity, building at least a partial competition space. It became apparent that, due to the township communities and positive reputations of schools in older parts of the city, competition in East Town was more complex, extending beyond clusters of schools in close proximity, with certain parents willing and able to send their children to the other side of the city to access schooling. This effect would have been overlooked by selecting three schools in an immediate and proximately close competition space within East Town. Median School, a school in an adjacent township to East Town Secondary was selected as a school similar in terms of student attainment to East Town Secondary, but with a predominantly white student intake. Poplar School lies just outside of the city but was included because it was identified by East Town Secondary and Median School as a successful and oversubscribed school which parents would prefer to send their children to, and a school which both schools felt that they lost students to. From speaking to schools and considering league table data it appears that there are four parentally preferred schools operating in the city of which Poplar School is one³⁸.

East Town Secondary

East Town Secondary is housed in a collection of low level two story buildings with unplastered walls, which are interlinked by outside walkways. To enter the school one is admitted to a central atrium and then, having reported to the secretary, one must wait for a teacher to let you through an internal locked door into the school itself, giving the feeling of being locked inside. Students, once locked in, are not allowed to leave the premises during the school day. The school has the feeling that effort and care is being taken with attractive displays of students work inserted into perspex cases and teachers making a visible presence as students move around the buildings. Closed circuit

³⁸ It was not possible to gain access to the other oversubscribed schools in the old part of the city.

television cameras are visible around the school and a community police officer is in residence. Whilst appearing orderly and calm, these aspects give a feeling of an underlying tension and are visible motifs for the school; and teachers' need to control their students. This school has an intake with the lowest number of students gaining five A*-C GCSE's of the three schools considered and the lowest number of first choice preferences among the intake. The school serves one of the poorest wards in the city: 28 percent of pupils are eligible for free school meals and 41 percent have English as an additional language. The school is undersubscribed with 28 percent of surplus places and is, under the consultation document, earmarked for closure. In the classes I observed, the students appeared loud and confident and the teachers strict in a desire to keep control. The students were willing to come and speak to me, enjoying the chance to leave the classroom and chatted openly, and not in the more aggressive or challenging ways in which they spoke inside the classroom.

Median School

This school, similar in architectural style to East Town Secondary is situated within a shopping centre. The classrooms and corridors in the school appear dilapidated with tired wall displays. A group of year ten boys commented to me that their school looks scruffy. Once entry is gained to the school reception, access to the school is open, although a senior teacher stands on duty during transition times. It has an intake slightly higher than East Town Secondary in terms of academic achievement on entry and is a popular choice for many local students. It is a predominantly white British school. It has only 0.4 percent of students with English as an additional language and 23 percent of students are eligible for free school meals. The students responded to the interview in a similar manner to those at East Town Secondary.

Poplar School

Poplar School is situated on the outskirts of the city with a rural catchment area of surrounding villages. It admits 40 percent of its students from outside the catchment area. These students are mostly from the city and have to go through an appeals procedure in order to get a place. The school is at the end of a quiet road housed in a large and spacious building. Entry to the school is through an unlocked door opening into a wide hall, there is attractive art work on the walls, an air of expectant hush and

students walking quietly through the building clad in identical uniforms. 5 percent of students have English as an additional language and the number of children eligible for free school meals is below the national average.

East Town Secondary and Median School felt similar as you moved around them and the demeanour of the students was alike. As I moved around East Town Secondary and Median School I was aware of the students as a strong and powerful force with their own identities and groups. In East Town Secondary the sense of being locked inside, watched and monitored was stronger and the student population were visibly more diverse. In contrast Poplar School was devoid of the feeling of student power. Immaculately dressed students walked quietly around the school which had an air of calm purpose but lacked the vibrancy and colour of the other two schools.

North Town

North Town is a city in Northern England with a population of 240,000, formed from several towns. It is structurally similar to the township communities of East Town. Each constituent town has its own centre providing access to schools. Due to the closure of local industry there are high levels of unemployment across the locale, 3.4 percent, which is above the national average. Whilst being structurally similar to East Town it has a very different history which may create a different sense of community to that of East Town. North Town has a strong sense of community and an industrial heritage steeped in unionism, it has less aspirant new comers to the town compared with East Town.

Schools in North Town were amalgamated and developed as comprehensives post 1965. Few Schools in the locale have sixth forms attached and the city is served by a small number of sixth form colleges. There are two Church of England schools and two Catholic schools within the city and no private schools. Traditionally, children have attended their nearest school. There is a firm tradition of the local school serving the local housing estate and a strong sense of community and tradition with multiple generations of a family attending the same school. From 2005 all parents in the locale have received a booklet outlining the idea of school choice providing information about each school and asking parents to make three choice preferences for their children.

The sample began with North Town Secondary, a school geographically close to several other schools serving the area. From discussion with teachers in the school it became evident that they did not feel particularly in competition with the neighbouring schools. North Town Sport, whose catchment area bordered North Town Secondary was selected as a school with specialist status. Choice of the third school was more complex. Both North Town Secondary and North Town Sport are comprised of mainly white British students. In close proximity is North Town High School, where 30 percent of students are minority ethnic. Whilst access to North Town High was desirable in order to explore why there appeared a pattern of racial segregation of school intakes between the schools, access was not possible due to the school recently being removed from special measures. St Mary's was referred to by staff in the other schools as the school offering a choice to parents within the locale and so it was included within the sample. Initially church schools were not going to be included in the sample, but in North Town only church schools had differing results and were the only schools viewed as potential competitors by the other schools in the locale. Access to schools in North Town was largely unproblematic with most schools contacted expressing willingness to help.

North Town Secondary

A school serving a large housing estate, its intake is comprised of students from three main feeder primaries and it serves an area of considerable social disadvantage. Students enter the school with below average attainment and there are high numbers of students eligible for free school meals and above average levels of special needs. There is also a large movement of students in and out of the school. Students arriving are often those excluded from other schools in the city. The school is awaiting a Private Finance Initiative to rebuild the school and create a neighbourhood centre within it. The school is housed in a collection of old buildings and effort is taken over displaying students' work in the corridors. The students were more hesitant in discussions with me.

North Town Sport

North Town Sport, housed in one large building, is very similar to North Town Secondary, serving a similar area with similar levels of low achievement on entry, free school meals levels and special needs. Most students attending the school walk there from nearby houses. The school has Sports College status, which has meant that it has

been able to expand and develop its sport facilities and is opening these to public groups.

St. Mary's

St Mary's is a popular and oversubscribed Catholic school, one of four church schools within the city operating a selective admissions policy, with priority given to students from Catholic feeder schools and Catholic students. The school has few minority ethnic students and less students in receipt of free school meals or with special needs than the other schools within the locale. It also achieves significantly higher GCSE scores than the non church schools. Slightly more students at St Mary's appeared to comply with the uniform regulations than at the other two schools.

There was little physically observable difference between the three schools and the students' attitudes and demeanour were similar across the schools.

North Town and East Town are similar in terms of size and layout, but not in terms of their economic and employment histories. There are similar numbers of schools within each locale. The three schools in North Town felt the most similar to one another. As an observer entering the schools there was very little difference between buildings, decoration or students' and teachers' physical presence. In East Town, East Town Secondary particularly stands out to the observer for having the most ethnically diverse intake and for the ways in which it monitors and keeps its students within the school premises. On first appearances, of all six schools, Poplar School felt the least homogenous of the six. Whilst the sampling aimed to use schools within distinct competition spaces, the schools here are only a part of a larger competition space. Whilst it is arguable that looking at all schools within a competition space is desirable, the amount of data procured is unmanageable for this project with its micro level analysis. Rather than fully charting one competition space the project instead aimed to compare and contrast the two locales and the differing impact, role and effects of choice.

Choice: the big picture

This section provides an overview of the locales and the issues which emerged. It is a summary account, intended to make the situations in the locales evident and the issues

which emerge in the data clear. The claims made here are evidenced with data as the chapter progresses and are further supported and unpicked in the subsequent chapters which provide a micro analysis of key aspects of the data.

Students and teachers in East Town sample schools perceived higher levels of parental choice in operation than teachers and students in North Town. East Town teachers viewed some schools (eg Poplar School) as popular and oversubscribed and others (eg East Town Secondary) as largely unpopular with high numbers of surplus places. East Town schools appear to be largely segregated on lines of race, class (as identified by numbers of free school meals) and academic outcomes, with many children travelling a considerable distance to go to a chosen school. The schools in the locale viewed as popular have less students in receipt of free school meals and with special needs. Students at Poplar School appear to enter the school with higher levels of human capital, where middle class human and cultural capital is valued. Types of cultural capital, which students bring with them to the school, vary between the schools in East Town. Teachers explain these differences in relation to student background and ability. In North Town nearly all students go to their geographically closest school and all schools have similarly low levels of achievement, with the exception of the church schools which provide a limited choice.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of the extent of available and practiced choice differed between East Town and North Town. School choice was a 'hot' topic for East Town teachers and students, particularly in light of the proposed restructuring of their schools and the publicised evidence of surplus places in some schools. In North Town, choice in practice was not viewed as important by class teachers, and students were not familiar with the notion of choice in relation to their own experience.

The choice market in East Town has created a discourse of competition and comparison between schools³⁹. East Town students are increasingly viewed as commodities in a market, with some schools limiting the choices of GCSE options for students in order to gain certain outcomes, practices which challenge equality of opportunity for students. East Town students are aware of the differing status attached to schools and view

³⁹ This is reliant upon discourses of student ability, explored in depth in subsequent chapters.

themselves and their school experience largely in terms of ability and the social desirability of their school. They appear to have internalised the discourses expressed by their teachers and the wider community, and are in turn becoming discursively constituted by this.

North Town schools are not experiencing high levels of competition. Some teachers commented on competition in the form of church schools and thought that greater choice through a school level market would improve their schools, but the students were unaware of any kind of school choice. Instead, North Town teachers commented mainly upon the curriculum which they perceive as unsuitable for many of their students, in a town which has high unemployment and a high percentage of students leaving full time education at sixteen.

A number of locales exhibit higher levels of disparity between types of school, for example Bristol. However it was particularly difficult to gain access to schools in such high choice locales. East Town and North Town are significant for comparison, since despite the sample schools appearing to be similarly diverse in terms of percentages of students in receipt of free school meals and with special needs, the role of choice at school level is operating to different extents. In the locales choice is, according to data from students and teachers, assigned different degrees of value, with different meanings. Choice as a policy discourse, has different degrees of strength in the two locales. The tables of school intake and results data below show that, statistically at least, the sample schools in both locales are similar. For example, in both locales there is a school with high levels of children with special needs, a high percentage of children in receipt of free school meals, and a low percentage of A* to C GCSE results (East Town Secondary and North Town Secondary). There is also a school within both locales which has lower levels of children with special needs or in receipt of free school meals and which gains significantly higher percentages of A* to C GCSE grades.

This data could be interpreted as implying that the perceived high levels of choice in East Town, as expressed by teachers and students, do not have any impact on school student intakes, given that North Town and East Town sample schools appear in the data below to be statistically similar. However, when all the schools within the locales are considered *and teachers' and students' experiences taken into account* the picture is far more complex. In North Town the composition of schools is largely homogenous,

with the only exception being the church schools. In East Town the disparities between schools are wider. There are different kinds of mechanisms of choice, both implicit and explicit, operating in the locales and these have different effects on schools' and teachers' practices and consequently on student experience. Whilst large scale school comparison data is useful, it cannot, as identified by Burgess (2005), explain what is actually happening inside schools, missing out on subtle effects and implications.

Table 5:1 Comparative data across sample schools in East Town. (taken from 2004)

	East Town Secondary	Median School ET	Poplar School ET
% free school meals	28	23	Below national average
% minority ethnic background	49	Below national average	Below national average
% EAL	41	0.4	5
% SEN	17.8	18.8	8.5
% SEN Statement	3.1	5.7	1.5
% first choice pref	35	68	100
% surplus places	28	25	0
% 5 A*-C	30	33	68
% 5 A*-G	79	75	95
% no passes	12	9	1
Value Added Score	97.9	94.9	100.2

Table 5:2 Comparative data across schools in North Town

	North Town Secondary	North Town Sport	St. Mary's North Town	North Town High *
% free school meals	26	15	12	37
% minority ethnic background	3	0.2	Below national average	30
% EAL	1	0.2	3.2	23
% SEN	17.2	16.9	8.2	19
% SEN Statement	4.1	2.9	1	4.8
% first choice pref	100	100	100	Not available
% surplus places	Not available	Not available	0	Not available
% 5 A*-C	35	36	60	39
% 5 A*-G	80	91	96	90
% no passes	15	3	2	-
Value Added Score	97.4	96.9	100.1	102.1

*A school which it was not possible to access as part of the sample, but similar in type to East Town Secondary, and within the same competition space as other North Town Schools.

The bold data shows that East Town Secondary and North Town Secondary are similar in terms of student intake and results, the central difference being the higher numbers of minority ethnic students in East Town Secondary. North Town High is similar to East Town Secondary in terms of minority ethnic intake, but was not accessible. It has been included in the table to show that in both locales there is at least one school with significantly higher proportions of minority ethnic students.

There is disparity between the sample schools within both locales. They are segregated in terms of ethnicity, class (as measured by percentage of free school meals) and special needs. Both locales contain a similar number of schools. In East Town there appears to be at least five desirable schools, which parents actively choose, only two of which are church schools. In North Town there are four church schools, one of which actively selects on academic ability via an entrance test, the remaining three have strict faith based entry requirements and the remaining North Town schools are all very similar with regard to student intake and levels of GCSE results. The schools in the tables with the highest GCSE results, Poplar School, East Town and St Mary's, North Town also have the lowest proportions of students with special needs and students in receipt of free school meals and, according to teacher data, are the most popular or actively chosen schools within the locales. From this data, assumptions are possible concerning the impacts and effects of choice, particularly in relation to certain students. It implies that students with special needs and those in receipt of free school meals appear less likely to attend popular schools actively chosen by parents. This contention is supported and developed by the school level data which will be pursued subsequently.

Initial analysis identified two central issues within the interview data from schools within both locales which forms the basis of analysis:

1. Distinctly different perspectives and experience of choice for teachers and students in East Town and North Town.
2. Segregation and inequity between schools within each locale in terms of student intake and academic outcomes.

The degree of choice of schools as perceived by students and teachers varied across the schools. In East Town this was proportionate to what could be expected from the initial data about the schools. Poplar School, the most academically successful, with the lowest numbers of students in receipt of free school meals, was first choice for all its students,

whilst East Town Secondary was not a popular first choice. In student interviews there was enormous disparity between student responses across schools regarding their experience of school choice. In North Town this was not the case. All North Town students had gone to their first choice school, and they appeared unaware of or not bothered by the idea of school choice. Most students felt that their school was their local and hence assumed school to attend, with no thoughts of going elsewhere. They all felt that their school was good. This lack of choice discourse in North Town was emphasised by the fact that most students did not express opinions about other schools they might have attended:

NH: What other schools could you have gone to?
James: I just chose this.
Peter: My mum chose this.
Lisa: It's our local school.
NH: Do you know anything about any other schools
James: No.
Peter: No.
Lisa: This is a good school coz of the sports college.

(Year eight white students, North Town Sport)

Four groups of North Town students did refer to one other school, but only in relation to having fights with that school, and they thought that they might get bullied at that school, but no reference was made to other schools as being better or worse than their school.

Evidence of a lack of active choice by students in North Town suggests that choice is having a greater effect on students in East Town, despite league table data for schools in both locales suggesting that the schools have similar intakes. This is an example of where statistical data alone does not explain what is happening at the school level. All students in East Town felt that they had experienced choice of school either positively or negatively and were aware of schools perceived to be more or less successful than their own and the implications of this for themselves. Students in North Town Secondary and North Town Sport had not considered any other schools and were able to attend the school they wanted. It may be said that these students attended the school of their choice although they had no expectation of going to a different school, rendering it an unreal choice.

Versions of choice

Students across schools had different perceptions of choice and different experiences of what choice making actually meant. For some students, choosing the school meant deciding that they wanted to go to their local and assumed school, without experiencing any further kind of choice making process, whilst for other students, school choice involved visiting a number of schools, assessing, comparing and discussing with family and friends and reference to local opinion, and appealing if necessary. Perspectives of parents are central to school choice and several projects have addressed this. Research by Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) has considered and addressed parents operating as choice makers. The absence of data from parents here does not deny the importance of parental choice or the impact of parents in the school choice process but instead builds upon previous parental choice data by relating such analysis to student and teacher experience. For example, the categorisation of parents as differential school choice-makers (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995) is applicable to the students' experiences of choice and the teachers' views of the school intake. Although Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe's study does not measure parents' cultural capital directly, parents as differential choice makers can be explained in relation to their types of cultural capital.

North Town students interviewed were unaware of any choice making process in relation to their school. The only exceptions were St Mary's students, who identified that they were at a Catholic school. Very few of these students felt that they had actively chosen St. Mary's as most students had attended Catholic feeder primaries, implying that choice of a Catholic secondary school was made by parents at the primary level. Whilst North Town teachers did not view choice as something important to them, a few comments alluded to there being some choice. One teacher talked about students being 'creamed off' by the church schools, and another about students going to schools outside of the city.

The four most successful schools in North Town are all church schools suggesting that there is some limited choice in operation by a few North Town parents. Some parents, who are willing and able to travel across the city, choose church schools and some parents may send their children to schools outside the city. There is no private school option within the city. The remaining schools appear homogenous in terms of student needs and GCSE results. Students within the schools have no sense that choice of

secondary school is a possibility, although there is evidence of racial segregation. The data on North Town in table 5.2 shows that North Town High has a greater percentage of minority ethnic students. Given that the students do not perceive there to be a choice, this segregation may be entirely the result of housing patterns. Although Chapter 7 (which unpacks racial segregation at school level) provides school level evidence to suggest that community racism and school acceptance of this also prevents minority ethnic students accessing some schools, including St. Mary's.

To say that there is no choice in operation in North Town is incorrect. However, when compared to East Town, choice appears to work very differently. In East Town, choice was mentioned by all students and teachers interviewed and experiences of choosing and its positive and negative results carry considerable force, power and emotion for both teachers and students. They viewed themselves and their schools in relation to this, and viewed choice itself as operating to create 'good' and 'bad', 'desirable' and 'undesirable' schools.

Choice means very different things in both locales and understanding this difference is central to understanding the impacts on schools and students of the kind of choice operating in East Town and the different effects in North Town.

Whilst choice operates at some level in both locales I argue that East Town and North Town represent two distinct *versions of choosing*.

In East Town, parental choice of schools appears to be operating in the way in which New Labour Policy intends it. Termed here *Overt Choice*, it is explicit and directed by parents, with schools becoming competitors in a market place and parents and students acting as consumers. Parents' actions will inevitably be influenced by their cultural capital. This chapter and the subsequent chapters consider in depth the visible and personal effects of this kind of choice strategy on schools, students and teachers. Whilst I have termed this version of choice *Overt Choice*, referring particularly to choice under New Labour policy I acknowledge that this pattern of consumerist choice was being developed and encouraged by the old Conservative government, at the time antithetical to Labour education policy. However, it is the Labour government which has embraced, encouraged and developed the idea of increased parental choice with its obvious market place results.

In North Town *Overt Choice* has so far failed to make an impact. The majority of students attend their local school, with church schools providing a limited choice. Obviously there is still some choice occurring but this is of a more covert nature through choice of housing, church schools, racism and parents sending children to schools outside the city. This version of choosing termed here *Veiled Choice* represents the kinds of parental choice which operated prior to active government encouragement of parental choice. The term veiled is used to describe the process where middle class parents would choose comprehensive schools by choosing to live in the catchment area of a comprehensive school which they deemed good. This is supported by the literature which found increases in house prices in the catchment areas of ‘good’ schools. (Downes, T Zabel, J (2002), Gibson, S and Machin, S (2003), Haurin, D and Brasington, D, (1996)). There was clearly choice occurring under a comprehensive system, only in a veiled fashion, and the same may be occurring in North Town, where middle class parents may be choosing to live in more rural areas outside of the town closer to schools which they deem good.

The table summarises the different kinds of choice which we see in North and East Towns.

Table 5.3: Choice: East Town and North Town

	<i>Overt Choice (New Labour Policy)</i>	<i>Veiled Choice (Old Comprehensive Policy)</i>
Town	East Town	North Town
Parental Choice	Visible	Invisible
Student awareness of choice	High	Low
Inter school competition	Strong	Weak

Subsequent analysis of the school data shows in detail how these different versions of choice are expressed and experienced discursively. The fact that East Town and North Town embody these different versions of choice allows analysis to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of choice, and to assess these in relation to issues of social equity. Clearly it is not as straight forward as comparing old and new given the adhoc and diverse nature of secondary education provision demonstrated in Chapter One. Reflection and comparison considers the possible implications of *overt choice* and evaluates whether either version is concerned with or able to promote social and racial equity.

In both locales *overt choice* and *veiled choice* appear to be creating, or at least maintaining, segregated schools in terms of race, class and special needs, as is evident in the data from schools within the two sample locales (see tables 5.1 and 5.2). This has consequences for a policy advocating choice, suggesting that whilst choice may drive up standards for some schools it also allows social segregation to continue. The fact that schools in North Town and East Town are similar may be used as an argument in favour of markets not making schools more socially and academically segregated. This, however, assumes that the status quo and such segregation and inequity between schools was and is satisfactory. If this was and is the case it raises questions concerning the purpose of a choice market. The fact that the market in East Town does not appear to be changing the positions of schools in the league tables and is, in many ways, actively maintaining them, implies that choice and school diversity is only operating to the advantage of certain groups. Arguments for choice, as a tool to drive up standards, are not supported by the example of East Town, where the position of popular and unpopular schools appears fairly static. If anything, choice is widening the gap between popular and unpopular schools, although there appears to be a residue of parents who will continue to choose schools which are unpopular with the middle class parent chooser, thus allowing their continuation. This supports the arguments by Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) for different types of parent chooser and class related orientations to choice.

These claims are addressed and supported over the following chapters by considering teachers' and students' experiences in depth. The discussion now considers schools within East Town to give a picture of *overt choice*. East Town Secondary and Poplar School are focused on to exemplify this. The way in which *veiled choice* operates in North Town is then addressed before comparing the effects and relationships between schools in the *veiled choice* and new choice locales.

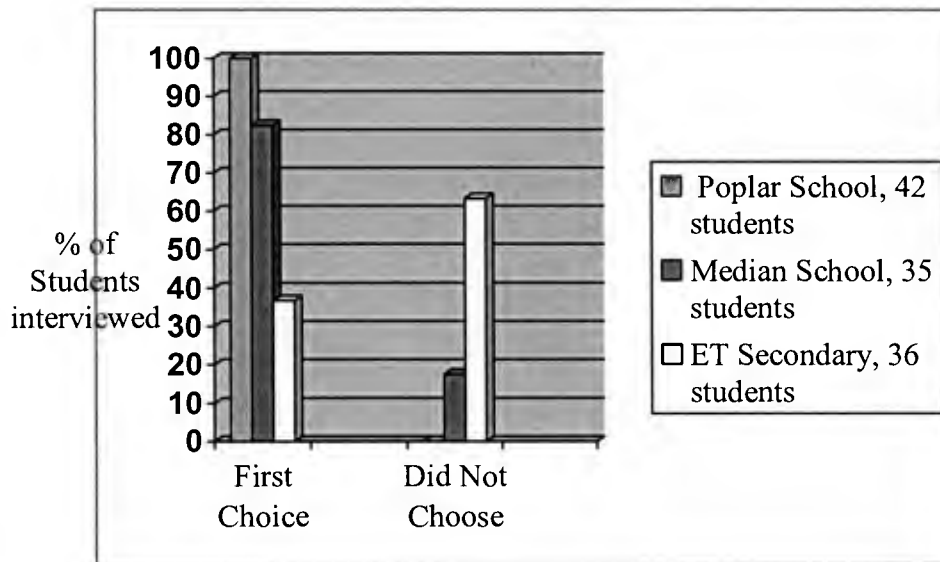
East Town: *overt choice*, effects and implications

The comparative school data illustrates distinct disparities between the sample schools in East Town, in particular between Poplar School and the other two schools in terms of the composition of student intake and GCSE results. Minority ethnic students are also largely under represented in Median and Poplar Schools. Poplar School has no surplus

places whilst East Town Secondary and Median School both have spare places. This data suggests that parental choice may be operating to create this effect, which is confirmed by the data from teachers and students.

The graph illustrates the differences in choice experience for students across schools in East Town:

Figure 5.4: Graph illustrating Percentages of students from schools in East Town sampled who chose and did not choose their school.



Whilst Poplar School was a first choice for all students interviewed in that school, the other schools were less frequently indicated as a first choice.

The majority of students in the Median School sample chose their school despite low academic results. This is explained by the fairly positive views of the school held by the local community, and the fact that it is viewed as the local school for students within the immediate locale. Most students commented that they chose it because siblings were there and, or because it was closest. The intake is mainly comprised of white students, which does not entirely reflect the local population, implying that some minority ethnic local families are not choosing the school. It is a mainly white school serving a township area which is experiencing high levels of unemployment. It appears similar in character to North Town Secondary School, but is far more popular with local parents.

East Town Secondary, which is heavily undersubscribed, was stated as a first choice by a small number of students interviewed, and of the students who put it as their first choice few had looked at any other schools. Minority ethnic students were most likely to have put the school as a first or second place.

The head teacher from East Town Secondary identifies and confirms the choice pattern in operation:

The 13 schools in East Town could be classified as those which are traditional and those which are new. The traditional schools include the church school which has selective admissions criteria, but it also has the reputational stock that that is the place to go and therefore if you look at their intake, all the children with rare exception are above national average at point of entry and understandably they get over 90 percent five A* to C's at the age of 16. Other schools have come into that category recently include Elms school the Poplar School and Brownlands School, though that has a more balanced intake. Other schools, particularly the new community schools East Town Secondary, Median East Town, and Whitefields all have **lower ability new township intakes**, and get below national average at point of entry and below national average at point of output.

(Head teacher , white male, East Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

East Town Secondary: the rough edge of overt school choice

The head teacher from East Town Secondary categorises school intakes across East Town by ability and makes implicit reference to social class when he refers to 'lower ability new township intakes'. This suggests that he sees the new township communities as being comprised of students of lower ability, and is linking ability and social class. The categorisation of student intakes in terms of ability was mirrored by teachers across the locale. Their comments equate social class position with perceived ability and attainment. The meaning of ability itself and the assumptions it makes will be explored in depth in Chapter Six.

This perspective, that the locus of difficulty for the school resides in the students' ability, which may also be understood as their cultural capital, is made explicit in comments from the head teacher:

Within East Town [this school] has the lowest profile by ability of all the schools. 50 percent of intake is minority ethnic and come from a town centre which is among the poorest wards in the country. The other more proximate areas from which the students are drawn are also relatively deprived. Our intake has declined in quality and number over the last 20 years... last 10 and most recently there's a growing number of asylum seekers, so the diversity of the student intake is very considerable. (Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

The head teacher makes the statement that his school has the lowest ability students. Certainly students enter the school below the national average in terms of Statutory

Attainment Test results (SAT's) but is this a fair, or at least, adequate measure of ability? The students may enter the school with low SAT's results for a number of reasons which may not imply intrinsically low ability on the part of the student but instead a lack of the experiences required for achieving SAT's results. This also makes assumptions concerning the measuring of school outcomes. It assumes that SAT's results are an adequate measure of ability, as an objective notion.

Teachers at East Town Secondary link differences in student background and cultural capital directly with low ability. For example, two teachers when talking together about low ability students, referred to students whose first language is not a written one, in a manner implying that the notion of low ability is being used within the school to refer to any students who do not have good levels of English, despite the fact that this does not mean that a student has difficulty learning. Any differences in students' cultural capital are viewed as negative if they require extra input from the school or mean that the student may not get high levels in national tests or GCSE's.

I think the intake is of a generally lower than average ability. We have more students, I think its almost 44 percent, who are below level four in their English when they come to this school. So that's one of the factors.

(Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), white female, East Town Secondary)

We've got about 43 percent ethnic minority children, the majority of whom are of Pakistani heritage from a poor region of Pakistan which means that the parents are not educated beyond a primary level, or not at all, which I think has a big impact on those children. (English teacher, white female, East Town Secondary)

.....There is no first written language. Now that impacts on **how learning** goes on in the home, and that I think is a huge barrier for our **children's learning**. Lots of our children are born in an illiterate family and go into school illiterate with no experience of reading or writing within the home or things that go on in a literate culture. So that is still being compensated for years later....But I don't think people quite realise what a difference that makes. Now when we talk about the two other secondary schools who take ethnic minority students, we have the largest number from a community which is Punjabi speaking and are not literate. Others from the Indian communities have greater literacy and are more educated. So I think that makes a big difference too.

(SENCO, white female, East Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

These teachers equate low levels of English with ability of students, which is discriminatory. Their comparison with minority ethnic students in other schools illustrates how, in the competitive school market in East Town, any students requiring different help or support become viewed negatively due to the fact that they make it harder for the school to appear successful in test outcomes. Their discourse of the desirable learner is framed entirely on a western model of modes of learning. The desirable learner for the teachers is one who conforms to a western model, speaks good

English and has particular and culturally biased, home experiences and capitals. They do not acknowledge other modes of learning. This discourse of the ideal student⁴⁰ appears to be being created by a system which values and expects particular school outcomes, which is the result of national testing, competition and school choice, in short all the trappings necessary for a market. As a result, notions of student '*value*' and '*quality*' have become significant in teacher discourse. The market appears to have renewed a significant discourse of 'ability', one where ability is used in a generic way to refer to innate intelligence and also familial background and home experience.

Issues of ethnicity and ability are central to the students' and teachers' comments in East Town Secondary, and are also evident in the other schools. The teachers identified English as an Additional Language and low 'ability' as a problem for the school and most students interviewed referred to racial tensions. These issues and the discourses creating and deploying them are addressed in depth in Chapter Six, devoted to the role of ability and in Chapter Seven, concerned with race. Race and ability are referred to here to exemplify the centrality of these issues alongside that of school choice with which they are intertwined. Parental choice is perceived by East Town Secondary teachers as having a negative effect upon their school:

I would say a small proportion of the parents who come here make an active positive choice. I think a number of parents in the area in the vicinity make a negative choice not to come here. OK, in some cases that's because of the Pakistani intake of the school, in others it's because of the behavioural reputation of the children. In our conversations with local primary schools what tends to happen is that where young people from the area who have a poor reputation will come to this school, parents therefore elect for their child not to continue as they had experienced in the primary school, so they move away from the more challenging children who we take.

(Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

The head teacher suggests that parental choice of school is affected by previous experiences in the primary school of students with behavioural difficulties. The comments imply that such students are more likely to go to the school, suggesting that their parents are less likely or able to access other schools. Most parents of students at the school, according to the head teacher, have not actively chosen the school and are there as a result of failing to gain access to other schools. This is supported by comments from teachers, who feel that their school is unpopular, and who appear to

⁴⁰ Reference to an 'ideal client' was made by Gillborn (1990), p. 26 when he suggested that the school context was shaped by teachers' conceptions of an 'ideal client'. This notion was previously used by Becker (1970).

categorise their intake in relation to this and make assumptions concerning the student intake in a school which is rarely a favoured parental choice.

Well we are just so the bottom of the ladder, we really are. I read in the paper recently, I didn't know the statistic, but 45 percent of our students are directed to us that we weren't a chosen school. I've not felt that in the school, you know,.... but certainly.. I mean you only have to look at recent admissions that there are students who are excluded from elsewhere who have had other serious issues with schooling. You know, a lot of school refusers have been directed to us so they've been out from somewhere else and have been directed here. You know, in my year group alone I probably have had four or five recent admissions ie in the last two weeks. None of those have come in with an ordinary, you know, completed school record. There are a number of parents who will occasionally come in and say to you, usually when the child's in trouble , 'I never wanted them to come here' you know.

(English teacher, white female, East Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

The English teacher perceives the school intake as undesirable, and her school at the 'bottom of the ladder'. This implies comparisons with other schools and a factor or factors by which to make such comparisons. She uses the criteria of whether students chose the school and issues relating to student backgrounds, needs and previous school experience (cultural capitals) to develop and continue her perception of the school as the 'bottom of the ladder'. This use of language itself implies that she is using a system of rating her students and the school in relation to the others and, through this comparison, perceives her school to have more to overcome, producing a sense of unfairness for herself and the school. A number of students appear to be viewed almost collectively by the school as less desirable assets, which perhaps contributes to the feeling of being at the bottom of the ladder. A number of subtle assumptions are made by teachers in East Town regarding the students who are perceived to be successful and desirable for a school. School refusers, those students society deems in need of child protection services, those with learning difficulties, and children who move because of bullying appear to be deemed as less desirable because of the ways in which they may contribute to the school's low position in terms of academic results. They require greater support or financial input from the school and they may affect community feeling about the school.

Teachers in East Town Secondary have to cope with negative attitudes of parents toward the school caused by the perceptions held in the local community concerning the intake of the school. As East Town Secondary is a last resort for many families, there appears to be little parental interest in the school. Those parents with the means and, cultural capital to move away or to pay in order to access different schooling have exercised this, resulting in a perceived lack of positive parental input.

The choice is affected by parents. Certain parents want and will get the best. That's because they value education. A lot of parents, I feel, don't value education and then they're not so vociferous in, you know, demanding choices or supporting the schools that their children go to.

(Head Teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

And I think, also, that there are a lot of parents who have special educational needs and are less able to support their children and one of our key directions in our education is making up for deprivations of the children which they face at home educationally and in all sorts of ways. For us, it all comes down to money. A lot of us think education is important. **We know how to deal with low ability children how to get the best out of them.** For many years we were coming in at two levels below the national average and going out with GCSE's at the national average, not above but at, which was a huge difference, but because of the declining intake it means that the budget declined so you had fewer and fewer resources put into a type of education that needs more resources in its own way than when you have **higher ability children who are able to be taught in a much more direct way.**

(Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

East Town Secondary's head teacher implies the existence of a 'bad' or less able parent who does not demand choice. This makes middle class assumptions concerning good parenting, as one which places educational capital and school choice high on the agenda, despite the fact that in other areas of the country parents have very little choice. The head teacher implies that home backgrounds (cultural capital) and ability are related. His comments also support the earlier point that East Town Secondary is being affected by market choice discourses and financial considerations. The head's comments show that he is considering student ability specifically in relation to financial resources.

Parental choice to avoid East Town Secondary affects the social and ethnic composition of the student intake, with financial implications. The majority of East Town Secondary students come from the most disadvantaged wards of the town. Many teachers felt that they had to address social and welfare issues, which may be explained as differing levels of cultural capital, such as low levels of literacy, difficult home circumstances and poverty before teaching and learning. The need to give students a sense of value and pride in an institution which for many was a last resort was also referred to by teachers:

NH: How does choice affect your school, intake and teaching?

English Teacher: Well it affects the intake obviously.

SENCO: I think it affects the ethos, in that we have to try to get the students to have pride in the school which, if it wasn't their first choice, isn't seen as one they want to come to and that is difficult to deal with. A sense of belonging and pride in the school is important to the self esteem of students.

English Teacher: It affects the whole ethos in the sense that in this school it's, everything has a pastoral drive, building relationships with a lot of the children who are difficult, because they have low learning ability or come from deprived areas of the city centre. Where a lot of the children come from is one of the most deprived areas in the country, so we have an awful lot of emphasis on delivering our programmes with a pastoral sort of bias, whereas perhaps one or two other schools in East Town have a curriculum bias.

Choice as a negative operation for East Town Secondary is reinforced by the students' perceptions. The following extract illustrates just how aware students are of their school in relation to other schools and also how central school choice has been for them.

- Tony: [Queens School] was full. I liked that school. I went and had a look. I looked around I really liked it. I thought it was excellent and the people they said hi n everything. My mum was third on the list and all of a sudden she was down to fifth, and she wanted to know why and coz people were moving closer.
- Simon: I didn't choose this school but it was the only school available at the time I wanted [Poplar] or [Queens]
- NH: Did you look around those schools?
- Simon: No coz I couldn't get a place so.. this was my seventh choice. I got this one.
- Rachel: I did not choose this school. I didn't really want to go to this school coz I just didn't want to go and I didn't get the other places so I had to come here.
- NH: So what were your other choices?
- Rachel: I had [Queens], [Elms], and the Catholic school, and I didn't get none of them and I didn't get any of them so I had to come here. So it wasn't my choice.
- NH: Can you remember what you felt about that?
- Rachel: I wasn't very pleased! I just had to go along with it, you know.
- NH: Do you know why you couldn't get a place?
- Rachel: No they didn't tell you why.

(Year eight, white boys and girls, East Town Secondary)

This data was echoed across all groups of students interviewed in East Town Secondary. Dialogue from the students conveys a sense of not having any real choice in the process and of being powerless over it, combined with resignation at having to go to a school which they did not wish to attend. Tony refers to the fact that he did not get into his chosen school despite being third on the reserve list as a result of people moving closer to the desired school. Students such as Tony were aware that certain people had greater means of accessing particular schools. All of the schools stated by students as their preferred schools were oversubscribed schools in older areas of the city. Students in East Town Secondary wanted to go to these academically successful schools, despite, as subsequent data will show, themselves being perceived of and labelled by their teachers as of low ability. The students' experiences appear to relate to the levels of parental choice operating in East Town.

There was evidence within the students' comments that their school's position affected their own feelings about their education, their identity as learners, and the possibilities for their future.

- NH: What do you think of your school compared to other schools in East Town?
- Arjun: Princes and Poplar [schools] have better chance of passing and East Town Secondary doesn't have a lot of chance, like of getting good grades, coz those schools have got better teachers, higher quality teachers and the rules are more strict there than here.

- Amrit: I would've thought education was better in Princes and Poplar and Southbank [schools] .Yeah, coz they're more strict and stuff like that. East Town Secondary, you know,... it's not like that coz people they used to tell me you know that it ain't a good school and stuff like that.
(Year eight, Asian boys, East Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)
- Hannah: I think that people who go in other schools, they'll have a better chance to go to, like better unis and stuff. Maybe, coz they've said that they're from those schools, like the best schools from East Town.
- May: East Town Secondary hasn't really got a good reputation has it?
(Year ten, white girls, East Town Secondary)

Students appeared to reconcile themselves to their school's reputation in several ways. They did not refer to their own skills or features internal to themselves in relation to the results and reputation of the school but instead to features of the school and teacher quality. Arjun and Amrit place the locus of difficulty with the teachers who they suggest are not *high quality* and not *strict* enough. They perceive strictness of teachers and school rules to be a signifier of a good school. Hannah's and May's comments epitomise the feeling of several students that they do not have a lot of chance. This is a direct effect of school choice, as such perceptions were absent from North Town students' comments. Several groups of Asian girls sought to rescue their school from the negative comments of the community, possibly as a way of reconciling themselves to attending the school or as a way of justifying their attendance at the school, particularly given that several of the girls felt that they had not experienced school choice:

- Ali: You know my cousins yeah, [...]many of my cousins that have been to this school have got much better results. So just coz people think schools are better they're not.
- NH: Do you think people perceive this school as not being so good?
- Shakira: Yeah.
- Ali: People in our community, yeah, they see this school as, as like you go in and come out as really bad and they think you'll turn out really bad as well. But I mean, they think that ... that because its closer they think they're going to stay ok.
- Ali: I think Queens got a better reputation but this one, what I heard about it. It's not actually that bad when you come here. Like they were saying all sorts of stuff, but I've never seen like any of the stuff like go on.
(Year ten, Asian girls, East Town Secondary)

Teachers from East Town Secondary perceive the needs of their student intake as being the focus of difficulty for the school. This is a complex transfer of causation and blame by both the students and the teachers since many students blamed the teachers for the schools reputation. The fact that the majority of students did not choose the school inevitably results in negative feelings being projected onto the school and teachers by the students. It appears that the students' backgrounds are being used by the teachers to make assumptions concerning their intake.

Poplar School - on the plus side of choice

The negative attitudes towards choice found in East Town Secondary are not shared by Poplar School which views choice as positive for the school: 'The last 7 years we've been oversubscribed by 100, all first preference.' (Head teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town) The teacher below uses the notion of comfort to express the positive experience of choice for the school:

East Town, there is competition for places... We are in competition, but **at the moment we are in a very comfortable position in that we are well over subscribed.** So we are one of the more popular schools, so it isn't that serious a competition for us at the moment. It's one of the better, more popular schools in East Town ...If parents had a genuine free choice we'd come about third in East Town, third or fourth in East Town out of eleven or twelve secondary schools.

(Senior teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town) (Emphasis added)

Teachers and students both perceive Poplar as a good school. Poplar teachers were less concerned with pastoral issues when describing their student intake, but also categorised their students in terms of social class and ability, linking the two together.

NH: How would you describe the schools' student intake?

Art Teacher: I would say it's reasonably selective. They seem to be from generally middle class parents when I look at parents' evenings and its a 70 percent turn out.

NH: Do you think parental choice affects this school in any way?

Art Teacher: Yes, because if parents are choosing the school they're more likely to respond to any problems we have with the children, you know support it.

(Art teacher, white female, Poplar School East Town)

When I came here 6 or 7 years ago I thought I'd landed in heaven. There was a uniform blazers, there was no graffiti round the school and I thought the children were extremely well behaved, quite arrogant and that's why I said think they come from really affluent backgrounds.

(Maths teacher, white female, Poplar School, East Town)

The art teacher makes a number of assumptions concerning the 'ideal parent' within the choice market, which may be understood as a parent with high levels of cultural capital. She expresses a discourse of the desirable middle class parent chooser. She appears automatically and unfairly to equate these qualities solely with middle class. The maths teacher again relates behaviour and arrogance with an idea of 'the middle class child'. These comments highlight the way in which it is too easy automatically to adopt a discourse of the middle class ideal parent, which may obscure what is happening.

There was evidence in teachers' comments of the senior management taking active steps to ensure that the school remained in its comfortable position within the choice market. The head talked about the importance of his staff selling the school well at open evenings. The school's behavioural policy also aims to appeal to the middle class parent chooser, and practical division of children into strands from which they can choose

certain GCSE courses appears to help the school to maintain apparent high results in the league tables. Utilising students' ability to maximise the school's position was important for Poplar and is considered further in Chapter Six.

All Poplar students who were interviewed said that they had chosen the school. There were no students who said they would have chosen another school and there was evidence of some parents going to such lengths as moving house to ensure that their children would get a place at the school:

- NH: Did you choose to come to this school?
James: I was going to go to Brownlands, but then we moved house and appealed to come here.
Nick: I was going to go to another school but then we moved house into this catchment.
Tom: I had to appeal coz I lived in.... and should have gone to
NH: Why this one?
Simon: Coz my mum thought I'd get a better education here.

(Year eight, white boys, Poplar School East Town)

The appeals system to admit children who are outside of the entrance criteria may itself be a source of inequity. Parents have to apply to the school making a case for why they want their child to attend the school. The school recruits few students who are in receipt of free school meals, who are from minority ethnic backgrounds or with special needs. This raises questions concerning equity of access to the school for all students and families. The head teacher is aware of this inequity and acknowledges that there are social factors influencing parental choice of the school. For example he comments:

There are quite a number of reasons why they choose to make this application. At appeal hearings parents' articulate reasons. The context of school academically not as strong a criteria. Other stronger factors are: social context belief rightly or wrongly that their child is more suited to this school.

(Head teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town)

From the head teacher's reference to the social context and parental belief in children being suited for the school, one can again read a discourse of the middle class parent chooser. One who is concerned for their child to only mix with certain kinds of children, which makes them designate Poplar school a 'safe', 'desirable' and a largely white middle class school. The argument for the existence of a middle class parent discourse of the desirable child with whom they are happy for their own children to mix is supported and reinforced in comments by students in Poplar School, who have themselves internalised this parental discourse. When asked to describe other schools which they could have gone to, several students referred to students at East Town Secondary and Median School as rough, a discursive notion inevitably linked with the middle class parent choosers' perceptions of the desirable student.

NH: Are there any schools you wouldn't want to go to?
 Sarah: East Town Secondary is like that too. There's a lot of rough people there it's a rough area.
 Kyle: You'd get in lots of trouble and stuff.
 NH: How do you know?
 Kyle: You hear from other people.
 (Year eight, white boys, Poplar School East Town)

Ed: It's the people who go there. They're quite rough.
 Alex: Not being racist like, yeah, but the Asians start a lot of like fights and that.
 Ed: They cause all the trouble.
 (Year ten, white boys, Poplar School East Town)

The students make racial assumptions, assuming that Asian children are responsible for the negative reputation of the school. This dialogue illustrates the fact that Poplar School is not comprehensive in terms of its intake which is not reflective of the economically, culturally and ethnically diverse locale.

There is an absence of Bangladeshi and Pakistani students in Poplar School despite the large communities within the city. The fact that Poplar School is on the other side of the city to the area where most minority ethnic families live may be a factor in this. Perhaps minority ethnic families are favouring the local school: East Town Secondary is certainly seen as the local school for a number of Bangladeshi families. Students said that they chose East Town Secondary as their siblings or extended family attend the school and were positive about their transition to the school, whereas the majority of white students interviewed had not chosen it.

An unwillingness or inability to afford or organise travel may be a further factor preventing access to Poplar School. The other possibility is that the appeals process is not readily accessible to minority ethnic families. Poplar School is viewed as a mainly white school, and a lack of racial awareness is evident among the students, for example as expressed in Alex's and Ed's comments, where they perceive that Asian students are likely to cause trouble. A senior teacher at the school also alludes to the possibility of underlying racism:

No, I believe, I suspect we have, an undercurrent of a race problem.
 (Senior teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town)

The class and racial tensions touched on here are explored in depth in the subsequent chapters. Whilst positive parental choice contributes to the student intake at Poplar, there is also the question of whether the appeals process is working to the advantage or

disadvantage of some families. The head teacher clearly feels that this may be the case.

Issues of social class and ethnic group/class prejudice are evident in his comments:

I had a parent who said reason they wanted her to be transferred was because she was a fish out of water at her old city school, a 'pony girl' lots of her pony club friends come here, she would be happier here, because more in common with the other kids. Also, on the negative side some want to come here due to negative reasons about other schools... We 'don't' want that, a whole culture of neighbourhood gossip misinformed assumptions, the press, next door neighbours etc, not going there, where's one I fancy more than that. **Some of these reasons are awful reasons... racism idea that we're an all White school, we're not, over last two years issues of asylum seekers and refugees has come up too. A distinct minority that would do that.** Appeals is where the fun starts! Obviously some parents are far more adept at appealing, but panels are trained to avoid that, **but no doubt a well voiced argument with a presentable child who is articulate is going to help.** Many parents find understanding the criteria difficult and many parents try and persuade me. The role I try and play is to talk to any parent and give any information. Parents often ask how do I win an appeal. I say that they need to look at the school and child and say why it is so important for their child to come here. Some parents are put off by this and don't know how to respond.

(Head teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town) (Emphasis added)

In these comments the head teacher, whilst acknowledging the potential inequity of the appeals system, himself offers no suggestions of ways in which the school might be working to overcome the inequity. Indeed, throughout the interview the head teacher, whilst acknowledging the potential for inequity of access, appeared accepting of the status quo, which ultimately in a market led system is working to the advantage of his school.

If the head teacher's perspective reflects actual practice, it explains the particularly skewed intake of Poplar School and suggests that parents from certain ethnic and social groups and those in receipt of free school meals or with special educational needs are less able to access the appeals procedure, assuming they have the information and access to such a choice in the beginning. This is supported by data from the students in East Town Secondary of whom only four mentioned trying to appeal to get into another school, with the remainder accepting the place they were allocated. This implies that the appeals system is working to the benefit of those students whose families have the appropriate cultural capital to navigate their way through an appeal. This is emphasised in comments by a year ten girl from Poplar School on her experience of appealing:

I don't know my mum did it for me. They just kept on asking me things about me that were unusual and stuff that might help to get me in and I think the weird thing that got me in was the fact that I played the bag pipes.

(Anna, year ten, white girl, Poplar School East Town)

The New Labour parental choice process in East Town appears to result in a degree of social segregation epitomised by Anna's suggestion that it was her unusual extra

curricular activity which helped her gain access to the school. The bag pipes epitomise a particular cultural capital desirable to the school. This suggests that choice is not freely available and equally accessible to all students and their families. Certain cultural capitals are more desirable to the school and are more readily equated with the ideal student, created, in part, by market expectations of school results. The head teacher of Poplar is clear that some parents are put off by the appeal process which may reflect the low numbers of children receiving free school meals (if this is accepted as an indicator of class) in the intake who got into the school through appeals.

East Town: conclusions

Within one city *overt choice* has, as is implicit in the words of the head teachers from Poplar School and East Town Secondary, operated to allow the continuation of schools segregated along lines of race and class.

There is a negative choice on the part of the white majority and middle classes away from schools such as East Town Secondary in favour of schools such as Poplar School and two other particularly popular schools. The fact that very few pupils actively choose to attend East Town Secondary inevitably affects the school, and is a reflection of the school's reputation as perceived by families in the community. The school no longer caters for students within its immediate catchment area. Instead, the intake is comprised of students from 41 primary schools. Many families in proximity to the school seek to send their children elsewhere, either to the selective church schools or to an over subscribed school such as Poplar School where they may have to appeal to gain access. Students from the immediate neighbourhood who do not get into such schools will attend East Town Secondary as a last resort.

Choice and diversity in East Town appears to allow and legitimise schools similar in type to grammar and secondary modern schools, in terms of intake and quality of experience, to exist across the city. However, students are not being selected for schooling by an inequitable test but instead by the equally inequitable ability of parents to assess and access schools.

Parental choice in East Town has resulted in teacher comparisons between schools which affects the ways in which teachers view their school and students.

Well we are just so the bottom of the ladder, we really are. (Teacher, East Town Secondary)

At the moment we are in a very comfortable position. (Teacher Poplar School East Town)

The school choice market in East Town appears to be normalising discrimination and inequity. There is evidence of inequity between schools in East Town on the grounds of students' backgrounds, behaviours, needs and ethnicity. Choice and diversity appears to be a way in which discrimination can be legitimised and made socially acceptable, moving away from the idea of social inclusion and opportunities for all children within a common school. This is apparent at both school and policy level.

Both schools strive to operate under the notion of 'comprehensive education', whilst being comprised of highly self-selected or negatively selected intakes. From the data described it is difficult to see how the operation of parental choice could operate in any way to reduce the skewed distribution of students between schools. The schools in East Town do not have socially inclusive intakes and student experience is disparate across the schools. This has implications for social mixing and tolerance. The description of East Town Secondary students as 'rough' by Poplar students and the issues of racism touched on here and unpacked in Chapter Seven highlight the reasons why the social stratification of schools is allowing inequity and lack of social tolerance to continue. Further, teachers in both East Town Secondary and Poplar Schools are categorising and comparing their intakes in terms of ability.

North Town: *veiled choice*, effects and implications

The data in tables 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate similar disparities between schools in North Town as those identified for East Town. North Town Secondary and North Town Sport are similar in terms of student intake and outcomes and St Mary's is significantly different. It must be remembered that St. Mary's is a Catholic school with strict entrance criteria. It provides some choice to parents within the locale, but access for non-Catholic families is limited. Whilst North Town has four schools similar in intake and results to Poplar School, East Town, these schools are accessed differently. There is inequity between St Mary's and the other sample schools. North Town High, although not included in the study, also illustrates a degree of racial segregation which exists in the locale.

Since the school level data is fairly comparable to that of East Town, one could suggest that choice is operating in the same fashion as in East Town. However, early data collection found that choice is an alien concept for students within North Town.

A graph similar to 5.3 for North Town students' choices across schools is absent here, since all students interviewed in North Town had gone to the school which they expected or assumed they would go to, not because they were making a choice between options. This illustrates the differing role of choice in North Town. St Mary's students were aware that they attended a Catholic school, but had mostly gone to it from feeder primaries where St Mary's was the assumed next step. Besides the church schools, students appear to attend their closest school, and most students lived within their schools catchment area. Whilst the student data implies that there is little active choice, the uneven race distribution across schools and the higher GCSE results in the church schools and slightly lower numbers of children in receipt of free school meals, with special needs and EAL suggests that there is some choice. Choice, however, appears to operate in a more covert fashion. Some teachers suggested that some parental choice takes place when parents choose to send their children to schools outside of the city.

Race appears to be related to choice within North Town. Racism within the community surrounding North Town Secondary was cited by teachers as a possible reason for a lack of minority ethnic students at the school:

If I said that on the signpost at the end of the road someone had written 'Pakis go home' and it's been there now for two years. I think there's fear in the minds of Asian families wanting to send them [to North Town Secondary]. Yeah it's a factor, down the road they're like 70 percent Asian.
(Senior teacher, white female, North Town Secondary)

North Town Secondary and North Town High are situated at opposite ends of a road, the school at the top of the hill has an all white intake and the school at the bottom has a large proportion of minority ethnic students. St Mary's is in the middle, and is no more accessible to minority ethnic families. Implicit in the senior teacher's comments is complacency with the surrounding racism. Racial tensions and conflicts within the neighbourhood may be affecting school choice for some minority ethnic families. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the minority ethnic families are not accessing choice as a result of racism within the community or whether the disproportionate amount of minority ethnic students at one school is the result of housing patterns which are reasonably segregated by ethnicity. Whichever is the case the comments from the North Town teachers firmly imply that racism exists on the part of white residents. The

likelihood of this is supported by the fact that the town currently has two British National Party⁴¹ local government councillors. In North Town the choice provided by St. Mary's is not available to all families:

NH: Do you have any students from minority ethnic groups?
HOY: We do, some, more boys than girls because the girls have to wear skirts. We're a Catholic school, we would have more.....it's just a lot of our non Cath...ethnic minority parents would choose to be here because they'd prefer a faith education to a non faith education . But.....we don'tallow girls to dress differently ...so that's a tension,

(Head of Year (HOY), white female, St Mary's North Town)

St Mary's, as understood by a senior teacher, appears to be actively preventing minority ethnic families from having a full choice within the locale. Gender also becomes a divisive issue given that there are more ethnic minority males at St Mary's due to the school's dress code which discriminates against Muslim girls. Obviously there is the further issue of the school selecting students on the grounds of being Catholic, thus preventing choice for other families in the locale who are not Catholic and who may not know the particular strategies which some non-Catholic families use to gain access to the school.

Teachers at North Town Secondary and St Mary's both acknowledged that their schools were not particularly welcoming to minority ethnic families. This data and the complexities and tensions surrounding race in the locales will be examined in depth in Chapter Seven. It is mentioned here to highlight the complexities of choice and the centrality of race to North Town.

Choice in North Town is a much more subtle process, a *veiled choice*. A small amount of choice is undoubtedly going on in the city. It is similar to the operation of choice before the introduction of school league tables and choice policies. Parents can choose to move house or to send their children to church schools, or outside the city, but the majority of children attend their local catchment area school.

Within North Town parents may also be choosing to send their children to schools in more rural locales outside of the immediate city. Church schools are providing some choice:

⁴¹ The British National Party (BNP) is an extreme far right political party. It is firmly opposed to racial integration. As of 2006 it has 53 seats on local councils, and no seats in National Government.

NH: How would you describe your intake in relation to other schools in the area?
HOY: OK, we're probably similar to the other two comprehensive type schools on our doorstep. The Catholic schools, they sort of cream off the top 20- 30 percent ability of our intake, err which for a church school is I think, it might be quite unusual. They are also competing against the other Catholic schools. Err well they do take 40 percent of students which are not Catholic.
(Head of year, white female, North Town Secondary)

As the head of year suggests there may be a negative choice for some minority ethnic students, but overall school choice is not a significant experience or concern for the majority of families.

In contrast to East Town, North Town students appeared to have little knowledge concerning other schools in the locale. They had difficulty naming more than one other school and had not considered the possibility of attending a school other than their local one. Similarly, no students interviewed said that they had been to look at any other schools. The discourse of school choice was alien to these students, reflecting the lack of emphasis upon school choice in the locale. Students from North Town Secondary and North Town Sport expressed little, if any, understanding of how their school might be viewed by the community and by those at other schools. They thought that their school was 'OK' but could not articulate any evaluations of their school compared to others. This illustrates how school choice, comparison and categorisation of schools was not a significant discourse for the students within the locale. The students had not looked at other schools and so had no categories for comparison. This again implies that parental choice of school appears to have particular effects upon schools which are part of a competitive choice market, such as East Town Secondary and Poplar School, rendering differences in cultural capital more visible.

Students from St Mary's were most positive about their school, which may have been related to their parents positively choosing a church school and the growing reputation of the school within the locale. Students from North Town Sport and North Town Secondary seemed content with their experience.

North Town teachers viewed their schools and students in a different way to East Town teachers. North Town Secondary has similar numbers of students with special needs, low attainment of students on entry and who come from a deprived area with multiple needs, as East Town Secondary. However, the teachers when discussing their intake

stressed ability less and appeared more accepting of the needs of their intakes, which were quite considerable.

North Town teachers did not identify the locus of difficulty with the pupils alone, instead referring to ways in which the school and the curriculum was not always able, in their views, to meet the students' needs. In contrast, East Town teachers were more likely to see the locus of any difficulty for the school residing in the student intake itself, rather than with the school or curriculum. The lack of active choice and competition and the fact that most schools in the locale have similar intakes and face the same issues appear to have resulted in teachers and students within North Town feeling largely positive about their schools'.

NH: How do you view this school in relation to other schools in the area?

Geog. Teacher: I don't think we have a huge disparity between the schools. There are the church schools which are probably seen by parents as they have a better academic record and whatever. I think most of the North Town schools actually are very similar to the type of standard. I think we have a good reputation.

(Geography teacher, white female, North Town Sport)

In North Town Secondary students were described in a matter of fact way. Discourses of student ability existed but were not used to compare students with other schools, possibly because teachers like the geography teacher felt that schools across the city were fairly homogenous. In North Town students were not viewed by their teachers in terms of the desirability of their results, which may explain why teachers in North Town were not so concerned with the ability of students and did not evaluate their schools on the basis of this.

NH: How would you describe the student intake?

HOY: Well, mostly our intake is local, we don't get very many who are bussed in, or out of zone or out of area. With the social problems we've got in the area, obviously our intake come straight from the primary school, we know, we know what we're getting, there's no unknown quantity really every year.

(Head of year, white female, North Town Secondary)

North Town teachers frequently referred to the high levels of unemployment and poverty facing the local community.

Despite the social problems identified by teachers and some acknowledgement of low levels of ability the discourse which teachers used to describe their intake was positive and warm towards the students as individuals.

NH: How would you describe the student intake?

Geog. teacher: Likeable, but challenging.

Maths teacher: I think what we do with pupils is more with raising their aspirations and improving their social skills, academically we're there or thereabouts we get reasonable

results with the intake we get. But I think it's more to do with developing them as people we're actually quite good at it.

Geog. teacher I think we see that as a priority don't we, and compared with the other schools we still seem to get some top end students we don't get them all from the area but we still get some top end students and we still get students who severely need loads and loads of special needs support. But they still feel they can come here and get something like all the stuff that goes on to try and support them.

(Maths and geography teachers, white females, North Town Sport) (Emphasis added)

The maths and geography teachers appear to express an old style pastoral and maternal discourse concerned with the individual and with the value of comprehensive social inclusion. They are primarily concerned with social skills and appear to view this over and above academic results. Their comments may be interpreted by an *overt choice* and standards discourse as epitomising all which is wrong with 'bog standard' comprehensives: low expectations on the part of teachers and a lack of desire to push for academic achievement. Such achievement and outcomes, as measurable by league tables central to a choice driven market place are not the concern of these teachers expressed in the phrase: 'We get reasonable results.' This notion of reasonable is antithetical to a standards agenda.

There is a tension here between the warmth and respect with which North Town teachers view their students and the question of whether this comfortable relationship may itself breed complacency and a willingness to accept the status quo and school deficits. There is a sense in which North Town teachers have accepted the lack of desirable long term outcomes for their students in a city with overall low results and low levels of employment and aspirations, and are focussing instead of challenging this on social aspects. The lack of choice and competition between schools also means that teachers do not need to view their students as desirable or undesirable in terms of academic outcomes.

The different ways in which notions of ability, and students themselves, are viewed by teachers is a significant difference between the locales. The significance placed upon student ability and background in East Town appears to reflect the significant role of parental choice. For schools in East Town, competition for students is significant and freely expressed by teachers, particularly in terms of attracting students perceived as desirable in terms of academic outcomes. Choice is creating particular tensions and problems for schools in East Town and is creating a discourse of comparison and the notion of an ideal student. This is absent in North Town where schools have very

similar intakes of which they are accepting. This lack of competition at secondary level means that teachers do not feel that there are high levels of competition between local schools. As a result the school and teachers accept their student intakes without having to problematise them or compare students in relation to an ideal. Although St Mary's and the other church schools in North Town are viewed as 'creaming off' the top students, the other schools do not seem to be overly concerned by this competition.

In North Town, school choice and competition is beginning to enter school discourse, with all parents encouraged to choose a school. Teachers had mixed feelings concerning the extent to which choice would operate to a greater degree within the locale. Students were unable to identify many other schools and all expressed satisfaction with their school, implying that increased choice will be slow to take effect, if at all. Within the locale there seems to be a familial attachment with the nearest local school and a lack of willingness on the part of parents to choose a school requiring any considerable travel. A few teachers in North Town Sport and North Town Secondary were keen to embrace choice. In North Town Secondary the policy discourse of choice, diversity and markets was being embraced by the school management who had created a post entitled Head of Transition and Marketing. This is a clear example of market discourse being embraced by a school, or perhaps the school becoming captured by the discourse. Whilst most teachers accepted that choice would probably have a small impact on their schools, they felt that where it may have an effect would be if they could recruit students whose parents opt to send them to school outside of the city:

- HTM: I think it depends on the area , whether the area is an educated area and that's not the case around here. Its opinion at the moment and its changing opinion we battle against, and obviously it's not a one man job. It's got to be done from inside the classroom out and outside in.
- NH: Do you think your intake will change as a result of the LEA's increased emphasis on and encouragement of parental choice?
- HTM: Yes.
- NH: And how might it change?
- HTM: Well, we loose a percentage of students from, well we've got two schools where every year they all come to us bar about three or four if they live on the boundaries and they've gone to another high school, but we've got two schools where its probably about half and half and from year to year publicity bad publicity can rock the boat and the intake can drop, so I'm targeting those two schools.
- NH: Do you have surplus places?
- HTM: Yeah, I suppose we do at the moment we're not oversubscribed at all at the moment.
- NH: So just those schools where students go to either?
- HTM: Yeah definitely, but we're really going to town on getting in there first. Yeah, also our schools being knocked down and we're having a new school, a blue skies phase one school and there's only a few around the country and each LEA's got

one and we're ear marked and we're going to be an ICT enriched school so emmm that's a selling point for us, we can only go up.

(Head of transition and marketing, white female, North Town Secondary)

These comments illustrate how the language of choice and marketisation ('selling point', 'enriched', 'getting there first', 'targeting, publicity') is beginning to enter teacher discourse in North Town. This discourse becomes an avenue for middle class assumptions concerning choice, good schools, desirable cultural capital and the ideal student to develop. The language used by the head of transition also shows evidence that she is beginning to view the school and its neighbouring schools in a more competitive fashion. '*Were really going to town on getting in there first.*' This emphasis on competitive market-informed language has the potential to lead to categorising and idealising particular kinds of students as is already the case in East Town.

A longitudinal study of the locale would allow examination of the direct effects of choice within a locale. The discourse of school choice is, however, alien to many families within the locale and many teachers felt that parents would not access choice information:

NH: Do you think parental choice is going to make a difference? do you think parents are going to actively choose, or will students carry on attending their local school?

Music teacher: They're the whatever's easiest, at the moment. They follow suit, they don't want to upset the apple cart and they generally go,... I went there so you'll go there.

(Music teacher, white male, North Town Secondary)

NH: Do you think your parents access league tables?

Music teacher: Well we're in a really fortunate position coz this year there were only three schools that improved in terms of their GCSE results and we were one of them and none of the others in the area got through so we've got that in our favour, and on the publicity side and also, league tables a little bit, but I don't think they really understand yeah.

(Music teacher, white male, North Town Secondary)

Veiled choice and overt choice: first conclusions

From this brief macro-level analysis of the role of choice, it is evident that *overt choice* and *veiled choice* are occurring simultaneously in different locales, with different implications in terms of teacher and student experience. The implications and impacts of choice are not yet fully apparent, but will become more so with the micro level analysis in Chapters Seven to Nine. At this point, it is evident that a market discourse of choice, standards and accountability is operating in East Town and, as a direct result,

teachers are viewing their students in relation to desirable outcomes. This results in a number of racially and socially classed assumptions being made.

Teachers in East Town Secondary are rating their students as of lower ability when compared with schools such as Poplar School. Data from teachers suggests that any need which a student has is being seen as an extra financial burden on the school, particularly when children in a school appear to have multiple needs. Poplar School is thriving in the choice conditions and appears to be operating at a high standard with successful outcomes. However, the downside to this school's success is the unequal social distribution of students in the locale. This means that some schools, such as East Town Secondary, are faced with a disproportionately large number of students needing a wide range of support and feel that they are not able to compete with the likes of Poplar. One outcome of this is that teachers begin to view their schools negatively and their students as problematic, which as we have seen in the case of East Town Secondary has serious implications for students' experiences of school, their opportunities and outcomes. What must it feel like to be the East Town student who did not want to go to the school and thinks that she will have less chance because she is aware of her school's reputation in the wider community? This is evidence of an iniquitous school experience, especially when viewed alongside Poplar where all students think that their school is good and believe that they will succeed. *Overt choice* in East Town appears to be continuing or creating this inequity, which is both unjust and iniquitous.

In contrast, the negative perceptions of schools by teachers and the ranking and comparison of their students in terms of ability are far less in North Town. Teachers are warm and positive about their students and do not appear to compare their intakes in terms of ability and potential outcomes to the same extent. There is no doubt that school competition is significantly less in North Town where schools feel fairly certain that they will get an intake of students from their immediate catchment area. In North Town with its old style choice there is a sense in which teachers may be complacent concerning their students' and school's outcomes. With little competition and very few jobs available for students on leaving school post sixteen, which many students do, teachers seem to accept the situation and do not seek to overcome or challenge it. It is arguable that this critique of North Town is entrenched in New Labour discourse: of

new choice and diversity as a way to over turn the bog standard comprehensive. On the positive side North Town students are spared the distress of attending a school which they are told is no good and one where they feel that they have less chance. It may be that they have less chance overall in North Town schools, but the students do not feel that. North Town students and parents are very accepting of their schools and do not appear particularly to challenge or question the provision.

Veiled choice and *overt choice* are problematic mechanisms. North Town schools fall considerably closer to a comprehensive model. However, there is still a lack of racial integration and, or inclusion and the fear that they are 'bog standard' schools which in New Labour's words are complacent and do not challenge inequity and strive to raise standards. On the other hand East Town is firmly in the grip of market competition which is also leading to particularly harsh, iniquitous experiences for some students, those who end up in the less well favoured school, whilst also allowing some schools with high standards to thrive. The way in which choice is operating in North and East Towns is diametrically opposed. The challenge in the remainder of this thesis is to explore in greater depth the impacts of choice at the school level and to evaluate and weigh up the relative advantages and disadvantages of *veiled* and *overt choice* and their implications for equity.

Chapter Six

Ability, stratification and discrimination

Following Chapter Five's broad examination of the effects of choice across locales, this and subsequent chapters focus on significant themes in the data, allowing a greater understanding of how issues surrounding the notions of equality and social inclusion arise inside schools and how these relate to the operation of school choice.

In East Town increased competition between schools results in teachers using discourses of ability as a primary tool for student comparison. Ability of students is acknowledged by teachers in North Town but given the absence of high levels of inter school competition teachers appear complacent and do not categorise their students so sharply on ability criteria. The ways in which the discourse of ability is used and operates affects the ways in which students become stratified within school and in some cases acts as a discriminatory mechanism. This chapter begins by considering the relationship between ability and choice and the implications of this at a macro policy and institutional level. It then considers the role of ability discourses within school practice and concludes by considering the impact of such discourses on students. Critical examples from the data are used to show how the notion of ability is discursively constructed and used in different ways by East Town and North Town schools and teachers.

As Chapter Four clarified, this work considers both the actor's intent and the role of discourse (as understood in a post-structural sense) in analysis. In the following chapters a focussed consideration requires interpretive and post-structural analysis to be used in the manner of tools in a tool kit (Ball 1994), to a greater extent than in Chapter Five. Just as a plane and a chisel carry out differing functions in winnowing a piece of wood, post-structural analysis acts as the plane stripping back and discovering layers of discourse, whilst a modernist interpretation acts as a chisel, chipping away at small specific incidents. Both tools are necessary to carve a wooden object and in this analysis both are necessary to form a wide and full interpretation of the data.

The data is considered in terms of the discourses being deployed and where appropriate, the possible intentions of the actors themselves. Analysis focuses upon whose and which discourses are deployed or reflected and how these relate to or differ from the actors' apparent or expressed intentions. In choosing to consider particular discourses, the analysis is inevitably limited. Discourses exist on multiple levels, often intricately interwoven with the life of the individual (in the same way as a piece of wood may be planed from a number of angles, whichever angle illuminating some aspects of the wood and simultaneously obscuring others.) There are inevitably alternative interpretations of actors' intentions and discourses.

The relationship between student ability and school choice

Ability as a term is problematic. Debate focuses around whether ability is a valid term referring to an objective measurable state or instead a socially or discursively constructed self-creating concept. At the heart of this debate is the fundamental nature or nurture conundrum. Whichever position is taken on ability, the unarguable fact remains that ability exists as a fundamental educational discourse, inherent to notions of education, teaching and outcomes. This analysis views ability as essentially a discourse, subjectivating students by colouring and shaping their experience.

The data on school choice identifies considerable inequality of access to schooling and disparity of student intakes in the high choice locale of East Town. Issues concerned with equity and social inclusion were discussed with students in terms of their school experience and the extent to which they perceived this to be fair. Stratification and classification of students by teachers within schools on the grounds of ability was a central theme in the students' responses, particularly in East Town. The following issues, in relation to equity, inclusion and opportunity were particularly important to East Town students:

- Differential treatment across cultural groups (specific to East Town Secondary addressed in Chapter Seven)
- Inequity of treatment and opportunity related to teachers' and school perceptions of students' academic ability (as viewed through grouping, setting and GCSE options)

- Inequity of treatment and opportunity related to teachers and school perceptions of personal characteristics of students in relation to their ability.

East Town students were aware of the ways in which they were being categorised according to discourses of ability by teachers and the school.

As Chapter Five began to argue, the choice market has either created or allowed the continuation of the categorisation of students largely on the grounds of a notion of ability. Choice is implicated in this classification because when the high and low choice locales of East Town and North Town are compared ability discourses amongst teachers and students were evident to a greater extent within East Town, where the majority of teachers discussed their school, its market position and their feelings about it mainly in relation to student ability.

Policy discourse of accountability is central to issues of equity and explains the need, felt by East Town teachers, to focus on ability within the school. It is the interplay and relationship between discourses of choice, accountability and ability which are central to and determine the iniquitous experiences identified by students within East Town. Choice and accountability dictate that certain students are valuable to the school: those who will gain high results with minimal input (Gillborn and Youdell 2000). This creates a discourse of the able and ideal student. The school thus subjectivates the able student as a good student and students themselves take up this subjecthood through practices of the school, and particularly in practices which exclude other students.

This study identifies a relationship between high levels of parental choice and teachers' classification of minority ethnic students according to ability equated with English language skills, which is addressed in depth in Chapter Seven.

Throughout the data, differences between teacher and student experiences in North Town and East Town are apparent. Students in East Town are influenced and constructed by the prevailing discourse of choice and school accountability which they relate implicitly and explicitly to opportunity and discrimination. For example, some East Town Secondary students thought that they had reduced chances of accessing university as a result of attending a school viewed negatively by the community (see their comments on p. 88). North Town students accepted their school, their education,

and the low expectations for their attainment as a given and were not quick to rise to or produce cries of inequity.

North Town students' lack of awareness of any other schooling option than the one they were in results from a lack of choice and school comparison. This implies that choice may have a positive effect in terms of raising student aspirations. Although the extent to which it is choice alone and not the wider aspirations of the locale, home and community experience which is responsible requires further study. East Town has more pockets of affluence than North Town and higher levels of post-school employment which also affect student perceptions of school and their future opportunities. The data from this study, as Chapter Five illustrated, shows that whilst choice appears to have raised student participation, and for some student's aspiration, it has also resulted in some East Town students feeling disenfranchised and unfairly treated by school choice.

Ability as a socially legitimate stratifying device (the macro level)

The notion of different ability students was central to teacher and student discourse across East Town. Teachers referred to student ability when describing school intakes and their own teaching experience. Students mentioned ability in relation to setting, where students are grouped by ability for lessons. The process of setting allows students to be in different sets for different subjects depending on their progress and achievement in each, and the students also suggested their behaviour affected the set they were placed in. Students in Poplar School referred to a method of grouping, called 'stranding' by the school. This was where students were placed in one of two coloured strands for selecting their GCSE options. Students placed in one strand had a wider choice of subjects available to them. These discourses of ability and a fixed view of academic success implicit in choice policies, reproduced and expressed by teachers, and understood by students make assumptions concerning the purpose and value of education.

In East Town Secondary there were multiple examples of teachers appearing to see low ability as synonymous with difficult teaching experiences, issues of poverty and lower socio-economic status.

Notions of aptitude and ability have a significant history in relation to school discourse, stemming from their use in relation to the eleven plus selection system for places in secondary schooling. Prior to 1965 secondary school experience was dependent upon the eleven plus test, which was supposed to measure ability. On the grounds of this test, attendance at different schools was justified, and in 2006 this continues to operate in some locales. The idea behind the eleven plus, of ability, as a fixed and measurable construct, measurable through an IQ test, contains numerous assumptions. It assumes that intelligence is synonymous with ability and is measurable, which is problematic given that IQ tests are often culture specific. The idea of deciding future education via a test at the age of eleven also assumes that levels of ability are static or fixed relative to the cohort of children taking the test. It assumes that the intelligence and ability of children at the age of eleven will be directly related to future school outcomes. This fails to take account of individual factors which may have negatively affected children's development up to the age of eleven, but which do not mean that the child will fail to catch up or overtake peers. Also the notion of ability as a relatively fixed construct makes a number of social class assumptions given that grammar schools have a disproportionately low percentage of children in receipt of free school meals. Differences in home and familial experience may affect test performance at the age of eleven.

Sample schools and teachers shunned the notion of intelligence in favour of ability. No reference was made to students' intelligence in the sample by any teachers. However, the majority of them used a discourse emphasising ability. The teachers felt comfortable with ability, using it readily, without the same connotations felt if labelling a student intelligent or unintelligent. Ability within East Town teacher discourse, and as a discourse itself, is for the teachers a safe, comfortable, common sense, socially acceptable and politically correct way of labelling students. The notion is felt to be politically correct since the discourse of meeting students individual needs and grouping students by ability is a central part of Labour's education discourse (DFEE 2001, *Schools Building on Success* p7, 17, 53) and is hence a discourse which teacher's feel is acceptable to use.

Stratification of students according to ability by East Town teachers operates within schools and in the comparisons teachers make between their students and those from other schools.

Within East Town [this school] has the lowest profile by ability of all the schools.
(Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

Because they have low learning ability or come from deprived areas the city centre.
(English teacher and SENCO, white females, East Town Secondary)

In East Town Secondary, the “knowledge” that the student intake was significantly less able and of low ability was fundamental to many teachers’ perceptions of their students. The significant question is whether this discourse deployed by the teachers itself constructs low ability.

Ability is viewed by East Town schools as a socially acceptable label which places the locus of difficulty inherently with the student as opposed to external factors such as the home, family, school or society. By using the notion of student ability, schools are able to feel that student experience is equitable and appear to promote ideas of equality of opportunity which is self differentiated by the students’ own ability. However, students may enter school with below accepted levels of numeracy, literacy and social skills, but this does not itself mean that the student is of inherently low ability or intelligence.

When this is ignored, ability becomes a label functioning as a middle class discourse legitimising and normalising student inequity by calling it ability, which works to the advantage of certain students. Categorising students according to ability does not require recourse to and assessment of the social inequities of student experience which have resulted in them being classed as low ability to begin with, as it implies that a student’s inherent ability is something immutable.

Classifying students on the grounds of ability is also relative to a discourse of outcomes. Ability is only a useful label when measured in relation to a commonly agreed outcome. The discourse of school accountability, particularly in relation to the narrow band of school academic literacies and outcomes currently valorised by the education system, allows ability a central role.

Teachers in the East Town sample schools categorised their students as more or less able and this appeared to operate across the board of student attainment. Few teachers commented upon students having different ability for different curriculum areas. In

Poplar School, where ability and good school results were of central importance to the school and its public reputation, the head teacher argued for the importance of cognitive attainment tests to ensure division of children and suitable teaching. 'CAT scores show that we have a wide range of abilities. We have special needs children and a particularly good learning support department' (Head teacher, white male, Poplar School). He accepted ability differences as a given and not something socially created to be addressed or overcome. There appears to be a steady growth in the use of IQ and cognitive attainment tests (CAT's) by schools in relation to setting and grouping of students, implying that ability is held as a fixed attribute⁴².

Ability stratification in school processes and practice

A substantial body of literature addresses the practical organisation of students within schools by means of grouping, setting and streaming (Kulik and Kulik 1992). Ireson, Hallam and Hurley (2005) (see p. 49) Whilst many studies address this organisation itself, only a limited number of more recent works have done so critically in relation to inequities and discourse. Of all the sample schools Poplar School, which was most popular within the choice locale, adopted the greatest amount of within school student stratification.

Whilst students in North Town sample schools and East Town Secondary and Median School were all given the same limited choice of options from which to choose for GCSE subjects, a process of stranding for GCSE options in Poplar School extends beyond advising students. The school takes control over what subjects students can and cannot do and limits the opportunities available to a number of students. The school divided its students into two strands, red and green for GCSE's with differing access to courses related to the stream. Red stream students have a wider choice of GCSE's, whilst students allocated to the green strand take fewer GCSE's, are encouraged to take GNVQ courses and are not able to access humanities GCSE's.

Senior teacher: [Going from] year nine to ten with the strands, have you heard about that? The reasoning behind it is obviously to give the low ability pupils a, vocational subject which has more coursework. They have one GNVQ replacing two GCSE's... and they do five or six other GCSE's. Ideally they do the GNVQ which is 75 percent

⁴² For further information about Cat's testing see nfer Nelson 1993:
<http://www.nfer-nelson.co.uk/education/resources/cat3/cat3.asp>

course work, pick up one more GCSE then they've got a qualification to stay on to college or sixth form. Though most of them go on with the vocational. Where it does let them down is those two GCSE's coz humanities subjects are the ones, and there's quite a few students who like history and geography and would like to do that.

NH: What are your feelings about that?

Senior teacher: You cant class it as equal opportunities as they cant choose what they want to do, but its creating opportunities which is more meeting their needs and will hopefully help them more in the future for higher education.

(Senior Teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town) (Emphasis added)

Despite largely subscribing to a notion of fixed ability, teaching staff in Poplar School had mixed feelings concerning the GCSE stranding (A system sometimes referred to as banding, eg Ball (1981) in Beachside Comprehensive.) This seems contradictory, though probably results from the way in which the practice of stranding makes the assumptions concerning ability and their relationship with a lack of equality of opportunity starkly visible. Most teachers stated that stranding did not provide equality of opportunity for the students, but the senior management team justified it on the grounds that it was in the best interests of the students.

Art teacher: I don't know that much about it. I've only been here two years, but I know when the options come there is this slight separation suddenly goes on. Where they say you're in the green strand and you're in red. And one is so the more able have a bigger choice, but I know we've had meetings at school and senior management have justified it by saying well we've looked at how well these children have done in the past and by going along this road those children tend to do better when the results come.

NH: Some of the students thought stranding was done, to give the school good results?

Art teacher: I think it is. I think every teacher will say to be honest now there's so many league tables and things that err you are encouraged to get the best results out of them.

(Art teacher, white female, Poplar School East Town)

The art teacher, whilst accepting a fixed notion of ability, feels that restricting access to courses relative to perceived or measured student ability is motivated by the school's desire to produce the best results for the school which will then support and allow the continuation of their strong position in the parental choice market. It is significant that it is the school perceived as most successful by parents which resorts to limiting opportunities for some students.

Justifications for restricting access to knowledge through stranding or setting at GCSE are questionable. Stranding, as in operation at Poplar School, has implications particularly when viewed in relation to the current trend in proposals to change to secondary level examinations with wider access to vocational courses. Diversified courses carry with them issues concerning the extent to which schools are able to control access to courses and whether this wholly serves the interests of the students.

The discourse of ability adopted by Poplar school in response to discourses of choice and accountability in turn operates to restrict access to history and geography on the grounds that the students will not get high (A*-C) GCSE results in the subjects. Students are being prevented from accessing an area of knowledge solely on the grounds of the school's discourse of ability.

- NH: In terms of equal access to courses etc, do you feel able to provide it?
- Deputy head: We don't in that, at one stage when we start our key stage four provision, we do divide the children into two bands [referring to the process the SMT and students within the school refer to as stranding]. And some children if they are in the wrong band are not able to access certain subjects. We believe that it's professional guidance and that even though they don't believe it at the time, that we are putting them into the best areas possible. So, no, not everyone has access to everything, but that would be true in any situation in that if you're not capable of doing it and there are better courses for you to do you'd be best doing those. But everyone starts off with the same opportunities the fact that some people don't reach the top of this hill, therefore they can't climb the next hill.....Yes obviously it helps our GCSE results. Last year we had the best ever they shot up ten percent at 5 A*-C's or equivalent that's nice. But the nicer thing is that those children who would have ended up with three GCSE's could not have gone into post 16 education, now can and have gone on here to study A-levels in some cases. I believe that is at the crux of it, we are giving those children the best opportunity to succeed.
(Deputy head teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town) (Emphasis added)

Poplar's deputy head deploys a discourse of innate ability to justify his school's use of stratifying mechanisms which reduce opportunities for some students. He justifies this division on the grounds that all students start off with the same opportunities in school. This however overlooks the question of whether all students are equally able to access those opportunities, in his words to climb 'the hills' of education, and whether they are all at an equal starting place to begin with. The teacher's discourse suggests that whether students succeed or fail to make it to the top of the hill is dependent on their own capability to succeed, placing the locus of success entirely with the students own responsibility. This discourse or myth allows the school and its teachers' to feel just and fair in implementing stratified practices. However, the discourse is based on false premises, assuming that every child enters schooling from exactly the same starting place and assuming that school discourse is equally accessible to all children regardless of their home literacies. It is operating as a middle class discourse which allows and justifies inequity and reduction of opportunity for some students. The justificatory discourse used by Poplar's deputy head mirrors those used by advocates of the eleven plus school selection system.

A secondary level of justification is also used when the deputy head claims that the apparent inequity of preventing certain students from accessing humanities subjects is

justifiable on the grounds that the alternative qualifications they gain in the form of GNVQ's allow them greater access to higher education. However, he also acknowledges that most students placed in the green strand tend to take vocational routes post sixteen, undermining the previous argument that the stranding promotes access to higher education for the less able students. The fact that these comments are prefaced by a positive acknowledgement of the significant improvement in GCSE results implies that there are two discourses at play. The most important for the school and the more covert one is that of achieving good results and retaining market position. However, this is overlaid by a more visible and socially acceptable discourse of the humanitarian teacher and school, striving to do the best for each student.

The use of the term stranding by Poplar school to name the method by which it divides students' GCSE choice maybe viewed as an attempt to avoid the old negative connotations associated with streaming and hence sell the process to teachers, students and their families as less divisive than it really is.

The quote from Poplar schools deputy head highlights the central conflict for schools in trying to reconcile a humanistic desire to put the student first with the expectations of a market discourse. This tension between the school and government discourse of standards and accountability and the social discourse of the wider role of the teacher with responsibility for the well being and education of the individual student was expressed implicitly by many East Town teachers:

I do believe we have done it for the right reasons [stranding]. **The good exam results are a wonderful bonus**, but in our heart of hearts it is to try and get appropriate courses so that the children succeed and it gives them the next stepping stone and that's how we try and **sell it to parents**. Obviously the children are dubious about that. Many of them and their parents have an inflated opinion of their ability, and the reality is if they had followed a full GCSE course they would have probably ended up as what we might call I'd hate to call them *failures* but in terms of the progression into higher education that is. We are getting students going into university now who in the past would have left at year 11 with two GCSE's and I believe that is fantastic.

(Deputy head teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town) (Emphasis added)

There was evidence of some personal conflict for teachers between providing opportunities whilst at the same time being required to restrict these, partly in the interests of the students and partly in the interests of the school. The comments from the deputy head illustrate the ways in which discourses of standards and accountability, and in turn assumptions concerning ability, have crept into teacher discourse in the high choice locale of East Town. On the one hand the deputy head seems genuinely concerned 'in our heart of hearts' with doing the best for his students, however his

comments are based on a position committed to a notion of ability as fixed and immutable and tinged with aspects of accountability and market discourse.

The 2005 White Paper does not show evidence of considering students' own feelings and experiences. Students across East Town schools appeared very aware and sensitive to the hidden discourses of the school, and discourses designed to justify inequality. Students in Poplar school were not brought by the school's justificatory discourse of dividing students being in their best interests. They viewed stranding as a tangible source of inequity:

- Cara: Red strand are the brainiest. They get to pick history or geography or business studies. They get different choices. Red strand get more choices.
Sarah: Green get GNVQ.
Molly: Green strand, you get less options.
NH: How do the strands work?
Molly: SATS results and your CAT results.
Sarah: And how you've been getting on over the year.
Cara: Half the year, who get the highest marks. The teachers put you in, they use your results, your SATs grades.
NH: What do you think about that?
Sarah: I think it's unfair, coz you can't do history or geography.
Cara: And they don't do SATS in geography, so they can't tell really.

(Year ten, white girls, Poplar School East Town)

Sarah's comments reflect the sense of unfairness voiced by many students allocated to the green strand. They have to do GNVQ's and do not get the chance to do history or geography, despite, as Cara comments, the absence of tests to assess their performance in these subjects prior to the stranding. The students have internalised Poplar School's discourses of ability and the desirable student for the school, which includes those who behave in a certain way. For example, Cara identifies 'brainy people' as being treated differently and given more choices.

- NH: Why do you think there are strands?
Molly: To get better marks for the school.
Cara: For their reputation.
Sarah: And they want to get that special status or something.

(Year ten, white girls, Poplar School East Town)

Tension is visible in student discourse between the idea that teachers are putting students where they 'think you'll do best' and the school using the strands 'for their reputation'. The students' awareness of the importance of reputation to the school was frequently expressed by students across schools in East Town and in particular Poplar. The Poplar students' comments concerning a discourse of reputation correspond with those of the head teacher when he talks about 'selling the school' to parents:

As far as teaching staff here are aware, we are dependent on parental preference. Staff are aware of that and at Parental open evenings and parents evenings staff are very involved in and sell the school in a big way during that time.

(Head teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town)

In East Town, choice has made school reputation a commonplace discourse and one which the students are familiar with and able to reflect on. Reputation is referred to by some teachers in North Town but was entirely absent from North Town students' vocabulary. On the other hand several year ten Poplar students felt that the stranding arrangement was used to get better marks for the school to improve its status.

The selection of students to take exam courses by Poplar School supports the argument that choice, selection and public accountability by schools has resulted in an A*-C economy existing in many schools. This coheres with the findings of Gilborn and Youdell (2000) who identified the centrality of ability in teacher discourse in Clough School specifically in relation to the demands of an A*-C economy. The stratification of students by Poplar School suggests that within school triage (Gilborn and Youdell 2000) is in operation, with the highest degree of this in the most popular school. Triage, in relation to education as identified by Gilborn and Youdell, describes the process whereby schools consider their student intake specifically in relation to their potential for achieving desired outcomes and apply an appropriate treatment only to students considered 'treatable', which allows the school to gain the results it wants, even if this requires limiting student access to particular courses. Poplar School's stranding at GCSE may be viewed as an example of this, with only students likely to get high GCSE results being allowed to study for a subject, regardless of the students own interests.

Student perceptions of the impact of ability discourses

The emphasis on ability as a legitimate way of discussing intelligence was similarly reflected in East Town students' comments, where only two students referred explicitly to intelligence, whilst many referred to ability. There were several examples of students viewing ability as an accepted stratifying device:

- NH: How are you divided up for lessons?
Theo: It's on intelligence.
Michael: Depends if you're stupid.
Rob: Not necessarily...
NH: How does it work?
Theo: If you've got low ability you'll be in the bottom set, if you've got high ability in the top set.

Michael: Depends how you behave. If you've got bad behaviour you'll be put in the bottom set.

(Year eight, white boys, Poplar School East Town)

Year eight students in Poplar School, appeared to adopt the discourse of ability as something innate to the student synonymous with intelligence, exemplified by the idea of it being something you've 'got'. Behaviour is also identified by the students as a factor for stratification as is evident in Michael's comment. A relationship between the teachers' views of a student's ability and how they view and respond to their behaviour was identified as an issue by several students, who suggested that bad behaviour was largely paralleled with low ability by the teachers. (This is discussed in depth on page 182.)

Whilst year eight students in Poplar School appeared to have adopted the school discourse on ability, year ten students questioned the use of ability tests as a means of determining class sets and GCSE strands:

NH: What do you think about those tests? (referring to Cognitive Attainment Tests referred to by the students)

Adam: I think they should have something like they do in the sixth form, like they interview people something like that.

Matt: I think it should be more like how keen you are to learn as well, rather than just what your IQ is.

Adam: Yeah.

Tom: Yeah.

Adam: I don't think you should do the CAT test.

(Year ten, white boys, Poplar School East Town)

The students' comments on willingness to learn as important, contrasts with the wider perception of the East Town schools and teachers who place ability and implicitly intelligence at the centre.

Ability grouping

In relation to ability grouping and setting in general, only a few students commented on grouping specifically in relation to equity and opportunity, although students also perceived differential treatment according to how they were viewed by teachers and the school in relation to their behaviour.

Many students appeared to accept the notion of entrenched ability:

NH: Are you in groups for all your subjects?

Sarah: We're divided into groups. It's pretty fair, coz people are more able than others and the more able people go in like a higher group. Than the not able go in, like a lower group and some are in middle.

Jane: Yeah, coz like in year seven, we were in a mixed group and then we all moved up and I found it like harder to do the work, but you do more stuff.
(Year eight, white girls, Poplar School East Town)

Rick: I think it's good, they work at their own level.
Tod: Work at our own level, yeah.
Sam: I think it's good because everyone in the groups like the same ability.
NH: Do you think it might be better in mixed groups?
Rick: It wouldn't work. The teachers couldn't do it.
Tod: You'd be told off for talking.
(Year ten, white boys, East Town Secondary)

Students cited the same reasons as their teachers to justify grouping. This echoing of the discourses of teachers and the school, illustrates the ways in which setting and grouping are entrenched within school discourse.

In some students' comments a sense of having to accept something which was at times hurtful or troubling was evident:

Matthew: You're able to learn more in a higher group.
Lewis: But if you're in a low group teachers treat you like you're really dumb.
Matthew: I like to be grouped coz when you're in the top set you get to do better stuff.
(Year eight, white boys, Median School East Town)

George: I don't really care what set I'm in.
Alex: I'd get offended if I was put in a really low set, Coz they're trying to say you're stupid you have to go in a low set.
George: But its only coz of what you get and they're putting you in a low group to help you get higher.
Chris: But when you do go in a low set they take everything too slow for you, like you don't learn anything. I think some of its not based on SAT's, it's based on behaviour as well. Like bad behaviour will be put in a low set.
(Year eight, white boys, Poplar School East Town)

Being in a high group was generally viewed as desirable although students also tried to find ways to justify to both themselves and their peers being in a lower group. The comments from the Poplar boys illustrate this struggle between the schools own platitudinous justifications for groupings for example expressed by George 'they're putting you in a low group to help you get higher' and the boys' own personal experiences and feelings, 'I'd get offended if I was put in a really low set'. The boys attach a high status to being in a high set and their fears of being put into low sets are evident. They equate being placed in a low set with being 'dumb', 'stupid' and with bad behaviour. The comments from the boys imply that many students value being in higher sets and view lower sets negatively. In relation to social inclusion these comments imply that the students are very aware of their ability as perceived by the school and view being in lower groups as a socially and personally negative thing. Stratification of students on the grounds of ability allows the continuation and reproduction of school

ability discourses, which subjectivate students according to the ways in which the school views their ability.

Ability and fairness

Few students in North Town, East Town Secondary or Median School referred explicitly to the discourse of ability in relation to feeling valued by their school. For East Town Secondary students this is in direct contrast to their teachers' comments, where issues of race and ability were central to their perceptions of and creation of an ideal and able student. Three groups of students did comment particularly upon how students with high ability as identified by the students and the teachers were in their view favoured by their school:

- NH: Is everyone treated equally?
Kate: I don't know. Like if there's, like I don't know, like on that maths trip the other day, they only picked the people who'd get like C's and above.
Kim: Yeah, the two bottom groups didn't get to go, and we never even got asked if we wanted to go. And all the top groups got to go.
Jack: It was just to like go and sit in this big like conference thing and they tell you and you write notes what you're going to need in the GCSE's, and we don't even get the chance.
Kim: And like now were not going to get to know.
Kate: It's only the C and above groups that got to go.
(Year ten, white boys and girls, Median School East Town)

These students cite a specific example of an incident within the school, the maths revision trip, which they perceive as being inequitable. This example is the result of a particular school discourse emphasising academic ability and specific outcomes. Whilst Median School did not strand its students in the same way as Poplar School, the use of ability setting for GCSE subjects appeared to operate in a similar way. The students felt unfairly treated and stigmatised as less able, perceived by their teachers as being unable to benefit from the maths conference. These students were very aware of how they were viewed by the school in terms of their ability with those students classified as less able aware of this and often feeling that they missed out on activities as a result.

In contrast to North Town and the other East Town sample schools, where only a few students commented on a relationship between school favouritism and ability, most groups of students at Poplar School commented upon how the school favoured those students who would get good grades. The students also viewed good grades as the reason why their school was a good one.

- NH: Is everyone treated equally?
 Liam: Clever students...make the school look good so the good students, they take them on trips. They only choose the smart kids on trips.
 Ricky: Or to do questionnaires. People who are naughty don't get to go.
 Mitchell: I don't know, I think if you're in the green strand you're labelled as being a bit more,... less un-intelligent I think that's quite strong in the school.
 (Year ten, white boys and girls, Poplar School East Town)
- Karen: I think that this school has not necessarily the best facilities, but it gets good grades.
 Asha: Yeah, I like it we get good facilities and grades and stuff.
 (Year eight, white and Asian girls, Poplar School East Town)

The students are clearly aware of the importance of student success for the school's reputation, as is evident in Liam's and Mitchell's comments. The ways in which traditional academic success is valued by Poplar School permeated most students' understandings. Again behaviour is also indicated as a factor related to opportunity and ability. Poplar students like Karen and Asha tended to feel that their school was a good one because of its results. Karen and Asha's comments provide an example of students internalising a school discourse of success, an in turn being subjectivated by the discourse.

A learning support assistant (LSA) from Poplar present during one set of interviews commented that she was surprised that all the students had cited high grades as important, even those from the lower ability sets who were unlikely to achieve them. This implies that achieving good grades is a central discourse operating in the school and one which in turn constructs students' perceptions of what is important. The LSA's surprise that the students were so aware of this is significant as when talking about equity and inclusion teachers interviewed did not reflect on how students felt or the ways in which the students might be aware of the discourses and values of the ideal student expressed by the school.

The fact that students in low achieving sets in Poplar School appeared to value high grades raises questions concerning the effect of school standards discourses on those students who are not going to achieve the grades desired by the school. This has implications for students' self esteem and identity. Whilst North Town's lack of emphasis on outcomes may be viewed as complacency and an acceptance of low standards, the students in North Town schools did not appear open to the same sense of failure as those in Poplar School, where success in terms of academic outcomes was pivotal. North Town Sport and Secondary instead valued social achievements in a

similar way. In East Town Secondary the high levels of competition between the schools has resulted in teachers appearing to accept a discourse of inevitable failure for their school with no choice and no hope in relation to academic success. This discourse of inevitable failure was not evident to the same extent in North Town where the teachers view their students more positively (despite low levels of attainment on entry) as they are not comparing their student intakes with the likes of Poplar School, and are not placing the same emphasis on outcomes.

Ability and behaviour

As observed previously, East Town students felt that behaviour was significant in relation to their treatment by teachers. Many students felt that they were treated differently depending upon both their ability and behavioural reputation. North Town students made some references to behaviour but not in relation to ability:

- NH: Are students in school treated fairly?
Tom: Not really.
Zak: Like some people are treated differently, like I am.
Rachel: Like zero tolerance.
Zak: Yeah, if you're bad once you just get excluded straight away for three days and I just think it's stupid. It's just our year just now, coz more people are not behaving well and some people are being sent out for nothing, like. And then if you're really good then you get those chances, coz they don't think you're bad. Like go back in and sit down and get on with your work. Don't do it again, but everyone else just gets like put in the holding area or gets sent home or excluded.
Rachel: I can be really bad and not get sent out coz I'm all safe with work.
(Year ten, white boys and girls, Poplar School East Town)

In this dialogue, the language of government policy concerning crime and deviance has entered school discourse with the idea of 'zero tolerance' in relation to student behaviour. This implies a sense of the student population being policed. This theme was also evident in comments from students in East Town Secondary when they talk about CCTV cameras around the school making them feel as if they are in prison.

- Akim: They're going to have cameras in classes here as well.
NH: What do you think about that?
Rahul: It's like a prison.
Akim: It's like the cameras, and it feels like....cameras everywhere. If you're near inside yeah, they blame you for everything even though you're not involved with it.
(Year ten, Asian boys, East Town Secondary)

In both data extracts the students suggest that they are judged according to their behavioural reputation within the school rather than in relation to a given incident. This was evident in both Zak's and Akim's comments.

A link between school outcomes, ability and behaviour can be inferred from Rachel's and Zak's comments. Rachel feels that she can exhibit bad behaviour yet evade negative responses from the teachers because she is 'safe' with work. This implies that Rachel perceives the teachers to overlook her negative behaviour because she is positively valued by the school because of her work and hence her contribution to and place in the school's A*-C economy. On the other hand Zak feels that because he is not positively valued by the school that he gets treated differently whilst other students perceived as good get 'those chances coz they don't think your bad'. In relation to the comments concerned with special needs students, most students in Poplar School appeared to feel that behaviour of both the able student and those categorised as having special needs was treated differently by the school.

This perceived relationship between behaviour and ability was reinforced by many students within Poplar and Median Schools:

- NH: Is everyone in school treated fairly?
Ali: No, but like the people who are sometimes naughty and that if they get spotted with a different coloured cardigan or pair of shoes they get told room two straight away. But if you've got people in the top groups and everything and they've got like a different coloured cardigan or trainers on the teachers won't bother. I don't think the teacher bothers to go out of their way to tell them, especially Mrs Brown. [Ali then describes an incident where a top set girl got excluded for a day for swearing at a teacher and concludes...] Whereas if that'd been me I'd have been away for the whole week but because it was someone in the higher group and that they didn't even do anything they let her back the next day and I think that's unfair.
(Year ten, white girls, Median School East Town)

Ali, like Rachel and Zak, feels that top set students are treated more favourably by the school, and are able to get away with more bad or anti school rule behaviour. She gives the example of school uniform, suggesting that teachers are more likely to pick up on non-essential rule breaking by students perceived as less able or as generally badly behaved. Again, implicit in this example is the feeling that the school in the high choice locale values the able student. A further reading may interpret this in relation to the ways in which the school and teachers seek to control students who are perceived as a threat to the order and rule governed nature of the school. Some teachers may be discursively constructing certain students as both less able and more likely to deviate, hence requiring correction. Teachers may view imposing their authority over minor behaviour issues such as uniform on students viewed as troublemakers who challenge the authority of the school as a way of retaining the balance of power and control over such students. Students perceived as able are viewed as less threatening to both the

teachers and the schools reputation, hence the teachers are less concerned with chastising such students for minor rule breaking. There may also be issues of social class power at play.

Further evidence that students felt that the schools conflated issues of ability and behaviour is expressed by Rick:

- Rick: I don't think there's enough one to one help for people that need it.
Lucas: I don't think there is.
Rick: I was in second from top science and I got moved down to second from bottom and there's five groups coz of my behaviour and now we're doing the same work as them and taking the higher paper. If we'd had more one to one help with our work I probably wouldn't have behaved like that. I wasn't mucking up the lesson like but I wanted more attention, more help, but the teacher was giving more of the bossier students help than she was me. So I just sat there and didn't do anything coz I wasn't getting any help.

(Year ten, white boys, Poplar School East Town)

Rick attributes being moved down sets to his behaviour rather than his ability. This may be a way for him to save face by claiming it was his behaviour, rather than the teachers' perception of his ability. His reflection on the reasons for his misbehaviour suggest that he has adopted the reason he was given by the school and shows how the school appears to be linking together behaviour and opportunities to access the curriculum through ability grouping.

Students made links between their perceived ability and the ways in which teachers treated their behaviour. A number of students perceived that teachers had higher behavioural expectations for smart students, but at the same time gave such students greater chances and less severe consequences for bad behaviour. The discourse of choice and the ideal student appears (according to student data) to affect how teachers and schools view their students, in terms of school performance and behaviour. The valuing of particular students who help the school's results, which in turn attracts parents to the school, and the acceptance that different expectations are necessary for those with identified special needs, has implications for those students who do not fit into either category.

Behavioural expectations of East Town sample schools reflected the schools' position in the choice market and as a result their expectations of their students. East Town Secondary, as it is undersubscribed, has no choice but to admit students who have been excluded from other schools in the locale. Often these are schools such as Poplar, which have high levels of often non-essential rules and discipline in order to appeal to and

attract a particular kind of parent chooser⁴³. This in turn discriminates against students with behavioural difficulties:

Attendance is good, permanent exclusions fairly low, but lots of temporary exclusions, we have a high intolerance level for example if a child swears at a teacher. (Head teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town)

The standards expected of students in Poplar School are unrealistic for East Town Secondary.

We have to work to be inclusive, everything we espouse the way we deal with children. We are welcoming we are forgiving we are supportive. We plan for bullying we plan for all the behavioural outrages and seek throughout multiple strategies of people of procedures, daily checks, interventions, etc to try to prevent and inhibit some of the disruptive effects on children's education but beyond that when it does happen there's the reaction and the follow up a lot of time spent with parents.

(Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

As a result East Town Secondary spends disproportionate amounts of time working on issues of social and behavioural inclusion which are avoided in Poplar School as a result of their over subscription.

Conclusions

This discussion has identified the impact of discourses of ability at the level of schools, teachers and students. It argues that it is policies supporting choice, diversity and a market model of education which have rendered ability a central issue for East Town schools. Within East Town, ability has become a stratifying device, and a new market discourse concerned with outcomes now exists alongside, and at times replacing, an old 'education as compensatory' discourse which operated to widen opportunities. The students within Poplar School identified the ways in which high attaining students were perceived of as having high ability by their teachers and were, from the students' perspectives, given preferential treatment by the school, in terms of trips, opportunities and greater leniency over behaviour. These students in a choice market are discursively constructed as the 'ideal' and 'desirable' students. This was supported by data in Chapter Five which identified the large extent to which teachers classified their students according to ability, and viewed their intakes negatively if they were predominantly perceived to be of low ability.

⁴³ For example: 'We've got a reputation for strong discipline.' (Head teacher, Poplar School East Town)

Students officially classified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) were accepted and supported by the schools. Poplar School in particular appeared tolerant of its 'official' special needs students in relation to other students without such a label. Poplar school appeared to view SEN students in a different category to the rest of the students, one exempt from the concerns of an A*-C economy. Perhaps the fact that proportions of students with statements are identified on league tables results in them not being viewed as such a problem by the school as these students outcomes will not reflect negatively on the school as a whole.

This chapter illustrates the way in which ability and choice discourses have created a group of students, particularly in Poplar School, who are discursively constructed as 'unwanted', viewed less favourably by the school and not treated equally. In the case of Poplar School this group of students falls between those with special needs and those perceived of as safely A*-C students. This group are stereotyped to be low attaining, less able and more likely to exhibit negative behaviour. In Poplar School their equity of experience is visibly restricted by the stranding process, where their GCSE options are limited.

Emphasis on choice and competition appears to allow the rise of an ability discourse at the same time as a demise of a discourse concerned with equity. The extent to which this discussion of ability has centred on the higher choice locale of East Town implies that the issue is more pertinent to a choice market, since in North Town an old discourse of social equity and inclusion was operating to a greater extent than that of ability. As Chapter Five argued, this does not mean that North Town represents a comprehensive idyll since it is itself complacent, failing to challenge wider inequities faced by its students. The schools did not appear to be actively looking at ways to raise standards and a lack of aspiration was evident among students which may be attributed to the lack of employment within the locale. However, the data from East Town has provided evidence of the specific effects which choice appears to be having in one locale.

The discourses of social inclusion and equity embedded within comprehensive discourse are still enduring for schools and teachers who as the discussion has shown, are reluctant to comprehensively embrace a market discourse. The disquiet expressed by some teachers over stranding in Poplar School is one example and the perceptions of

students themselves suggest that students perceive equity in the sense of an old comprehensive discourse.

Further work is required to examine the extent to which ability labels affect teachers' perceptions of students and their awareness and responses to student behaviour, along with an in depth study of the effects of ability grouping for students' self perceptions. The following chapter addresses issues of race which arose in the data and analyses the ways in which teachers equate ability and race.

Chapter Seven

Race and school choice

Race is an enduring theme across the data, referred to explicitly by students and teachers within East Town, where the sample schools are significantly segregated along lines of race, ability and class. In East Town, the three sample schools have distinctly different intakes with a significant proportion of minority ethnic students in only one of the schools. The local community appears to categorise schools in the area in relation to the proportion of minority ethnic students. Choice is allowing continuation of segregation on race lines and may provide further opportunity for this. In North Town, there is also evidence of racial segregation across the schools, and differential access to choice for different ethnic groups. This supports the findings of Burgess, Wilson and Lupton (2005) that schools exhibit greater levels of segregation on the grounds of ethnicity than the surrounding neighbourhoods. Possible reasons for this segregation are discussed in the course of the chapter.

Critical Race Theory and Race Formation (Omi and Winant (1993), Ladson-Billings (1998)), as outlined and assessed in Chapter Four, inform the subsequent analysis. The analysis acknowledges racism within the sample schools, and seeks to unmask and expose this through a consideration of student and teacher narratives and discourses that frame these.

Racial divisions between schools appear, in the data, to be maintained and possibly affected further by the operation of school choice. Government policy concerning choice and diversity of provision (2005 White Paper) refers to equal opportunities for all and some issues concerning racial inequities but these are not reflected in the policy outcomes. This is mirrored by policy at LEA level. In East Town, where schools are in the process of being closed and amalgamated, studies, plans and consultancy regarding this has failed to consider the implications for minority ethnic students. Similarly, a number of studies on parental choice do not consider the potential significance of racial factors in the making of school choices, or lack of active choice. Gilroy (1990:74) critiques the viewing of racism as 'a superficial problem not requiring a critique of basic social structures', and instead argues for placing race at the centre of power and politics. The data which is considered implies the need, as Gilroy identifies, for race to be

viewed within school choice debate as a central and significant force. The data suggests that race may influence school choice and operate as a discourse, which itself reflects discourses that allow discrimination and inequity to function, with serious implications for equity and social inclusion. This is a pertinent starting place for discussion as issues pertaining to race and racism are immediately evident within the data set.

The references to race within the data are usefully divided into four main interpretive categories:

- School identities, external and internal, linked with ethnicity of student intake and implications for, and created by, a choice market.
- Teachers' personal assumptions concerning ethnic minority students (often focussing on ability, related to English as an additional language).
- Students expressing implicit and explicit experiences of discrimination attributed to their racial status .
- Students expressing explicit prejudiced attitudes and opinions toward other ethnic and social groups.

There are multiple discourses functioning around and constructing the issues surrounding race and ethnicity within the schools and locales. For every discourse identified, a number inevitably remain silent and unvoiced. The discourses outlined are those evident in the discursively constructed analysis.

Discourse of the ideal student

The discourse of the ideal student was used by teachers operating to construct students as desirable or undesirable learners based on the extent to which students were viewed as a positive asset by the school in terms of the outcomes which individual students provide for the school. The operation of this discourse in this context is a direct result and reflection of a policy discourse of parental choice and school accountability and success in terms of outcome and product. The wider market discourse of school success allows a particular discourse of the ideal student to develop within schools and among teachers. Such a discourse becomes essential to the school to attract the kinds of students and parents that it perceives will allow for perceived school success. The discourse of the ideal student operating through and created by teachers is in turn experienced by and creates students as specific subjects. Students themselves create a

student discourse comprised of their perceptions of what their school and teachers value. This discourse is intricately interwoven with both race and ability.

English as an additional language(EAL) associated with student deficit

As a sub discourse of the ideal student a specific discourse is apparent within the sample schools, which combines EAL with student deficit. The student with EAL cannot be an ideal student according to the discourse outlined. This discourse operates at a whole school level and in turn creates a discourse among individual teaching staff. As a result, students with EAL, who in the fieldwork schools were mainly from Pakistan and Bangladesh, are rendered problematic and less desirable for the school.

White hegemony/ supremacy reproduced as normative

Within teacher discourse across sample schools are examples of white teachers acknowledging the existence of racial tensions, inequities and explicit community racism. This is combined with a tacit acceptance of the status quo and a reluctance to actively challenge or address this.

Racism as a discourse itself, used by white and minority ethnic students

The term racism becomes a specific discourse for students within East Town Secondary School. Here both white and minority ethnic students use racism as a shared group discourse operating to define their own identities in relation to the other. The function of this is different for both white and minority ethnic students within the school. White students use racism as a discourse to which they see minority ethnic students having recourse and hence gaining identity and power over the school through this discourse itself. The adoption of this by white students may be acting as a way of legitimising white racism.

Church discourse

This refers specifically to the church schools present within both locales, although only present in the North Town sample. Within these church schools exists a discourse operating to legitimise Christian teaching with parental choice and schools segregated

on religious grounds. The discourse gives parental choice and right to a faith based education ultimate sovereignty.

The locales

In East Town, the three sample schools had different proportions of minority ethnic students. East Town Secondary had the largest proportion of minority ethnic students largely from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and the school was awash with racial tensions being situated in an area of predominantly white housing. Few white families actively chose the school, and according to the teachers many families did not choose the school because of the large minority ethnic intake. It was viewed as an unpopular school particularly by white families. Median School, East Town, although similar in most other respects to East Town Secondary was comprised largely of white students and Poplar School East Town was similarly comprised of mainly white students. In East Town choice by certain parents and neighbourhood composition actively influences the ethnic make up of the schools, with particular ethnic communities favouring particular schools, or only being able to access certain schools.

In North Town where *overt choice* of school is not currently significant for the majority of families, where school intakes are fairly homogenous with regard to socio-economic status and where reputations and outcomes are similar, race appears to be the main factor influencing choice and division between schools. The sample schools have low proportions of minority ethnic students, and these students appear to attend only a limited number of schools which are perceived as safe by the community. Research access was not possible to North Town High, the school in close vicinity which has a larger proportion of minority ethnic students. There was evidence of racial tensions within the community which were expressed by white teachers. St Mary's, the Catholic school provides data on the way in which church schools within North Town, which have higher GCSE results, are currently providing the only real choice for families but are less accessible to minority ethnic families.

Other non-church schools within North Town and situated close to North Town High are also inaccessible to minority ethnic students, being viewed by the community as white-only schools. Attitudes in the schools were entrenched, such that teachers appear to express resignation to the obvious segregation. The church schools admission

policies discriminate indirectly against certain students particularly on the grounds of race. St Mary's, expresses a church school discourse which operates to justify Christian teachings with the selection of certain students (those from Catholic families or with supportive proactive parents, who in North Town are inevitably white). Such a discourse in turn creates an ideal Catholic student subject. St Mary's, whilst situated close to North Town High, has very few minority ethnic students and few Muslim students as a result of the school's emphasis on a specific uniform, which prevents certain students attending. Thus the only choice available within the locale is not available to all. This is justified by those within the school and by advocates of church schooling by emphasis on parental choice and the right of parents to choose a faith based education for their children. The fact that only the church schools are currently gaining high levels of GCSE results within North Town raises significant questions for equity.

Several reasons can be postulated for North Town church schools doing significantly better in terms of league table results. The schools may receive additional funds allowing for greater resources, or the positive parental action of choice which is central in admission to these schools may be implicated, (where positive parental choice operates in East Town to the advantage of Poplar school the school has lower numbers of students with special needs and in receipt of free school meals). The Catholic admission policy itself appears to be prohibitive to minority ethnic families whose children may enter school with lower levels of attainment in English requiring more school resources. Parentally desirable and actively chosen schools in the locales appear to have lower numbers of students with special needs, eligible for free school meals and with English as an additional language.

In East Town Secondary and Poplar School teachers expressed the opinion that some parents made active choice of schools on the grounds of race:

I would say a small proportion of the parents who come here make an active positive choice. **I think a number of parents in the area in the vicinity make a negative choice not to come here. Ok in some cases that's because of the Pakistani intake of the school**, in others it's because of the behavioural reputation of the children.

(Head teacher, white male, North Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

Some of these reasons [for parents choosing the school] **are awful reasons, racism, the idea that we're an all white school**. We're not, over last two years issues of asylum seekers and refugees have come up. There's a distinct minority that would do that.

(Head teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town) (Emphasis added)

Both head teachers' comments appear to refer to traditional or old racism in operation by the parents, a racism which is explicit and obvious rather than working implicitly through institutional mechanisms. This is a factor in the formation of the student intakes in schools in both locales. Subsequent analysis argues that alongside this traditional racism exercised by some parents through choice, is an implicit discursively constituted institutional racism resulting from the discourses and policies surrounding choice and accountability.

English as an additional language and ability

The ways in which teachers within the sample schools construct and view their intakes has been discussed in relation to school choice. This suggested that in East Town the market rendered white, middle class students with English as a first language highly desirable to schools. Minority ethnic students with English as an additional language (EAL), on the other hand, were less desirable, viewed as requiring greater input and resources to achieve the same outcomes in terms of school test results. Teachers within East Town appeared to equate minority ethnic students with English language deficits which they viewed negatively. This supports Gillborn and Youdell's 2000 study :

Additionally, the school interprets different forms of pupil need as forms of pupil deficit: pupils for whom English is an additional language ... are disproportionately placed in particular groups and viewed as unlikely to achieve academically. From the moment they enter the school, therefore, the pupils face a range of assumptions that begin to shape their markedly different educational careers. (Gillborn and Youdell 2000, p. 13)

These assumptions are mirrored in comments by the head teacher from East Town Secondary:

Many of the children are below national average, many of them with additional linguistic issues because of their ethnicity... They need, and must have, focussed attention in year seven and eight. So for the most needy children we do have, I'll call it more like junior school provision fewer teachers, focus on literacy particularly. Their science and mathematic scores tend to be higher, literacy is the big issue for many children here.

(Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

The East Town teachers' perspective appears to be largely driven by the high choice market, viewing students with EAL as problematic. Teachers at East Town Secondary appear automatically to link differences and, or deficits in student experience directly with low ability. East Town Secondary teachers (quoted below), when talking together about low ability students referred to students whose first language is not a written one, in a manner expressing the discourse that the notion of low ability is being used within

the school to refer to any students who do not have good levels of English, despite the fact that this does not mean that a student necessarily has difficulty learning. Any differences in students' cultural capital are viewed as negative if they require extra input from the school or mean that the student may not get high levels in SAT's tests or GCSE's. This supports Tomlinson (1997) who argued that 'Minority ethnic students are less likely to be sought after as 'desirable commodities by the school' (Tomlinson 1997, p. 63). The teachers' discourse of the desirable learner is framed entirely on a western model of modes of learning. The teachers appear influenced by policy and governmental and media discourses which elevate literacy over and above other skills.

I think the intake is of a generally lower than average of ability. We have more students, I think its almost 44 percent, who are below level four in their English when they come to this school, so that's one of the factors.

(SENCO, white female, East Town Secondary)

And later in the interview a link is made between problems the school perceives itself facing in relation to the intake and family capital.

We've got about 43 percent ethnic minority children, the majority of whom are of Pakistani heritage from a poor region of Pakistan. This means that the parents are not educated beyond a primary level or not at all, which I think has a big impact on those children.

(English teacher, white female, East Town Secondary)

.....there is no first written language, now that impacts on **how learning goes on** in the home and that I think is a huge barrier for **our children's learning**. Lots of our children are born in an illiterate family and go into school illiterate with no experience of reading or writing within the home or things that go on in a literate culture. So that is still being compensated for years later....But I don't think people quite realise what a difference that makes. Now when we talk about the two other secondary schools who take ethnic minority students, we have the largest number from the Mirpuri community which is Punjabi speaking and are not literate. Others from thecommunity and the Indian communities have greater literacy and are more educated. So I think that makes a big difference too.

(SENCO, white female, East Town Secondary) (emphasis added)

The SENCO from East Town Secondary, in her comments, implies that the school is blaming cultural factors on the difficulties they experience. The SENCO's comments are entrenched in white western discourses of the ideal student and what it means to be educated, and represent an expression of institutionalised racism. Students from the Mirpuri region appear to be viewed by the school as less educated and possibly less educable due to the different kinds of cultural capital they bring to school. The comparison made with students from Indian communities implies that teachers make assumptions and view minority ethnic students differently depending on their presumed cultures. It also implies, that in a choice locale, teachers are comparing their student intakes in terms of ethnicity, which inevitably results in racial stereotyping. The SENCO implies that her schools intake is of a lower quality and more difficult than

other schools with minority ethnic students' as a result of having students of a particular minority ethnic group. The fact that such comparisons between ethnic groups are being made raises serious challenges for the discourses of accountability and choice and the existence of league tables. The extract from the SENCO shows that under the pressure of choice and the need to perform well, individual students are being viewed as commodities. In her comments minority ethnic students are, in the eyes of the teacher, losing their identity as individuals, allowing institutional racism to operate.

The SENCO's comments highlight how school comparison and accountability data does not take adequate account of the diversity of student intakes and student need, resulting in some schools feeling marginalised, unsupported and unrecognised. Value added data has the potential to have a positive effect on this. However, research is required to assess the extent to which parent choosers are aware of or consider value added data. Pressure on schools to succeed allows student capital (the capital which students bring with them to the school) to become central to teachers' perceptions of their students. Use of implicit references to cultural capital in the form of home experience is used to a far greater degree in East Town where students at different schools are viewed as having different home experience in terms of cultural capital.

Within East Town [this school] has the lowest profile by ability of all the schools. 50 percent of intake is minority ethnic and come from a town centre, which is among the poorest wards in the country. The other more proximate areas from which the students are drawn are also relatively deprived. Our intake has declined in quality and number over the last 20 years... last 10 and most recently growing number of asylum seekers so the diversity of the student intake is very considerable.

(Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

The head teacher uses poverty as an indicator of student difficulty. In his comments he appears to relate minority ethnic students and those experiencing poverty to the low ability profile of his school. Such perspectives were less obvious within North Town, where teachers were less likely to refer directly to student ability or outcomes and did not compare their schools so readily. However, there was some evidence of accountability discourses and discourses relating to EAL:

Down the road they're like 70 percent Asian and I don't know how they deal with that. That must impact their results in some ways, coz I know lots of the families we're talking about have issues with English being a second language. Err, we don't have that here.

(Senior Teacher, white male, North Town Secondary)

The senior teacher is clearly adopting the accountability and results directed discourse which associates EAL negatively with difficulty for the school. Fundamental to teachers' perceptions of race in both North and East Towns is a discourse of ability

which interacts and constructs certain teacher discourses toward ethnic groups. English as an additional language was associated by teachers with low ability and minority ethnic students regardless of whether this is actually the case for the individual student. English language is being linked solely to English nationality and whiteness.

This teacher discourse is inevitably informed and created by government and policy discourse of assessment and accountability of schools in terms of statutory bench-mark testing. This discourse in turn creates a discourse of the socially desirable student, the ideal student valued by the school. This renders students with English as an additional language problematic for schools as these students may require greater input and resources to gain the same results in the statutory tests. Thus, a discourse of the less valuable, more problematic student is created. Teachers, particularly in East Town Secondary, appeared to equate EAL with being less able particularly in relation to students from Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The discourse of ability and the socially valuable student, which through policy and testing has been taken up by schools and adopted often unconsciously by teachers, has allowed a discourse which views the minority ethnic student as a problem for the school to develop. The discourse of the able student is operating to render minority ethnic students less able, given that teachers appear to be equating ability at speaking English with a more generic notion of ability. This is important in relation to equity. Ability is frequently used implicitly by teachers and students to mean intelligence and is being used here to describe students solely on the basis of their ability to speak English, thus acting as a mechanism through which embedded institutional racism functions.

Data from teachers in East Town Secondary concerning the ways in which they view students with EAL is particularly significant in relation to the 2006 DFES report findings highlighted on page 58, which show that minority ethnic students have lower scores on teacher assessment of English than on written tests. The data discussed here shows how teachers are viewing students with EAL negatively and as a problem for the school. These strong perceptions may colour teachers' assessments of minority ethnic students, and may account for why teacher assessments of minority ethnic students' work in English are lower than the students test scores. Brah (1992), cited in Brahm, Rattansi and Skellington (1992) notes that:

There is evidence that Asian girls who may require additional support in English can find themselves presented with a restricted curriculum as if they were remedial learners. (Brahm, Rattansi and Skellington 1992, p. 74)

The 2006 report highlights that the differences between teacher assessment and test scores are particularly marked for English and less so for maths and science. The East Town Secondary head teacher comments that minority ethnic students are weaker at English than science and maths (p. 158), which suggests that teachers may be assuming that English is a particular problem for minority ethnic students, which may affect their perceptions, teaching and assessments of these students. Further research is required to assess the extent to which increased choice may be affecting the ways in which teachers perceive minority ethnic students. The DFES 2006 research report could be reconsidered by comparing English teacher assessment and test scores in schools where there are high and low levels of parental choice in operation. This would allow assessment of the extent to which choice discourses may be contributing to the way in which teachers construct minority ethnic students.

This fundamental inequity stems from government accountability discourse which results in EAL being viewed as a factor influencing school outcomes. Ability is seen as synonymous with ease of achieving desirable results, which renders EAL a problem for the school and in turn subjectivates the student as less able. Students may only be less able in terms of accessing the curriculum, but the use of the term ability implies some cognitive given. The discourse of accountability and the successful school, entrenched within government and policy discourse, thus constitutes certain minority ethnic students, those with low levels of English skills, as a source of difficulty and a problem for the school.

Institutional racism

Institutional racism may be defined as a form of racism which exists and operates through and within institutional structures and contexts. Often it is embedded in the historical evolution of the institution where implicitly racist practices are adopted over time and not questioned in relation to race or the implicit messages they may be giving.

The discourse of church schooling is legitimised through its embedded role within the history of English schools. This discourse supports the right of parents to choose schools and operates, on occasions within the data, as a discourse legitimising social

inequity and confirming and reinforcing normative whiteness. This is particularly pertinent to schools in North Town, where there is little evidence of choice in operation, with the only apparent choice being church schools. In this locale, race is a definite choice criteria, particularly for minority ethnic families, who are made to feel unwelcome in particular schools by the local community. Racial discrimination from within the neighbourhoods is affecting the choice of school for minority ethnic families.

NH: What about social inclusion?

Senior teacher: If I said that on the signpost at the end of the road someone had written “Pakis go home” and it’s been there now for two years. I think there’s fear in the minds of Asian families wanting to send them. Yeah it’s a factor. ..we realise we really need to work on the racial equality, we need to work through our PSHE programme to squash the ignorance ...but it [racism] is, it is evident here.... Ofsted hasn’t picked it up here but for sure they will.

(Senior teacher, white female, North Town Secondary)

There is a sense of complacency in the teacher’s comments, and a lack of motivation to address issues of racism in the wider community. The teacher appears to accept white centrality and racism as normative and inevitable and displaces issues of racism away from the school itself by implying that racism operates in the community and with the students whilst the school remains passive. The open acknowledgement of racism, by the senior teacher, and the acceptance that it needs to be addressed is tinged with a lack of urgency. The teacher implies that for her and her school the discourse of accountability, as expressed in reference to Ofsted, is more significant than the values held and promoted by the school itself as a social institution. The teacher is more concerned with whether Ofsted identify racial inequality as an issue than on what the school are doing to address it. Whiteness is taken as the norm within the school and racism, whilst acknowledged as existing, is not challenged. Instead it is accepted in a matter of fact, business as usual manner which operates to legitimise rather than challenge its existence. In this way social inclusion and equity become just performance indicators rather than something of intrinsic value.

Acceptance of normative whiteness is shared by teachers from Poplar School, although senior teachers within East Town were more hesitant openly to acknowledge racism as an issue for their school and community. Emphasis on the significance of school reputation in East Town, driven and created by discourses and practices of parental choice and accountability, has been internalised by teachers within the locale. As a result, they are cautious to express any negative attitudes which may reflect on the school itself and hence affect parental attitudes toward the school and the quality of

subsequent student intakes. The teachers were happy to discuss the deficits within their students but less happy to address issues of race within the school. Discursively constructing the students in terms of deficits is a mechanism whereby the school can externalise race and inequity away from the school's own practice, rendering themselves dependent on their student intake and hence less accountable for difficulties encountered when measured against government accountability criteria.

Implicit references to racism are inferred from a number of comments by teachers where they appeared uncomfortable to openly and explicitly identify and label racism:

No, I believe I suspect we have, an undercurrent of a race problem. East Town is a very multicultural city we do not have many coloured or black students in the school, and I think listening to, and many of our students come from country areas, villages which are predominantly white middle class big houses probably wealthy parents, little understanding in general of the big culture of Britain and East Town in particular. I suspect that may be true. It's difficult to say but there may be an under current of that in the staff as well. They would find it very strange to go and work in one of the closer to the city centre schools. **I don't think we're you know...** we try our best and I've no evidence to suggest that we're worse than any other, but we are a predominantly white school **and I suspect there are some students who do not** I don't know.... **but I do hear comments in classrooms and things which to me suggest that the students and probably their parents are not**but im sure that's true of society in general.

(Senior teacher, white male, Poplar School East Town) (Emphasis added)

Discomfort is identified in bold in the teacher's comments, where he appears uncomfortable to voice the existence of racism instead implicitly communicating this with the researcher through a tacit and implicit acknowledgement of what he means. The use of the term 'coloured' by the teacher, suggests a lack of awareness and sensitivity concerning minority ethnic groups, given that the term coloured is viewed largely as a derogatory term in a UK context. Whilst the teacher appeared intensely uncomfortable in this discussion to verbalise racism itself as a problem within the school, he implied that either the school is not actively chosen by minority ethnic students or that they do not have access to it or are unsuccessful in appeals. He acknowledges the normative whiteness of many families choosing the school, whilst distancing himself from it. In order to attract these parents the school appears tacitly to accept the predominantly white make up of its intake which suits the parents it wants to continue to attract. This operates like a silent unacknowledged pact between the community of white parents choosing the school and the school itself as to the desirability of certain students, which extends beyond race to issues of class, ability and background.

The comments from teachers in North Town and East Town all deploy a white discourse of 'race' not being an issue for them. They detach and separate racism from

their own immediate experience, identifying it as an entrenched community discourse which they do not feel personally moved to challenge or change. For example, the North Town teacher refers to the racist comments on the signpost, yet nobody has seen fit to remove them. The teacher condemns this, but also does not seem concerned actively to change it, implying a discourse of white hegemony.

North Town Secondary and North Town High are situated at opposite ends of a road, with St Mary's in the middle. North Town Secondary at the top of the hill and St Mary's have a largely white intake and North Town High, at the bottom of the hill has a far higher proportion of minority ethnic students. Racial segregation is apparent here. As choice is further encouraged within this locale there will be very little available choice for minority ethnic families. The communities surrounding the largely white sample schools are racially hostile, and the church schools do not provide a realistic choice.

As illustrated on page 158 minority ethnic students in North Town are unable or less able to access St. Mary's due to the strict dress code. St. Mary's appears actively to discriminate against some minority ethnic parents in the school choice process. St. Mary's entry requirements reflect church school discourse:

- NH: Can Muslim students wear headscarves?
HOY: No.
NH: So Muslim families for example are unlikely to choose your school?
HOY: Yeah, We have got a very low minority its below ten percent. It's probably less than that now, ethnic minority children, and we don't get the support really. I know there are workers within the LEA but because we're so low we don't get a lot of help really.

(Head of year, white female, St. Mary's North Town)

In North Town, the church school discourse of St. Mary's acts to legitimise its restricted access, which is justified by government policy through discourses of choice. The religious discourse here constitutes the inequality by creating subjects who accept such inequality of access to the school through their faith discourse, without addressing the real social and racial segregation which exists between, for example, St. Mary's and other schools within the immediate locale.

Student experience

In North Town students were unable or unwilling to explicitly identify race as an issue, despite their teachers' open acknowledgement of entrenched racism within the

community. The fact that sample schools were comprised of mainly white students meant that issues of race were not touched upon when considering issues of equity within the school.

Students in East Town, where choice has allowed them greater knowledge of other schools, were very willing to express their views, openly expressing racial tensions and feelings of inequity and injustice on the grounds of race. This was most significant within East Town Secondary where issues of race were central to the students' discourse and their discursive construction and identity as students within the school. They talked fairly freely about this in one off informal interviews. Most non-race specific interview questions were answered with some reference to race and related inequities. Explicit identification of racism within the school was a central part of the student experience and identity. This was mainly discussed in relation to behavioural expectations and punishments as opposed to academic experiences. Students were unable to address inequities explicitly in relation to this, (as in other studies, see Marcella in Gilborn and Youdell 2000) although a number of implicit references to this are identified within the students' narratives.

Students within the school mainly categorised themselves and their peers as white or Asian, with Asian appearing to refer to students within the school from Pakistan and Bangladesh, who also used this term to describe themselves, or Pakistani to refer to specific students. I will use these terms in relation to the school as a means to explain the students' perspectives. In the data there were several examples of students conflating ethnicity and nationality, with white students viewing Englishness as whiteness.

Whilst issues of racial tension and inequity were central to East Town Secondary students, the head teacher of East Town Secondary when asked about social inclusion, did not acknowledge the extent of racial and racialised feeling expressed by the students within the school. His use of a discourse emphasising racial inclusivity and multiculturalism appears to be used here as a discourse which operates to deny the difficulties and tensions centred upon race encountered constantly within the school community.

There's equally aspects of racial inclusion, inclusivity in terms of uniform arrangements, special arrangements for girls who are swimming but Muslim, and so on. Language that you use in school, we use Urdu and Punjabi as greetings at the very least its all those policies are about recognising that we're a multicultural, multi class, multi cultural society, multi racial and multi religious society, and that's reflected in our curriculum and other arrangements in the school.

(Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

In East Town, there was reluctance on the part of teachers to name race as a source of tension or inequity. For the students in East Town Secondary, race was central along with the ways in which they interpreted the school's responses. The majority of white students had not actively chosen the school, whilst many of the minority ethnic students had several members of their family already at the school. In East Town Secondary there was evidence of racial tensions from the perspectives of both white and Asian students of both genders and year groups. Asian girls particularly commented upon their lack of inclusion within the school and made implicit references to differences in classroom experience:

- NH: Do you feel included in your school?
Sumala: I think that you know that like on, assemblies and stuff, how it's mostly the white kids that like take part, never many Asian kids.
Thania: Yeah, it's like that.
NH: Why's that?
Thania: Don't know.
Sumala: Coz they mainly dance and stuff.
NH: Would you like to do things in assembly?
Mona: I don't know, I think its coz like we have different music taste and stuff, say like Bangara and stuff, so maybe its coz of that.
Sumala: Yeah, like do you remember when Sanjay did that thing?
Mona: Yeah.
Sumala: Like one of the Pakistani boys. Like all the Pakistani boys yeah, they started like getting up and joining in, like clapping and dancing and stuff and the teachers got you know pretty upset about it.
Thania: Yeah they did You know coz when a white person does it not many people like join in , join in.
Sumala: Its coz bangaras all jumpy like isnit. So everyone was like joining in, so the teachers, I don't think they're going to let anyone do that again.
Thania: I think the teachers are racist here, well most of them are.

(Year ten, Asian girls, East Town secondary)

This example is characteristic of a number of examples, given by female Asian students of not being included within the school and of feeling in tension with the authority of the teachers and school. In several similar discussions, the predominantly white teaching staff are discursively constructed by the Asian students as fearing a loss of control over the students and as not understanding their culture. From the way the incident is described one can infer that the teachers may have felt threatened by the students joining in with the dancing, which they did not expect from a white student. The fact that assembly was referred to is telling given that assemblies may be seen as remnants of the remaining requirement for acts of Christian collective worship in schools. The pervading discourse of white normality implicit within the white power hierarchy of the school management and detected by the students in relation to assembly

results in the students' apparent alienation within the school and their own deployment of the discourse of racism in relation to their teachers. 'I think the teachers are racist here, Well most of them are'.

The wearing of headscarves was a source of tension within East Town Secondary for female students and was particularly referred to by white girls who viewed the headscarves as a means by which the Asian girls could express themselves, to rebel against the power of the teachers and also to express their own power through their cultural and group identity symbolised by the headscarf:

- Kaya: Lke some teachers they're like,... say like my uniform is like really wrong and everything yeah, then they'll all pick on me. But then, say like an Asian person doesn't, they like don't say nothing to them. Like they never wear the proper scarves and they always like wear cardigans and stuff when we're not allowed to do that.
- Rachel: And the headscarves as well. They don't wear the proper school headscarves. If we came in a different colour tie.....
- NH: You have a uniform headscarf?
- Rachel: Yeah, its got red and white stripes. But they come in like Calvin Klein headscarves and like flowery ones.
- Kaya: But if we come in something like that we get sent straight home.
- NH: Why's that?
- Kaya: Because they're [the school are] scared that their families are going to come in and then it'll be put down as racism, because if their family comes in and has an argument with one of the English teachers then they will say 'oh your just racist.' Then it will get all out of hand. That's just the reason for them to say that, so they don't really want to be getting involved
- Rachel: It might make teachers look like they're racist.
(Year ten, white students, East Town Secondary)

The headscarf is adopted by the white girls as a symbol of difference. In the discourse they deploy it acts as a source of threat to white hegemony existing in the community surrounding the school. Individual students interpreted the school's perceived leniency over headscarves as the Asian students getting away with more, and exerting and creating their own discursive power as a social group within the school.

The reference by Kaya to the school fearing accusations of racism from Asian families, refers specifically to English teachers, rather than white, evidence of the students conflating ethnicity and nationality. The white students discursively constitute, and are themselves discursively constituted by, a discourse normalising 'whiteness', which they equate with English.

The white girls employ the discourse of racism in the opposite direction to the Asian girls by suggesting that claims of racism are deployed by Asian students to their own advantage. The way in which the discourse of racism is used in both directions is

fundamental to the racial tensions within the school. At times it is used by white students as a way to legitimise the normative whiteness of the school management and authority by themselves adopting and 'making white' the discourse of racism, by discursively constructing it as a powerful tool for the Asian students to use almost against them.

In discussion, the Asian girls from East Town Secondary did not suggest that the white girls were able to get away with more. However, they made references to experiences in relation to their work which suggest that they felt that they were not given the same opportunities:

- Shoma: I think the school favours those kids that, like, talk.
Thania: Are brainy.
Shoma: Yeah.
Maya: Yeah, the ones that talk and joke about with you.
NH: What the teachers?
Shoma: Yeah, Coz they are more close with them.
Maya: Yeah, yeah.
Thania: Like the ones that stay quiet, or the ones that muck about, they just think 'arr let them get on with their work'. You know they don't come to you or help you and...
Maya: People who are more like... yeah.
Shoma: People who are not, like, ashamed to ask the teacher for help and stuff, will like joke with the teacher, get to know the teacher, I think they get favoured Like Sam, she always gets help, she's always laughing with Miss Wright and stuff and she always gets the help.
Maya: We never get any help.
Shoma: Yeah, never.
Thania: Yeah.
NH: Do you ask for help?
Maya: Yeah, Sometimes we ask for help. Like, we all want to go to the library or we all ..
Shoma: We're, like, the only... Asians there. We never get to go to the library even though we only want to...like research and internet. Coz sometimes books ain't got everything.

(Year 10, Asian girls, East Town Secondary)

This extract suggests that the girls perceive the school to favour students who appear confident, outgoing and who talk to the teachers. The Asian girls appeared to feel particularly uncomfortable with this behaviour and hence felt invisible to the teachers, missing out on help. Previous research also identifies notions of invisibility in relation to Asian girls⁴⁴. Brah (1992), cited in Brahm, Rattansi and Skellington (1992) notes that:

⁴⁴ For further work, see Brah and Minhas cited in Weiner 1985 p19-20. They suggest that it is a common experience of Asian girls in school to be labelled 'passive' or 'docile' and cite a number of extreme examples of teachers perceptions of Asian girls.

Girls in general tend to receive less attention from teachers than boys. In the case of Asian girls... the prevailing stereotype of them as 'passive' can lead some teachers to pay an even lesser degree of attention to this category of girls. (Brahm, Rattansi and Skellington 1992, p. 74)

Brah (1993) in narratives with Muslim women of Pakistani origin also found that some girls felt that their teachers were complacent in relation to their school outcomes, holding stereotyped views regarding their aspirations post sixteen:

[They] spoke of how homeworking, certain types of factory work or, at best, low-skilled, low-paid non-manual work in the service sector had become the norm for Asian girls in the minds of local employers, teachers, education and guidance advisors., as well as amongst sections of the Asian communities. (Brah 1993, p. 455)

The students perceive there to be a school discourse favouring an ideal student who is outgoing, and able to talk and joke informally with the teacher. Implicit in this is the sense in which white students are more able to do this within the school with the predominantly white teachers. The students view both quiet students and those who muck about as in some way forfeiting teacher attention.

Within the data there is evidence of racial tension and perceived power struggles operating at a number of levels and in a number of directions: between groups of white and Asian girls (eg over headscarves); between white and Asian boys, (perceived by both groups to receive differential treatment as a result of fights); between Asian students and white teachers (as perceived by Asian Students, for example, the Bangara incident) and between white teachers and Asian families (as perceived by white students).

This is evident, for example, when the white girls commented that the school was less strict with Asian girls' uniform, which they perceived to be because the teachers were scared of being accused of racism by the Asian families. These students discursively construct Asian students as having greater power over the school and teachers and greater opportunities to exert their power through flouting uniform requirements. The white girls felt that they would not be allowed to get away with the same behaviour.

There are several examples in the data of a discourse of white fear of being accused of racism, on the part of the white students and a few teachers. The white students perceived that the Asian students were able to use the notion of racism as a tool with which to wield power over the school. The white girls imply a sense of fear of being accused of racism and a sense in which they perceived teachers in the school to also feel like this. This discourse can be explained in terms of a perceived fear or as a device to

allow white justification of racist attitudes. The white students appeared to feel negatively about their experiences in a school viewed negatively by the community, which explains their constant recourse to claims of unfair treatment in relation to minority ethnic students who may have been acting as a focal point or a group to blame, for their feelings of unfairness.

Tension was evident between the groups epitomised by an incident several months previously where a white teacher had been accused of making a Muslim student at the school remove her headscarf, which had been highlighted by the media. This incident was referred to only by white girls, and was not mentioned by Asian girls. This suggests that it was acting as a tool for the white girls to use in justifying and reinforcing their racist position within the school and to express their feelings of tension with Asian girls.

This is evident in the following extract from two white girls:

- Sadie: There was a teacher who said that Imrahna had the wrong headscarf on and they took 'em to court and said they were being racist.
Abi: Yeah, they were ripped like from her neck and stuff and none of that happened it was just like all over exaggerated in the media and everything. And then like she could have got put down for that, even though it was like the girls fault.
Sadie: Yeah, coz she's a trouble maker and she blagged most of it anyway.
Abi: Yeah.

(Year ten, white girls, East Town Secondary)

The Asian girls interviewed in East Town Secondary all talked about their feelings of racial unfairness mostly in relation to Asian boys being unfairly treated by the school and did not refer to the headscarves central to the white girls discussions of equity.

The tensions felt by the white girls in relation to the Asian girls implies that particular incidents are used by white girls as a motif to signify difference, dislike and to justify their own racist attitudes. White students perceived the school and head teacher to be scared of the Asian families. An explicit white discourse of racism, as a tool or bargaining device for Asian families to use, existed for white students and shaped and created students' subsequent views of the school's treatment of minority ethnic students:

- Tom: I think, like the school thinks, that if they send the other kids 'ome as well [Asian students involved in fights] they just might think it might get back on them like might cause trouble with their parents, coz their parents might come in and kick up a fuss saying: oh yeah you're racist and all this sort of stuff. Where as our parents aren't sort of like that are they? They just sort of go, ahh alright you got kicked home, and that's it. Whereas some parents will just kick up a fuss more likely.

(Year ten, white boy, East Town Secondary)

The white students suggest that the school is fearful of being accused of racism by Asian families. They imply that the Asian students create and exercise greater power within the school by being able to resort to and utilise the claim of racism. There is the implication that the Asian students have their own discourse of racism which they and their families can use and deploy against the school, and which is used to evaluate the schools treatment of students. There are some references to racism from Asian students within the school. However, they are not sufficient to support or contradict this. The white discourse of racism as a discourse used by minority ethnic students to their own advantage may itself be operating to justify inherent racism on the part of the white community. This inherent racism is legitimised through a discourse which constructs the claim of racism by minority ethnic families as a means of exerting power. One reading of the white students' adoption of a discourse of racism, which they see as operating against them, may lie with feelings of a lack of power as a group within the school in relation to the Asian students. The white students within the school felt that they were at the bottom, in a school they mostly did not choose to attend. They may have felt that they were powerless, whilst they perceived the Asian students as having power through recourse to accusations of racism. They perceived Asian students recourse to racism as a bargaining tool to use with the school which, as white male students, was not available to them. Apple (2000) identifies a similar process occurring within American society. He argues that given difficult economic conditions, implicit racial anxieties and the historic power of race in 'the US psyche' and in many other nations, it is possible that people may construct solidarity based on their whiteness (Apple 2000, p. 208). At a basic level the construction of white solidarity among the white students at East Town Secondary, through recourse to a discourse of racism, has developed from the difficult market conditions which have allowed them to end up in a school which they did not want to attend.

Whilst inequity in relation to race centred largely around issues relating to uniform and headscarves for girls, with little explicit reference to inequity in relation to academic school experience, discipline and punishment was another focus for students' perceptions of inequity. Discipline, particularly in relation to fighting, was referred to by most male students within the school and functioned as a central part of both white and Asian students identities and perceptions of inequity within the school.

In the following comments a group of white boys discuss their treatment after fights. They believe that the school treats them more punitively than the Asian students, again explaining this in terms of the school being scared that the Asian families will resort to a discourse of racism against the school. The white males may be strengthening their identity as a group by uniting over a sense of injustice. The way in which they refer to 'a racial incident' implies that this is something which they are used to and a discourse by which they categorise other students. This data is countered by data from a group of Asian girls who imply that the reverse is true:

- Tom: When there's like a racial incident I found it hard like, coz most of the time it goes the other way know what I mean?
 NH: Can you explain?
 Tom: Well, when I get into fights and stuff like with Asians yeah, it always goes the other way like the Asians ...I don't think its right I think it sucks.....
 Matt: I think we get treated differently.
 Tom: They don't get expelled they just get sent to a supervision or something, whereas people like me I'll get expelled for like a week or two weeks or something.
 Chris: I agree with what he says as well actually. Like the last fight there was someone.. there was I think Rick and Dan got sent home but like for a week or two weeks later and then the Asians were back in school two days later. But fights are between two people at the end of the day isn't it so both should be treated, treated the same.
 (Year ten, white boys, East Town Secondary)

There was also evidence, although to a lesser extent, of minority ethnic students believing the opposite to be the case with the white students being favoured and receiving less harsh discipline.

- Maya: One thing, when there's fights, Asian kids they get chucked out and stuff. Then that leads them to permanently excluded. But the white's don't, they still get their place back in school,
 Rahda: Yeah, like when the year ten boys had a fight Rakesh got chucked out. But they were both a part of it.
 Maya: Yeah, they were both part of it but just Rakesh got chucked out.
 Rahda: Almost all the Pakistani boys got chucked out but not many white boys got chucked out.
 Maya: Yeah.

(Year ten, Asian girls, East Town Secondary)

Each group accuses the other of being preferentially treated by the school, although the white students were more vociferous in their claims. In a school where many students, particularly the white students, do not actively choose or want to be there, reference to racial inequities and a discourse of unfair treatment and oppression operates as an effect of the situation, a means for the students to feel that they are gaining some power through the designation of an 'out' group. Explicit references to racial tensions as expressed by the students were largely absent from the teachers' discussions. This tension was only referred to by one newly qualified teacher (NQT) within the school

who identified with the feelings of the white girls and their perceptions of the school feeling threatened by the Asian community:

You have to be so careful with everything. Like too careful I think. Like in PE you have to have one white captain and one Asian captain for everything, regardless, and if you try and tell an Asian student off it all starts straight away. So you just can't discipline, its not right I don't think.
(Sports teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

This tension which is not acknowledged by any of the other teachers, coheres with the feelings of the white students. It appears that a small number of incidents are used by white students and possibly some teachers to justify a sense of difference and tension and to legitimise a racist position, held by some white students.

Apple(2000) observes a similar process happening in an American context:

It may be unfortunate but it is still true that many whites believe that there is a social cost not to being a person of color but to being *white*. For them, whites are the "new losers" in a playing field that they believe has been leveled now that the United States is a supposedly basically egalitarian, color-blind society. Since "times are rough for everybody," policies to assist "underrepresented groups" – such as affirmative action –are unfairly supporting "nonwhites." Thus whites can now claim the status of victims, (Apple 2000, p. 207)

This is not to imply that tensions and racism are only working in one direction within the school. Instead it appears to be a complex web of relations mirroring those of the wider community. Discipline operates as a focal point for inequity. The extent to which discipline may or may not be being differentially applied by the school is impossible to assess in this project. The students cited examples which they perceived as iniquitous, although the extent to which this was actually the case or exaggerated to serve the group's purpose is questionable. What is most telling is the teachers' lack of direct acknowledgement of this as an issue within the school and for the students. The teachers' did not refer to ways in which they sought to make discipline fair or to ways in which they tried to ensure equal treatment, and it is possible that the NQT's comments may voice the views of some of the teachers.

Whilst all the groups interviewed referred to the treatment of white and Asian students who were involved in fights and incidents involving clothing and social practices of the school, very few students in the sample were able to comment explicitly upon or identify race as a factor in determining different academic treatment or opportunity. This is an issue identified by Gillborn and Youdell (2000). The only implicit examples of this were made by the Asian girls concerning the kinds of students they perceived as being valued by the teacher.

Conclusions

This chapter illustrates the extent of traditional and institutional racism in the sample schools. In East Town, choice appears to increase the categorisation and stereotyping of students on the grounds of ethnicity and correspondingly ability, related to having English as an additional language. The top down discourse of accountability alters the ways in which teachers and schools view both students and parents. Policy discourses of accountability and choice construct EAL as difficult for the school, which in turn constructs teachers' perspectives which operate in practice to subjectivate the minority ethnic learner as problematic, less desirable to the school and potentially of lower ability. The centrality of this discourse to most East Town teachers overrides any individual perspectives of the teachers themselves, who appear firmly entrenched within and shaped by the policy discourse of accountability, even when this conflicts with their own values.

As a result of the choice market, students in East Town Secondary felt that they were at the bottom. This was particularly significant for white boys who felt that the Asian boys were favoured. The white students were less likely to have chosen the school than the Asian students, more of who chose the school as they had many family members there and felt some degree of ownership, signified by the large number of students from their own community. The white girls also viewed racism as a powerful tool, a discourse which they perceived Asian girls as using to their own advantage. Asian students felt discriminated against in a number of explicit and implicit ways. The ways in which East Town Secondary itself seeks to control the Asian girls is a further source of tension: the regulation of headscarves operates as an attempt to westernise and control religious and cultural practice, since white girls' hair styles and accessories are not regulated by the school in the same manner. The school's censoring of headscarves raises questions of why this needs to happen at all, and why a non uniform headscarf would be threatening to the school culture. By wearing their own headscarves. Muslim girls appear to be asserting their individuality and their status, antithetical to the western view of the submissive Muslim women. However, the school appears to see it necessary to sanction this.

Racism in the community and potentially within the school was alluded to by teachers in North Town. The students, however, made little reference to this. The schools in the

North Town sample were comprised of mainly white students, meaning that there was little specific experience within school which the students identified as raced. The anger felt by white students in East Town Secondary and their view of racism as being used as a positive tool by Asian students was not present in the North Town sample schools. Instead students identified themselves with their school, and such identity is reinforced by fights between schools, race may be a factor in some of these but is not central to it.

In schools in both locales (North Town Secondary and Poplar) there was evidence of implicit acceptance and expression of a discourse accepting the 'normality' of whiteness and the sense in which racism was accepted within the community and not actively addressed or challenged by the school. The data illustrates the extent to which race emerged in the study as a central theme, interwoven with choice and accountability. Apple (2000) argues that within a conservative market context it may be easier for racial anxieties and divisions to be allowed to operate unchallenged. The discourse of whiteness and the white solidarity evident among some East Town secondary students suggests that choice may have implications which need to be further assessed and considered. Apple argues that policies concerned with markets and standards are being viewed as 'neutral technologies (p. 212) which he argues may mask racial effects. Issues of race were evident in both North and East Towns suggesting that racial inequities may exist within and outside of parental choice. The fact that racial tensions appear to be continuing to operate within the choice market of East Town requires attention by policy makers advocating choice.

Chapter Eight

Comprehensive schooling: a relevant or outdated discourse?

This chapter addresses the relationship between the meaning ascribed to comprehensive discourse at policy level and the existence of a comprehensive discourse at school level. Comprehensive schooling appears to have been rendered a meaningless discourse in light of policy discourses of choice, accountability and diversity which give little space or value to ideas of equity and social inclusion traditionally associated with comprehensive schools. As Chapter One identified, the term 'comprehensive' appears spasmodically in policy and government discourse, and is attributed different meanings. For example, the notion of a comprehensive school was referred to in Ofsted reports for East Town Secondary, Poplar School ET and North Town Sport. In all cases the reports claim that the schools are comprehensive and then continue to set out features of the school which contradict this claim.

Ofsted Report 2002 East Town Secondary(p. 7):

The school is **comprehensive** with the full range of ability and attainment. Some students enter the school having obtained high standards but, overall, students' attainments on entry to the school are well below the national averages. (Emphasis added)

Ofsted report 2003 Poplar School ET (p. 7):

[Poplar School]...is a mixed **comprehensive** college... The college is heavily oversubscribed....Standards of attainment on entry to the college are above the national average and the proportion of students with special educational needs is below the national average. (Emphasis added)

Ofsted report 2004 North Town Sport (p. 3)

The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is fully **comprehensive** but below average. (Emphasis added)

The school level statistical data in the tables in Chapter Five illustrate that none of the sample schools are truly comprehensive in intake and do not reflect the diversity of the student population within the towns. Instead, each school's intake is skewed, on grounds of race, class, special needs and attainment. The use of the term comprehensive in the reports is misleading and identifies the confusion and tension which continues to surround the term.

The notion of comprehensive schooling was referred to by teachers across sample schools when asked about inclusion and equity. When subsequently asked to define comprehensive schooling there were only two newly qualified teachers in the sample who could not define the term. All other teachers sampled had a sense of a comprehensive discourse, at the level of ideas and practice:

NH: What's a comprehensive school?
NQT: Sorry I don't know.

(NQT, white female North Town Secondary)

The NQT's lack of reflection on and awareness of comprehensive schooling reflects its lack of current emphasis and value at policy level. The lack of use of the term by the DFES, and the subtle dropping of the term from political parlance has escaped largely unnoticed. However, this lack of policy discourse does not render the term meaningless for many practicing teachers.

For many teachers the idea of comprehensive schooling retained its meaning and discursive power in relation to their own practice, despite the presence of conflicting policies. Analysis of the relationship between discourses of choice and those of comprehensiveness at school level identifies fundamental ways in which they conflict and ways in which this differs between North and East Towns. This discussion highlights the current inequitable diversity of secondary school provision and how historical remnants of comprehensive reorganisation post 1965 are still retained in some areas. In North Town comprehensive schooling is a widely accepted and used term, whilst it is used infrequently in East Town.

Considering East and North Towns is similar to looking simultaneously at examples of past and present periods of schooling. Whilst East Town reflects the present emphasis in policy discourse on choice and diversity and a language of market consumerism, North Town, with its low levels of choice and inter school competition, allows reflection on how schools may have been prior to the 1988 Education Act with wider comprehensive practice and discourse. Historical evaluation of the comprehensive era shows that the differences pre and post 1988 are not clear cut. During the comprehensive era, old grammar school heritage, private schooling and choice of housing allowed some aspects of parental choice of schools to operate. Comparing the existence of comprehensive discourses of schooling allows greater depth of reflection on choice and its effects,

particularly given the overall lack of any thorough evaluation of comprehensive ideas in practice, with the exception of Benn and Chitty's (1994) account.

Data from teachers in North Town and East Town schools discussed subsequently shows distinct uses of a comprehensive discourse. The development and results of secondary school policy is visible in both East Town and North Town school situations today. Secondary school policies have been implemented in different ways in each town. North Town schools appear to retain discourses and values associated with comprehensive schooling after 1965, whilst schools in East Town are shaped by the discourses of accountability, choice and diversity. The old and new policy discourses relating to comprehensive schooling are displayed in table 8.1. Table 8.2 illustrates the different ways in which these discourses are deployed across North and East Towns and the ways in which this mirrors the old and new policy discourses.

Table 8.1: Policy discourses operating after 1965 and those operating after the 1988 Education Act

Policy Discourse	Post 1965 Circular, comprehensive reorganisation	Post 1988 Education Act, introduction of choice and diversity
Comprehensiveness	Discourse of practice	Discourse of old/unattainable idea
Choice	Veiled Choice	Overt Choice
Ability/ Talent	Flexible, variable across subjects	Fixed and general
Social Inclusion	Social Inclusion and social justice=Aim of the school	Choice renders social inclusion a problematic ideal
Accountability	Weak discourse	Strong Discourse
Social Class Differences	Implicit and hidden	Explicit and Evident

Table 8.2 Policy discourses and their role in North Town and East Town

Teacher Discourse	North Town	East Town
Comprehensive	Discourse of practice	Discourse of an unattainable ideal
Choice	Veiled Choice	Overt Choice
Ability/ Talent	Flexible/ variable across subjects	Fixed and general
Social Inclusion	Aim of the school	Problematic ideal
Accountability	Weak discourse	Strong discourse
Social Class Differences	Implicit and hidden	Explicit and visible

The patterns identified in the table, particularly the differences in operational discourses between North Town and East Town, reflect current and old policy discourses. This was confirmed and reinforced by the teachers' and students' perspectives. Most noticeable from the tables is the prominent and central role which the discourse of comprehensive schooling, or the discourses associated with comprehensive schooling, continue to play for teachers within North Town. Whilst policy based on choice and diversity implies that comprehensive schooling is an outdated term, the discourse of comprehensive schooling is still active in some areas creating and maintaining teachers' perspectives and approaches towards education. In North Town, where comprehensive discourse continues to be dominantly used by teachers over one of markets and choice, the result is a teacher discourse centred upon the ideas of meeting students' needs, developing students as individual persons, and challenging discrimination and inequity through an inclusive environment. Analysis of data from North Town teachers suggests that they are less likely to categorise students in terms of ability, behaviour or difficultness. Most North Town teachers clearly expressed the ideals they held in relation to schooling, and the role and intervention of policy was given little space. However, some negative aspects of comprehensive schools were raised, such as complacency with the status quo without the direct challenge of inter-school competition.

In contrast, most teachers from East Town, whilst able to define comprehensive schooling, were largely negative about it in practice, viewing it as an outdated notion which did not work. Teachers in East Town instead expressed a discourse of parental choice and the market notion of schools needing to achieve particular outcomes. This resulted in the labelling of students depending on how easy it would be to achieve desired outcomes for the teachers and the school. East Town teachers did not refer to ideological aims of education in relation to their own teaching. Their construction of

their job and themselves as teachers was expressed almost entirely through a market outcomes directed discourse. There was a sense of dissatisfaction for many of the teachers, with the more senior teachers expressing a desire for a return to a grammar school system, despite the fact that choice within the town has created schools nearly equivalent to the old grammar schools. Political dissatisfaction was raised by some of the East Town teachers but was not mentioned by those from North Town, reflecting the different degrees of engagement with policy by teachers in the locales.

These differences in teachers' perspectives demonstrate the potential impact of choice on students and for different social groups within the locales. It also makes apparent a number of positive factors expressed by teachers in North Town regarding comprehensive schooling. It implies that comprehensive schooling is still a practically used term which itself operates discursively within North Town and suggests that where a comprehensive discourse has been lost, teachers are viewing education, schooling and their students largely in terms of outcomes, ignoring more person-centred individual concerns. Students' understandings of their own school experience are considered alongside their teachers perspectives in order to illustrate ways in which the differing discourses and perspectives at teacher and locale level are themselves shaping and constituting student identities. In the analysis of teachers' and students' perspectives, the following interpretive categories are used:

- teachers' own assumptions concerning comprehensive schooling, positive and negative largely dependent on locale;
- students' perceptions and attitudes towards a comprehensive idea, which reflect their own experiences and the discourses to which they have been exposed.

This analysis reflects specifically on two sets of discourses, one reflecting current New Labour policy and the other concerned with teachers' expressions of comprehensiveness, which are similar to those expressed in Circular 10/65. This discussion is complicated by the need to explore educational discourses which are simultaneously dependent on both politics and traditions of practice as adopted by teachers themselves.

'New' Discourses

Policy discourse of choice and diversity

This discourse is constructed by policy makers and politicians, loaded to sell the idea of diverse school provision. It adopts a 'managerialised' language of markets and consumer choice, which is internalised by some teachers as is evident in their expression of this discourse and their assumptions of the value of this discourse in their answers. The discourse assumes that uniformity, epitomised in the phrase 'bog standard', is negative and detrimental and views the notion of comprehensive as an unattainable ideal. It becomes a justificatory discourse for inequality as an inevitable result of choice. This discourse operates to construct subsequent discourses for example of the able student.

Policy discourse of accountability and success as outcomes

The discourse of accountability places the locus of success with measurable outcomes. Adoption of this discourse by schools creates comparison and competition between schools and teachers. The discourse also operates to construct and rate students in relation to success criteria, namely results in national tests.

Discourse of fixed ability

As a result of discourses of choice and accountability, teachers themselves discursively constitute their students in response to the discourses operating to construct them as successful teachers. Successful teachers under accountability discourse are those gaining good test outcomes. This appears to result in teachers discursively constructing their students in relation to a fixed and immutable criteria of ability, which translates readily into those students who can achieve the school's desired outcomes with the minimum of teacher input and school resources.

'Old' discourses

Historic policy discourse of comprehensiveness (post circular 10/65)

Historically a Labour policy discourse, as is evident in Circular 10/65 requesting secondary school reorganisation on comprehensive lines, this advocated equal access to schools for all and less division on the grounds of fixed ability, with emphasis on social inclusion and equality of opportunity. Whilst this discourse no longer exists at the level of government policy which has been consumed by policies of choice and diversity, it continues to operate through the discursive practices of teachers within some schools. To a degree this discourse constructs students in those schools and is itself maintained by those adopting 'old' left wing positions. The result is a discourse which has evolved from a political and policy position to one which acts as a counter discourse at field level subversive to choice and diversity policies.

Discourse of individual talents

The lack of emphasis on the value of specific outcomes and the greater emphasis on social inclusion and equity implied by a discourse of comprehensiveness results in a different discursive construction of students by teachers. A discourse of individual talents where students are viewed as individuals with a range of skills and talents not easily categorised in terms of quantifiable outcomes. This results in a fluid and non-prescriptive notion of ability.

Comprehensive ideas of equality and inclusion

As is evident in table 8.1 the value and role of 'old Labour' discourses of social inclusion and comprehensiveness which were central to policy discourse in the 1960's have lost value at the New Labour policy level. However, as table 8.2 illustrates, teachers in North Town retained a discourse of social inclusion. Teachers across the sample referred to equality of opportunity and social mix as significant identifiers of comprehensive schooling.

NH: How do you define comprehensive schooling?

English teacher: I think this is actually a truly comprehensive school. I think, well, I think it's actually a school where all students from all **different backgrounds** meet. **All abilities**, different **cultures** a true mix of society and I think this school is pretty good on that.

(English teacher, white female, East Town Secondary)

This English teacher views her school as comprehensive despite other teachers in the school feeling that the school was very un-comprehensive in terms of the students' ability. In relation to the other schools in East Town, the school does have the largest proportion of minority ethnic students and those with special needs which may be behind the teacher's feeling that the school is a 'true mix of society'. It certainly provides a far greater mix of cultural groups than any of the other schools within the locale.

NH: What is a comprehensive school?

Drama teacher: Somewhere accessible to all, every child should be able to come to our school and achieve the best they can. So it's got to be a varied curriculum to meet everybody's needs.

(Drama teacher, white female, North Town Secondary)

Where teacher discourse of comprehensive schooling varied between North and East Towns concerned the practical potential, and value of social inclusion. East Town Secondary was the only sample school in East Town where some teachers talked positively about social inclusion in practice and their school trying to be socially inclusive and comprehensive. North Town teachers referred to social inclusion as a realistic and practically operating discourse:

NH: How would you describe comprehensive schooling?

Geog. teacher: Probably what we've got here really. We do our best to include everyone and give everyone a fair chance like and like Jane said before develop the personalities and not just how many GCSE's they've got or whatever its more about personal skills.

(Geography teacher, white female, North Town Sport)

According to North Town teachers, a comprehensive discourse is pragmatically valuable and functioning, despite recent policy attempts to introduce and encourage choice among parents. Most teachers perceived their schools to be comprehensive and viewed their school positively in relation to it being comprehensive:

Well we're all comprehensive here, apart from the church schools.

(Senior teacher, white female, North Town Secondary)

I don't think we have a huge disparity between the schools. There are the church schools which are probably seen by parents as they have a better academic record and whatever. I think most of the North Town schools actually are very similar to the type of standard.

(Senior teacher, white female, North Town Sport)

The North Town sport teacher's comments explain why the North Town teachers feel that their schools are comprehensive. The teachers perceive their schools to be fairly equal, all doing a similar job with similar ends, to provide the best experience they can for their students. A sense of social justice pervades North Town teachers' discourse of comprehensive schooling. Social justice is also referred to positively by East Town

teachers, but it is simultaneously held as a problematic and unrealisable idea. The fairly homogenous intake of schools, across North Town, explains why comprehensiveness is central to the teachers' understandings of their schools.

With the exception of a few teachers from East Town Secondary, the majority of teachers in East Town discussed and described comprehensive schooling as an abstract idea, in contrast to North Town teachers who use the discourse of comprehensiveness and inclusion to describe themselves and their own experience. Members of the senior management teams in North Town schools referred to comprehensiveness to a lesser extent than the rest of the staff and they made some reference to the potential effects which they thought choice and market discourses may bring.

Ability and accountability in relation to comprehensive schooling

The ways in which North and East Town teachers described their students and talked about what they aimed to achieve as teachers gave the clearest example of differing discourses shaping teachers' and the schools' expectations and perspectives. North Town teachers appeared less concerned with results and more concerned with a discourse of the individual, which can be attributed to the lack of concern with competition between schools within the locale and hence the focus on the individual as a person, instead of in terms of the students' value to the school in relation to results.

Yeah, I don't think the cohort are as difficult as some, but I think what we do with pupils is, more with raising their aspirations and improving their social skills, academically we're there or thereabouts. We get reasonable results with the intake we get but I think it's more to do with developing them as people, were actually quite good at it.

(Geography teacher, white female, North Town Sport) (Emphasis added)

This comment mirrors other North Town teachers' concerns with developing their students as people. The reference to raising aspirations coheres with New Labour policy discourse. However, the lack of concern over results expressed by the teacher conflicts with New Labour standards, policies and discourse. Notions of developing personalities, and personal skills are evident in many of the North Town teachers' comments. This discourse of helping the individual and the value of the person fits to a greater degree with comprehensive discourse. However, as argued earlier, this may also be interpreted as a sense of complacency concerning low academic standards.

Catering for students of all abilities was cited as a main feature of comprehensive schooling by teachers from East Town, whilst North Town teachers referred to accessibility of schooling for all. East Town teachers referred specifically to ability and placed the idea of catering for all abilities within one school at the centre of their definitions of comprehensive schooling. This reflects the centrality of the discourse of fixed student ability for teachers in East Town and the comparison of their schools student intake with other schools within the locale. Teachers in East Town Secondary viewed their school as more comprehensive than the other East Town schools, despite their student intake being largely the result of a negative choice or lack of choice on the part of parents attending the school. In East Town, choice has in effect created segregated schools almost parallel to grammar and secondary modern schools, emphasising the importance of ability for the schools. Catering for the needs of all abilities and inclusion were cited as central facets of comprehensive schooling by the East Town teachers, but a comprehensive discourse was not deployed and was viewed negatively overall.

NH: How would you define a comprehensive school?

Art teacher: Trying to cater for the needs of all pupils, all abilities.

(Art teacher, white female, East Town Secondary)

Maths teacher: Well, comprehensive schooling, when it was set up, was in my view, so that children could move up or down according to their ability in each individual subject. I don't think that's ever how it's been done.

(Maths teacher, white female, Poplar School East Town)

NH: What ideas are behind comprehensive schooling or important to it?

Art Teacher: I think it was that every child should be valued for what they were good at wasn't it? So they could excel at whatever they were best at and they weren't going to be held back by being labelled as middle of the road children. So if they were brilliant at art or brilliant at music or brilliant at maths then they could be in top groups for that because the school could cater for the complete spectrum.

(Art teacher, white female, East Town Secondary)

These comments place comprehensive aims in the past tense, as unrealistic or unrealised ideas. They assume the existence of an objective category of ability and imply that a flexible notion of ability is problematic for East Town school practice. Implicit in these comments is the current policy discourse of accountability and the desirability of certain outcomes which create the need to categorise students in terms of a notion of fixed ability.

In contrast, teachers in North Town, when asked to define comprehensive schooling, were less likely to refer explicitly to catering for all abilities. Meeting the needs of differing students was instead implied by the notions of accessibility, individual

learning and inclusion. The term ability was used only occasionally. This suggests that the discourse of choice and diversity is itself framing the perceptions of teachers within East Town who are experiencing the results of this policy discourse in terms of segregation and division of students on the grounds of ability. Ability becomes of central importance in a competitive environment where schools are ultimately concerned with the value of outcomes.

Teachers in North Town considered mixed ability teaching and grouping as a feasible option, and one which they liked the idea of, although they raised concerns about whether it would work:

NH: What do you think about setting?

Senior teacher: No, no, I don't agree with setting at all. But that's not my decision, so I just have to run with that. But I think in a larger comprehensive with such learning and behaviour difficulties which children have here, perhaps such mixed ability wouldn't work.

(Senior teacher, white female, North Town Secondary)

Mixed ability teaching was viewed wholly negatively by East Town teachers for whom fixed notions of ability and rigorous ability grouping were viewed as the most efficient ways to produce desired outcomes. This reflects policy emphasis on levelling and ability grouping students.

Teachers' perceptions of their students in North Town and East Town appear largely shaped by the prevailing discourses operating at school and LEA level. The research implies that where there are higher levels of choice in operation and emphasis on competition and outcomes, teachers discursively construct and frame their students in relation to this. For example, North Town teachers' expressions of comprehensive discourse see ability as fluid, not fixed and general, where students can excel at different things. Teachers in East Town use this discourse when defining comprehensive schooling, but in practice prevailing discourses of choice and school accountability override the fluid notion of ability. Comprehensive ideas of students being of equal worth conflict with this discourse and are referred to in the past tense by East Town teachers. Areas not experiencing such levels of choice and inter-school competition instead view their students in a more holistic fashion, concerned with developing the individual.

Further complexity underpins this division. Whilst the operation of choice in East Town is rendering the social inequities between schools more visible, the comprehensive

discourse accepted by teachers in North Town masks any social inequity faced by the students.

Comprehensive schooling in practice

East Town and North Town teachers held distinctly different perspectives concerning comprehensive schooling. Comprehensive schooling was viewed negatively by the majority of East Town teachers, as something which does not work in practice. Some of these comments appear to be the direct result of the current role of choice within the community. They also reflect on the previously segregated intakes of the comprehensive schools resulting from the new township community housing developments, which had new secondary schools, valued less favourably than the older schools. North Town is a very different kind of locale, with an unusually homogenous population lacking large swathes of middle class workers, which may contribute to the different perspectives of North Town teachers who viewed their experience of comprehensive schooling positively. Any conclusions regarding the effects of choice and market discourse on teachers' perceptions of comprehensive discourse need to take account of wider disparities between the locales.

For most teachers in East Town the idea of meeting the needs of all pupils within a comprehensive school was viewed as problematic. This was particularly so for East Town Secondary teachers, who felt that their students, the majority of whom had not actively chosen the school, had disproportionate levels of need compared with other schools in the locale:

I mean, I think it is, you know we do have some very able kids as well. But I just don't think it's very proportionately distributed, so you know yeah it is comprehensive school but I think we are unfairly, having to admit kids that need huge resourcing.

(Head of year eight, white female, East Town Secondary)

Whilst the teacher maintains some notion of the comprehensive ideal, she views having to take students who need more resources as problematic for the school, as this will affect their outcomes and hence how the school is viewed by the parent chooser.

I've never worked in a school that has been truly comprehensive. **So I don't know how it should work.** I know the theory, the theory nobody could object to, but in practice I don't think it works and I don't think it's the way forward either. **I think there should be different types of schools for different types of children.** Not necessarily on an oh they can't cope with an academic education, but different schools that parents would select because it met their children's interests and needs in a better way. I don't think there's enough choice. **I think there's a divide, its so sharply divided with the schools who have all the difficult children and the schools who don't have the difficult children have high academic achievement.** But there's no other choice

and I think that's wrong and my own personal view is that I don't think the comprehensive experiment has worked.

(Special needs teacher, white female, East Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

This East Town teacher rejects comprehensive schooling as a failed idea based on her own experience. Her comments, like those of the head of year eight, reflect her experience of working in a school which has been largely affected by a parental choice market, resulting in the teacher feeling that her school has all the difficult children. This is a further example of how the discourse and practice of choice and the subsequent disparity of student intakes within East Town has resulted in a discourse which subjectivates students, in this case as difficult. This discourse inevitably impacts on the students' own experiences within the school, and on the ways in which the teachers respond to the students. The data suggests that some teachers in East Town Secondary automatically assume that their intake will be difficult and problematic. It is particularly significant that North Town Secondary and North Town Sport have similar numbers of special needs students and students in receipt of free school meals as East Town Secondary, yet the North Town students are not referred to as difficult or problematic by their teachers, who are not operating within the same discursive framework.

Very few North Town teachers expressed negative feelings toward comprehensive schooling, and there was little reference to it not working. The discourse of comprehensive education remained central to their identity as teachers. This reflects the lack of choice currently operating within the locale. The teachers were not concerned with their school achieving the best academic outcomes in comparison with other schools in the locale, but instead with meeting their students' needs and providing the best opportunities to them.

NH: What are your feelings about comprehensive schools?

Jane: I wouldn't want to work in one that wasn't. I like the range of ability and having gone to a different kind of school I like to be with a mix of these pupils and I like the idea of challenging all those class things and the race things.

Kay: Yap.

Jane: And all the things we said before about developing people and making a difference in society and everything. You couldn't do that if you didn't have a diverse intake in the first place. You know, if you've got some middle class whatever type group of students who are all of an average ability how could you teach them about other things and other people?

(Teachers, white females, North Town Sport)

The teachers in North Town, when reflecting upon comprehensive schooling, appeared to hold particular ideals and aims of education which they tried to fulfil. For example, Jane talks about challenging issues of race and class within the school. Comprehensive

discourse shapes the teachers' identities and their feelings concerning the value of education. This reflection on personal aims of teaching was less evident in comments by East Town teachers, who appear to be heavily influenced by a market discourse, and reflected less upon what they wanted for individual children.

North Town teachers were more likely to identify the need for a diverse and broad curriculum, but not the need for separate schools. No teacher in North Town expressed any desire for a return to a grammar school system, whilst many teachers in East Town felt that student abilities were too divergent to be catered for in common schools, despite the fact that choice is already creating fairly segregated student intakes within East Town, representative of grammar and secondary schools. These differences relate to the significant role of market discourse and one of outcomes central to the experiences of teachers within East Town, where the teachers could not step outside of the market discourse of diversity and choice.

There was some evidence of New Labour discourse of choice and accountability being taken up by a small number of senior North Town teachers:

NH: Could you sum up what comprehensive education is?
Senior teacher: Providing relevant curriculum to the community and the young people that will inspire them to be motivated and become successful. Personalising it to their particular learning. So you're able to provide a plethora of different things within school, so you're able to provide an appropriate curriculum to SEN students but also to provide that drive and additionally to the most able students. So it isn't just one size fits all. I do think the comprehensive system we now have within the country is becoming more personalised to individual learning needs.
(Senior management team teacher, white male, North Town Sport)

These comments reflect closely the comments in the DFES' 2002 Policy Review. For example when it talks about the need to bring into focus 'each child's individual talents'(p.2)⁴⁵. The senior teacher comments on how comprehensive education is becoming more personalised and is moving away from a one size fits all approach. However, he does not advocate the need for diverse kinds of school to achieve this.

Whilst most North Town teachers felt that their schools operated on comprehensive lines and expressed little concern with parental choice, there was a marked divide in opinions between teachers and members of the Senior Management Team (SMT). SMT

⁴⁵ From the DFES 2002 Spending Review, Retrieved from:
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/2002spendingreview/pdf/investmentforreform.pdf>

teachers in North Town reflected both positively and negatively on the role which choice could play within the locale, and also appeared to have adopted some of the policy discourse of choice and accountability. Two head teachers identified the fact that the schools in North Town were not truly comprehensive in terms of having the full ability range of students. SMT teachers from North Town appeared both concerned about the potential effects which increased choice and a city academy may have upon the comprehensive nature of most schools within the town, but also were considering possible positive consequences of increasingly active parental choice:

NH: ` What do you think about comprehensive schooling?

Head teacher: Comprehensive education will work where you have truly **comprehensive schools** and the funds to go with it. The dangers that we face are things like city academies we also face the problem of the church sector because just down the road we've got St. Mary's Catholic high school, in other parts of the city and it does work a bit against comprehensive education so you have those stresses and strains. In this particular area the difficulties will be with say a city academy which might gain parents. I know a comprehensive school works in practice. **But it's about how school is perceived results and ethos.**

(Head teacher, white male, North Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

These comments from the head teacher reflect a sense of pride and protectiveness of comprehensive schooling, expressed by teachers in the schools. However, in the last sentence, a discourse of outcomes appears to slip into play, providing evidence of how choice and accountability policy discourses are beginning to penetrate and shape SMT perspectives.

Two North Town senior teachers referred to a market discourse of choice and diversity as a possible means by which to change the social composition of the schools, as most students currently come from families who have traditionally worked in manufacturing, with a lack of middle class families accessing common schools within the town. As one senior teacher from North Town remarked, the majority of schools in North Town are comprehensive but with uniformly low results. This identifies the suspected pattern of North Town as a locale with low choice and low level outcomes.

The head teacher of North Town Secondary referred to the notion of specialist status as a potential means to make the school more comprehensive in terms of intake. He adopts the new discourse of choice and diversity and tries to use it in relation to a comprehensive discourse.

NH: How would you define comprehensive schooling?

Head teacher: This school very much strives to be a comprehensive school and an inclusive school and we are aiming to become a fully extended school which is part of that so what we are missing to be a really truly comprehensive school is some of the top

end, erm and we need to do something about that and part of the strategy for doing something about that is to earn specialist school. We're going for specialist science status and the new school altogether so that's part of it and raising the whole ethos alongside academic improvement.

(Head teacher, white male, North Town Secondary)

This data and the subsequent passage are evidence of schools in North Town beginning to consider notions of markets and diversity as ways of improving their schools:

Senior teacher: Most of the schools here are comprehensive. Coz in the next town they're all sort of competing with each other. Whereas North Town we've only got sort of three honey pots of extremely successful schools and the rest of us are sort of between 20 percent and 50 percent and no higher really and I think it's an expectation. **The comprehensive system in North Town has a completely different expectation on the students and in some ways its lower.**

(Senior teacher, white female, North Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

Senior teacher: I don't think I agree with it [comprehensive schools], the specialist schools are obviously bringing money in and its boosting the comprehensive system around here. We're going for a community school so it means we'll have a doctors surgery we'll have a police station on site a nursery and a crèche. So we'll become **a far more professional base**. So we'll attract more teachers the right type of teachers not just the ones that come to North Town that live in North Town. We'll attract from the outside because we don't, we've had a really bad problem, the quality control, you have to kind of make do with what you've got I suppose.

(Senior teacher, white female, North Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

The North Town senior teacher adopts the new market discourse of choice, diversity and accountability, and raises some criticisms of the complacent acceptance of the comprehensive nature of North Town schools by teachers. She suggests that one criticism of the comprehensive schools in North Town is that, given the lack of competition between schools, there is complacency and a lack of drive for raising standards and attainment, which she feels does not exist in high choice locales.

There is a sharp divide in the data from North Town between the perspectives and discourses used by teachers and the senior management team. The teachers in North Town still express and appear to base their practice on comprehensive notions and appear to perceive their school and the other schools in the locale in these terms. Few of the teachers speculate on or compare results across the schools and they appear to believe that their schools are comprehensive. This is evidence of comprehensive schooling operating as a discourse, creating teachers' identities and values concerning their work.

For these teachers, their comprehensive discourse resonates closely with the spirit of comprehensive schooling which may be interpreted from Circular 10/65. From this finding, one can assume that the students within the North Town schools are influenced

most by the perspectives and discourses of their teachers rather than by the senior management team.

Considering data from North Town SMT teachers suggests that, in North Town, they have begun to adopt current policy discourse and are beginning to view their schools through this discourse. They appear to be gradually adopting the 'spin' or discourse of current government policy. This is a clear example of the way in which policy discourses are able to gain power. Although in North Town, this is currently operating at a fairly subtle level, there is evidence in the comments from SMT teachers that they are beginning to evaluate their own comprehensive discourse through the new policy discourse valuing choice, accountability and diversity. There is evidence in the SMT's comments of some feeling that school choice and a market centred approach may help to raise standards, recruit teachers and make the schools more desirable. The idea of the school becoming a more professional base is evidence of the discourse of managerialism beginning to enter a locale where schools have been, and currently are, largely uniform and comprehensive. Within this locale, choice is operating at a low level, as emphasised by students asked about school choice and other schools which they could have attended. No students expressed making a choice for their school; only a couple had looked at other schools and students had very limited knowledge of the existence of other local schools. Longitudinal study of the North Town schools would allow observation and assessment of whether the adoption of the new discourse by the SMT will in turn make the teachers themselves deploy this discourse.

Given the parallels made at the start of this chapter between North Town and the policy discourses of 1965, and East Town and the post 1988 policy, consideration of teacher and SMT teacher discourse in East Town suggests that similar discourses of choice and comprehensive schooling may, in time, develop in North Town. Obviously, the socio-economic, financial and historic backgrounds of the locales are diverse, rendering this consideration speculative. Within East Town the comprehensive discourse of social inclusion, and the valuing of comprehensive schooling as a positive social idea were lacking from teacher discourse, which instead focussed on student ability and the difficulties resulting from competition. It can be assumed from this that if choice discourse and practice develops in North Town, teacher discourse may be subsumed by choice and accountability discourse. Whilst East Town teachers had fully discarded

comprehensive discourse in any practical or discursive sense, SMT teachers in East Town schools did refer to a comprehensive idea, almost as a way to express their commitment to social justice whilst simultaneously admitting that it was too problematic and beyond the remit of their school. There was an implicit sense of guilt at having traded traditional and historic educational aims and values of social justice in favour of market forces.

I guess I believe in a comprehensive ethos. I did think that the old system of grammars and secondary moderns was very divisive for society. People were labelled at eleven. In some ways I'd like that within one school, where as before they were divided into the ones that will and the ones that will not if you like and that's what I like about comprehensive education **but the reality of how you do that ...**

(SMT teacher, white female, East Town Secondary) (Emphasis added)

Despite this apparent reluctance on the part of East Town SMT teachers to admit their rejection of comprehensive discourse, evidence from the teachers' perspectives and discourses imply that diversity and accountability discourses have replaced comprehensive ones. The data considered has shown that whilst at policy level comprehensive discourses are ignored and ruled out, for teachers in low choice locales like North Town they are still used and are an integral part of teacher identity and their perceptions of their occupation and their beliefs in specific aims of schooling. Data from East Town suggests that increased choice weakens this discourse, with implications particularly for social justice in terms of how students are perceived by teachers. It also illustrates how policy discourses operate to transform and replace other discourses which do not cohere with new policy. The difference in the discourse of SMT teachers and teachers in North Town suggests that the increasingly managerial and hierarchical structure of school leadership operates to the advantage of policy discourse by subjectivating teachers so that they come to embody and deploy policy discourse through their practice. Consideration of students' perspectives will support this conclusion illustrating the effects of the differing discourses on the ways in which students construct their own identities in relation to their school.

Student understanding of comprehensive discourse

When asked, few students across the samples could explain what a comprehensive school was, and as a term it had little meaning. The only exception was East Town Secondary where several students had some understanding of the term. This may be due to the head teacher's espousal of comprehensive ideas and his use of the term

comprehensive as a means to make the school appear special and important to the students, given that it was a school which very few of them had chosen to attend. Students mostly identified a comprehensive school with being either multicultural or a school which everyone could go to:

Errr is it one for every one different abilities isn't it?

(Year eight, white girl, East Town Secondary)

In discussion, students in East Town Secondary and Median School were very positive about the idea of common schooling for all, and largely negative about schools which could select students. This is likely to be because the students felt that they had been unfairly treated by not having received places in other schools they had applied to.

This section considers whether school markets, and schools' interpretations of markets, have any impact upon students themselves, their identities and discourses. Throughout the student data from East Town is evidence that students were acutely aware of their own school's position within the community and in relation to other schools. The school market discourse created by parental choice in East Town impacts upon students' experiences of school resulting in students being aware of and experiencing social stratification resulting from choice. Some students from East Town Secondary whilst recognising that their school was viewed negatively by others were very positive about the inclusive nature of their school, and were positive about the idea of comprehensive schooling:

Sam: I think that's better [referring to a comprehensive school] coz ...

Taylor: Yeah,

Rach: Yeah,

Sam: Because you don't get judged on what level you are or if you're cleverer than others.

(Year ten, white girls, East Town Secondary)

Taylor: Good, coz people are looked at as equals and not for like what they've got and what they haven't. They're there to learn, to socialise as well but their more there to learn and just get on with it which is why everyone else is there so they're there for same reasons everyone else is.

(Year eight, white boy, East Town Secondary)

Kylie: Yeah, coz this school even takes the people who are permanently excluded from other schools. They even take them students in. I think that's good. Even with bad reputations. Other schools say 'no we haven't any room' but East Town Secondary takes them in.

(Year ten, white girl, East Town Secondary)

Kylie is able to easily identify the aspects of East Town Secondary which she sees as compatible with the idea of a comprehensive school, which I had explained to her. Kylie was very aware of how some of the other schools would have perceived some of the

students at East Town Secondary as undesirable. Whilst East Town Secondary faces a number of challenges being an unpopular school, its open and inclusive nature was commented on by a number of students. This is a positive aspect of East Town Secondary, not evident in students comments from the other East Town schools.

These comments and those in Chapter Five show how the students in East Town are very aware of their school's standing and status within the community and rate their own chances of success in relation to their school's reputation. In contrast to students in East Town Secondary, students in Poplar School were more ambiguous towards the idea of a comprehensive school for all. More students were concerned with how such a school would affect them and how it might change their lessons or results. This reflected the over subscribed position of their school which could be compared with a grammar school, where the emphasis for the students centred upon getting good results. Even the lowest groups of students reported that good grades were the good thing about their school. The next extract illustrates the impact which school ethos and discourse has upon students.

- NH: What do you think about a comprehensive school?
Tom: It might be bad because people who are naughty are going to affect people who are good.
Liam: Like ruin our chances.
Tom: They won't be able to learn so well coz they'll be focussing on the naughty people.
Zoe: It could be good, coz you get a chance to mix with different people, to socialise with them, but like it could be bad coz it starts like fights between religion and what you believe in.
Liam: Yeah, starts bullying. There is like good points and bad points to having a comprehensive school coz like you can meet new people but also the people who are a bit silly at times in classes do get most of the attention which is a down point coz were not going to learn as much. Coz the teachers are busy telling them off.
(Year eight, white students, Poplar School East Town)

The teacher discourse of the ideal student is reflected by Liam and Tom, who have discursively constituted themselves as good students, and who view 'naughty' students as those who would prevent them from succeeding. They imply that such students go to other schools within the locale, and that if their school was not socially stratified their own chances may be hindered by these students. Social inclusion is also considered by these students who attend a largely white, middle class school. Their reflection on the potential of comprehensive schools to allow them to mix with different people, given the diverse social and ethnic mix of East Town, implies that they are aware of the socially and racially segregated intake of their school, particularly in comparison with East Town Secondary. However, they view the possibility of having a greater social mix

in their school with caution, associating it with the potential for fights and bullying. These statements in themselves imply a need for greater social inclusion within the East Town schools which have become increasingly socially and racially segregated. Tom, Zoe and Liam were clearly aware of the un-comprehensive nature of their own school.

Most students within East Town appeared to advocate the idea of paying for private education. In the data below Omar argues that private education is positive for those who can afford it, and he thinks it is a worthy investment, in relation to his own school experience as he thinks he would do better if he attended such a school. He has internalised a discourse of the validity of choice and views his own lack of choice as potentially negative for his own progress and school success.

Tyen: I think they're better.[private schools] They make you learn more.
Omar: Well I think you pay out money, yeah, but after a while when your sons gone through it yeah, he's bound to get all the money back that went into the school, coz he's going to get a good job. In this school there's not enough of a chance than in a private school.

(Year eight, Asian boys, East Town Secondary)

Students in East Town recognise competition which exists between the schools and could readily identify where their school stood in relation to the other schools in the locale. School competition within East Town and policy discourse advocating choice acts as a constituting discourse for the students. Omar, for example, has internalised New Labour discourses of the right to choice. Even students within East Town Secondary, which is most disadvantaged by choice and which the students attending hold negative opinions of, expressed positive attitudes toward choice, despite not getting their own choice of school.

The perspectives of students in East Town Secondary concerning the value of comprehensive schooling and the justifiability of private schooling was mirrored by their head teacher:

Individuals in society have freedom of choice they can spend their money on a flash car, nice suits, going to the pub, smoking, drinking, drugs whatever right. If they spend it on their children through private education you must commend that why should you challenge it. But what the state should not do is to magnify that by giving exceptional additional advantage through charitable status or whatever to those enterprises that are private. What it should do is to recognise that we need all of the children to perform well and therefore it should be much more differentiated in what it spends on state education. So that's my view. I would never fault a parent for spending money on their child and private education is wonderful but it should not be at the expense of other schools certainly not financially and it's difficult to avoid it having a reputational impact on state education as being a superior model.

(Head teacher, white male, East Town Secondary)

The head teacher advocates common schooling to the students although he perhaps implicitly identifies the difficulties faced by the school in meeting the students' needs with limited resources.

Students in East Town were able to reflect on issues surrounding private schooling. Their comments are framed in terms of choice discourse. By comparison students in North Town found the concept of choosing a school, private or otherwise alien to their own experiences.

- NH: What about schools that parents can pay to send their children too?
Liam: It's a waste of money, but you should have the right to do it. I think if we all had the option we would want to do it, but if we don't have the option that would be unfair.
Simon: If it's that important to people, if they really want to do that, then they should have the chance to.
Hayley: Depends if they can afford it. It doesn't really make any difference to the ones who don't really.
Shannon: I think its OK, coz if you want your child to have a good education then you'll send them to a school where you know they'll get a good education.
Zak: It's not fair, they should get a good education anyway...coz that makes sure their children will be rich and then the other children will stay like wealthy or poor coz they don't have an education to make themselves rich. So it keeps the poverty rate. It's all about money.

(Year eight white students, Poplar School East Town)

Zak is struggling to make sense of schooling in relation to social reproduction. He is viewing education as a means to later financial rewards, and is assuming that educational experience is differentiated across schools. In the high choice locale of East Town, all students are aware of the diversity of schools resulting from choice and have clear concepts of what schools they perceive to be good and bad.

The discourse of choice and diversity which has been internalised by East Town students was absent from the comments of North Town students. They were unaware of other schools which they could have attended, and expressed generally positive views of their schools. They expressed no sense of unfairness at their own experience as they did not compare their experience with that of other schools. Even students at St. Mary's appeared to accept their school and did not appear to consider other schools.

Conclusions

Comprehensive discourse is central to North Town teachers' construction of themselves and their students. Where this discourse operates, teachers appear to take a more holistic view of their students and are less heavily influenced by accountability discourses.

North Town students consequently have positive attitudes towards their school and, like their teachers do, not categorise themselves, their peers or other schools in terms of outcomes and fixed notions of ability. The absence of a sense of unfairness in North Town and the accepting nature of the schools by teachers and students does not appear actively to challenge the status quo, or the greater extent of inequities and problems which North Town schools face due to lack of employment and low level aspiration, in relation to schools in other locales.

East Town, in contrast, is largely devoid of comprehensive discourse which has been firmly replaced by a discourse of choice, with the exception of East Town Secondary where some teachers felt that they were trying to work within a comprehensive school which retained some comprehensive values. Teachers and students are aware of the iniquitous experiences for students between schools in the locale, and student identity is inevitably shaped by this.

The demise of comprehensive discourse within East Town and particularly in Poplar School implies that the emphasis on choice and competition within the locale becomes central to teachers' experiences such that they do not view schools as comprehensive or themselves as practising comprehensive values within their teaching, whilst comprehensive discourse exhibits greater endurance within North Town. The schools facing the greatest challenges with the most complex levels of student need appear to be more likely to retain a comprehensive discourse.

Chapter Nine

Choice and comprehensive discourse: between the devil and the deep blue sea.

This study has considered in depth the potential effects of school choice policies and practices and the adoption of market choice by parents in two locales. It argues that in East Town this has encouraged and led to the development of hierarchies of institutions within the locale. It has allowed a proliferation of deficit discourses to develop around the students and less popular schools in the lower reaches of the hierarchy. North Town, as a less choice driven locale, provides a source of comparison for identifying the inequities in the current provision. In this context the complex discourses of comprehensive schooling have been traced and the issues facing both East and North Towns considered. This conclusion begins by reflecting on the methodology of the study, considering how different paradigmatic approaches are used alongside one another. This is considered first as it evolved and developed alongside the data. The findings of the study are then summarised and discussed and they are considered in relation to the 2005 Education White Paper and in relation to future research.

Methodological reflections

This thesis and the following conclusions are inevitably based on a limited sample of two locales in a country of diverse school provision. This critique may be proffered to most pieces of educational research. The breadth of the field, the amount of funding available to educational research and the individual nature of education and schooling, which is centred around interactions between individuals, renders wider, more representative studies often unsuitable to assess what is happening in detail in a particular locale. There were a number of other locales with even higher levels of choice in operation that would have been desirable to use in this study, although it was not possible to gain access to these.

In relation to drawing conclusions from the data in the thesis, the scale of the study was small and the decision was made to go for breadth looking at the six schools in the two locales as opposed to depth. Carrying out an in-depth ethnography on one school would have provided a greater richness of data concerning how choice is understood and

experienced in a single context. However, focussing only on one school would have potentially missed issues arising from the position and location of each school. It was particularly interesting to observe how schools in one locale experienced choice in different ways. However, the sample of teachers interviewed was small meaning that any conclusions drawn must be viewed in relation to this limitation. A larger sample of teacher interviews in each school would have helped to overcome this problem.

The methodological approach and use of both post-structural and interpretive analysis gave the project additional complexity. The way in which the methods and perspectives on analysis worked together evolved as the project developed.

Whilst the thesis has come to embrace a concept of discourse as a means to explore the ways in which social actors operate, are constituted and act in their world, it also accepts that schooling and education is a pragmatic and real activity and that endless discursive analysis may not, on its own, allow for change or provide practical support. For this thesis, discursive analysis has become a means to reflect upon experiences at multiple levels through multiple readings and has allowed an authentic consideration of the ways in which different actors may operate. This has allowed reflection and a clearer means for looking at the ways in which policies hold discursive force in the field and the ways in which they operate alongside teachers' and schools' own discursive natures. The references to Bourdieu's notion of capital within the thesis cannot be entirely explained in terms of the interpretive accounts of the data. The structured, interpretive and Foucauldian accounts cannot meet theoretically and to try to do so would be to misunderstand the post-structural paradigm. Whilst the modes of analysis are logically inconsistent with one another I have attempted to use them here in a similar way to an artist who creates multiple pictures of the same still life using different mediums and perspectives. The references to Bourdieu's notion of capital, the critical reflections on race and the explanations of the economic market and actual school practice within the analysis can be viewed as the artist's observational drawings done, say, in the mediums of pencil, ink and charcoal, whilst the interpretive and Foucauldian analysis of the data from teachers and students may be viewed as the artist's modern interpretations of the still life, in paint and pastel, where she tries to convey the feeling and mood of the piece.

The resulting pictures may be hung alongside each other, each created from the same stimuli yet not reducible to each other. They exist independently in their own rights, differing reflections of the subject of study. If one understands the differing accounts offered in the thesis in these terms, the tensions and inconsistencies are both visible and understood. I could have offered a thesis in distinct parts, clearly separating the analyses out. However by weaving different perspectives into the ongoing analysis I hope to have provided an account which allows the viewer to look from one picture to another, and to be able to keep glancing between.

Immersion in the data allowed varying discourses to emerge. For the readings of data given here, other readings are also possible and are perhaps more visible to the reader coming from their own discursively constituted perspective. This is a problematic aspect of the data analysis. The data presented here raises a number of issues concerning the extent to which multiple interpretations of the data are possible and the effect which this possibility itself has on any one particular reading.

There is always a difficulty in supporting analysis with small quotations which cannot reflect the entire nature of the discourse or the interaction between the participant and the researcher at the time of data gathering. Likewise the reading makes its own assumptions concerning implicit motivations and the data itself may be coloured by the speaker wanting to please the interviewer.

The following extract from page 198 is an example where multiple readings and interpretations may be made. The following discussion of the multiple and at times conflicting readings which are possible illustrates the need for a greater degree of reflexivity (as discussed in Chapter Three) in the analysis than was provided. The data extract below is one example from the data where such reflexivity is required. Other examples of data used in the thesis require a similar critique. The use of this extract is not a defence of the account but provides an example of the difficulty which arises from giving only one discursive reading and also highlights the impossibility of reaching any single point of certainty in such an analysis.

NH: What about social inclusion?

Senior teacher: If I said that on the signpost at the end of the road someone had written "Pakis go home" and it's been there now for two years. I think there's fear in the minds of Asian families wanting to send them. Yeah it's a factor. ..we realise we really need to work on the racial equality, we need to work through our PSHE programme to squash the ignorance ...but it [racism] is, it is evident here.... Ofsted hasn't picked it up here but for sure they will.

(Senior teacher, white female, North Town Secondary)

The reading given for this data extract identified a ‘sense of complacency’ in the teacher’s comments and a lack of motivation to address issues of racism in the wider community. It suggested that the acceptance that racism needs to be addressed is tinged with a lack of urgency.

An alternative reading to the one given in Chapter Seven might suggest that this teacher is trying to work within a difficult setting where she feels that there is very little that she or the school can do to counter the entrenched racism within the community. Rather than being complacent, then, the teacher may herself be oppressed by the conditions in which she is working and may be doing her best within the inevitable restrictions. The teacher herself may have little power to act in relation to the greater force of entrenched external racism within the community.

This alternative reading is persuasive, yet the more critical analysis suggesting ‘complacency’ was made because the teacher’s comments appeared to imply that there is racism in the community and that the school has known about it for a long time, yet the school’s policies and practices do not appear from the teacher’s words to be actively addressing it. The use of the term ‘we need to’ implies that working to overcome racism is something that they need to do rather than something they are already succeeding at, or at least have a system in place. The teacher did not talk positively about what the school was already actively doing. The fact that the same sign has been on the signpost for two years further implies that the school have not themselves taken any measures to remove the sign. It suggests that the school may feel that it has little influence or is powerless over the community outside of its gates.

The tension between these two readings is possibly heightened by the fact that the first reading appears to allocate a portion of responsibility to the teacher, when in fact it is a school issue. The teacher may have been expressing the school’s situation rather than her own. For example, the teacher herself may not have direct control over the PSHE policy, or be able to compete with the community position with which students at the school have grown up. It may have been fairer to say that the teacher’s comments

suggest that there may be complacency or a resignation to the problems of racism within the school itself, rather than allocating such complacency to the teacher alone.

Whilst there is a danger of over-dramatising issues within the data or attributing the effects of wider structural, policy, cultural or institutional factors to an individual teacher, there is also a sense in which analysis is able to unmask the potentially subtle and implicit operation of institutional racism within the school and community. Institutional racism may operate subtly through the practices of the school which may not necessarily appear specifically to be acting in a racist fashion and which do not intend to have racist effects. There was a further example of this in data discussed in Chapter Seven from Poplar School East Town, where a senior teacher referred to the possibility of undercurrents of racism in the school, which were subtle and covert, hence not actively challenged by the school.

What is crucial to recognise as a researcher is that both of the analyses I have sketched here are likely to resonate with and be persuasive to readers – the readings of data that the researcher offers are informed by her own educational, social and political positioning and experiences as are readers' reception of and response to the analysis. Multiple readings of the data are an inevitability of the analysis, particularly when other data or impressions from the fieldwork setting are not used alongside. One way of situating analysis in the positions and experiences, of the researcher is to write the way that she inflects the data into the analysis – such reflexivity running consistently through the analysis would have located the analysis presented, reduce the risk of analytic claims appearing over-stated, and allowed the reader to better assess the analysis offered. There would also be significant value in offering a range of possible interpretations alongside one another, as I have done here.

Summary of findings

This thesis did not begin with grand aims, but rather to observe and consider the ways in which school choice was affecting, if at all, teachers and students, and the ways in which teachers and students perceived and experienced choice. The thesis attempted to provide a reconfigured analysis, primarily concerned with understanding choice in relation to the historical discourses and patterns which have shaped the current

secondary school system. For example, the thesis identifies the roots of comprehensive schooling and suggests that the ambiguity of Circular 10/65 allowed for the diversity of provision which remains today.

This approach required attempts to synthesise a number of areas often studied in isolation from one another. For example: teachers' and students' perspectives on the same issues; the conflicting discourses of choice and comprehensive schooling; and in depth consideration of particular discourses and themes, for example, race and ability.

The thesis at the simplest level has provided a window of insight into the reflections and experiences of some teachers and students regarding questions of school choice.

Reflecting back upon the initial research aims it is apparent that the data gained to address these aims is best considered as a whole, as each aim is interlinked.

The aims:

- Considering similarities and differences in choice patterns, student intake and equality of educational opportunity within and between school competition spaces;
- Examining teacher and student perspectives and experiences of school choice and comprehensive ideas of inclusion and equality of educational opportunity;
- Examining at school level the existence of comprehensive and choice discourses;
- Examining the impact that school choice and market policies have upon secondary schooling and comprehensive education.

Choice operated to different extents within North Town and East Town, with subsequent effects on the experiences of students within schools, and teachers' perspectives of their school and practice. Different versions of choice were in operation within each locale. In East Town, parental choice of schools was operating in the way in which New Labour policy intends it. *Overt choice* is explicit and directed by parents, with schools becoming competitors in a market place and parents and students as consumers.

Parental choice was operating to create a market place of schools, with some schools being popular and oversubscribed and other schools less popular. There was an apparent

social class and racial element to this choice, with evidence of cultural and social capitals influencing choice or the lack of it. This was reflected in the fact that the popular and oversubscribed East Town schools (eg Poplar School) had very low levels of children in receipt of free school meals or from minority ethnic groups, and children from Poplar School were able to identify products of their human capital which had helped them to access the school.

In contrast, an old style parental choice was operating in North Town, where most parents automatically sent their children to the nearest local school, and where all schools in the city were fairly homogenous in terms of student intake, with the exception of minority ethnic families. According to the students and teachers, few parents appeared to look at other schools or actively consider school choice as a possibility. North Town is representative of a *veiled choice*, referring to the kinds of parental choice which operated prior to active government encouragement of parental choice. Whilst few parents of students in the North Town schools appeared to make an actual choice, with the exception of those parents opting for a church school, this does not mean that no choice is occurring. Instead, a degree of choice is operating in a covert way. For example, some teachers suggested that middle class parents chose to send their children to rural schools outside of the city, and also chose to live in the rural areas bordering the city, rather than in the city itself.

The mechanism of choice operates in different ways within each locale. It would be easy to paint North Town as a comprehensive ideal with no parental choice. However a small degree of choice is in operation, particularly by the middle classes, but this is less visible than in East Town. In North Town, choice is a discourse adopted by a few, but is not a concept central to all parents. In comparison, East Town provides a prime example of a high choice locale where school choice appears to be a central and pressing discourse for most parents.

Whilst choice appears to have specific effects at the level of school composition, choice alone cannot be held entirely responsible for the segregated and diverse compositions of secondary schools. Given that as the historical and policy analysis at the beginning of the thesis showed the secondary school system pre 1988 was already somewhat hierarchical and diverse with residential patterns of segregation reflected within school

intakes. This pattern of disparity has continued with several patterns of choice apparent across locales and the eleven plus examination in some areas.

The effects of these choice patterns were most visible in the discourses of students and teachers. Any analysis of purely statistical data concerning school intakes and student background would fail to identify this impact of choice at a discursive level and the effects on students' and teachers' perspectives.

All of the teachers interviewed within East Town were very aware of the role and impact of parental choice for their city. They were aware of where their own school fitted into the hierarchy in terms of student composition and academic outcomes. In view of the local competition between schools, teachers compared and rated their students in relation to those from other schools, and they did this according to a discourse of ability. Teachers interviewed in East Town Secondary, the least popular and least actively chosen school in the East Town sample, categorised their students negatively and grouped them under the umbrella of the 'less able'. They all constructed their student intake in relation to ability. The head teacher introduced the discourse of quality. He felt that the student intake of the school was of a lower quality than those at the actively chosen schools. East Town Secondary had higher proportions of students with special needs, in receipt of free school meals and with English as an additional language than the other sample schools. The teachers interviewed felt that, as a result of this, the students required more support and resources than students at the other schools, and were still less likely to be as successful at GCSE. The teachers also felt that they were having to spend disproportionate amounts of time working on social issues and trying to encourage positive attitudes toward the school for the students, many of whom had not chosen the school in the first place. East Town Secondary appeared to have adopted a market discourse of choice and competition, which rendered their students less desirable and more difficult to work with, in order to create an end product desirable to middle class parent choosers who would judge the school according to these outcomes.

Teachers interviewed at Poplar School similarly characterised their students in terms of ability and were aware of their comfortable position within the choice market. For their school, choice was a positive thing, which they actively encouraged. The school placed large emphasis on academic achievement and outcomes.

In contrast to East Town, the teachers in all three North Town sample schools referred only occasionally to the notion of ability to characterise their student intakes. The student composition and GCSE results across all three schools were fairly homogenous, although St. Mary's, the Catholic school, had slightly higher results and slightly less students in receipt of free school meals. Most teachers commented on the way in which most schools in the locale were fairly similar. Each school's student intake was mainly comprised of students living in the immediate catchment area and teachers did not feel that they were in much competition for students, although some teachers did mention losing students to schools outside of the city. The market discourse of choice and competition was not central to the schools' or teachers' perspectives and this was marked by the lack of reference to student ability cited by North Town teachers.

This construction and use of ability discourses within the high choice locale, and the ways in which it resulted from discourses of accountability, operating to construct the student, (which were also often related to behavioural expectations) is raised as a central concern by the thesis, with implications for student equity and outcomes.

Student experiences of choice reflect the perspectives of their teachers. Within North Town the students interviewed were entirely unaware of a choice discourse. They had difficulty naming any of the other schools they could have attended and could remember no experiences of making a choice or looking at schools. Most students from St. Mary's had attended a Catholic feeder primary and their transition to St. Mary's was largely assumed. The students were accepting of their school and experience within it.

Students across East Town sample schools had very different experiences of choice. Students at Poplar School were proud of their school, emphasising how they thought they would do well there. Many students had had to appeal to gain access to the school and were pleased that they could attend Poplar. Most of the students were able to reflect on the choice process and they had very clear views about other schools in the locale, which they rated in relation to how well they thought students in those schools would do and in relation to the kinds of students who attended. For example, they identified the students at East Town Secondary as rough and associated problems with the 'Asian' students.

Many East Town Secondary students commented upon how far down their list of choices the school had been. Some felt that they would be less likely to do well in the school and were aware of the negative perceptions of the school. The minority ethnic students at the school were more positive about the school and some had actively chosen it.

Considering these issues in depth, the thesis has identified implications and effects of school choice. The effects of choice on students within a high choice locale, such as East Town, are important. Whilst Poplar students had a positive experience and viewed both their school and themselves with esteem, students at East Town Secondary had to reconcile themselves to being at a school they had not chosen and one viewed negatively by the community and other students. Further, the way in which East Town Secondary teachers viewed their students as of low ability has implications for the quality of experience offered to those students and raises the question of whether the students themselves will internalise their teachers' perceptions of them as less desirable and less able students. This has implications for students' self esteem and identity. It raises the serious question of whether such inequity of experience between students within one locale can be justified by arguments for the importance of the parental freedom of school choice, and the political assumption of the beneficial power of market ideology.

The negative experience of East Town Secondary students is not mirrored by students in North Town. The lack of choice means that students across the sample schools had a similar experience and were viewed in the same way by their teachers. However, the lack of aspirations of the students, the lack of opportunities available to them post sixteen, the ways in which the schools and teachers accept the disadvantages and inequalities faced by the students, and acceptance of the low level outcomes of their students is also not desirable.

Having considered practices of schools influenced by both choice and comprehensive ideas, the study concludes that neither is wholly satisfactory in relation to equity and social justice. Whilst choice and marketisation challenge the apparent complacency and acceptance of low standards evident within North Town (which New Labour would view as epitomising the problem with the 'bog standard' comprehensive school), it actually results in an even more socially divided experience for students. Market choice

and competition in East Town is allowing certain families to access excellent education whilst leaving other students to contend with a poor second best. The schools in East Town are segregated both socially and academically in a manner representative of the old grammar and secondary modern system, with Poplar as the grammar school and East Town Secondary, the secondary modern. Whilst this division in East Town is no longer based on a test of student intelligence, it is instead based on a test of parent choice making powers. A student's place at either school is largely dependent on their family's social, cultural and human capital: the extent to which parents are able to access choice and work appeals systems to their advantage. There is no mechanism within current choice policy with which to address these inequities.

Current choice policy still tries to imply that it takes social inclusion as a central value of education. However, social inclusion has a new meaning under Labour, new social inclusion whose concern extends only as far as the individual being included within society in relation to economic participation. Within East Town, evidence of comprehensive social inclusion⁴⁶ is largely absent from school discourse and practice. Instead two of the sample schools appeared forced, through the operations and results of choice, to view students in relation to their outcomes. In North Town comprehensive social inclusion is maintaining its grip as a powerful guiding discourse for teachers within the schools, who still appear driven by the value of comprehensive social inclusion where students are valued regardless of outcomes.

The thesis also highlighted the extent to which issues of race are central to teacher and student experience. It found that schools in both locales are largely segregated on the grounds of race. The more comprehensive locale of North Town, where teachers strive for comprehensive social inclusion, experiences racial segregation as a result of housing patterns and entrenched racism within the community, whilst current choice policies as practiced within East Town do not address issues of racial segregation and schools in East Town are equally, if not more, segregated. This is a further issue which choice policy fails to address.

⁴⁶Where comprehensive social inclusion refers to the sort upheld by old Labour concerned with the social embeddedness of individuals within a shared society regardless of class, ability and wealth

Discussion: choice and comprehensive discourse

It is arguable that basing a project around comparisons between choice and comprehensive schooling is unhelpful given the extent to which comprehensive discourses have been surpassed and discounted by the choice and diversity project. However, the study has shown that comprehensive discourses retain strength for many teachers, particularly in relation to the humanitarian aims of education which are overlooked by choice policies.

Comprehensive discourses were understood and used particularly by North Town teachers. Whilst Chapter One took a historical approach to the notion of the comprehensive school, situating it within the historical structure of school development, it did not extend this to look at the nuances of policy development at government and school levels. Initially, Chapter One referred to comprehensive schooling as an ideal which was never fully implemented in policy or practice, a halcyon idea which was never completed. A claim identified by Fogelman (2006):

There never was a standard model of a comprehensive school, but many would argue that, because such developments have frequently re-introduced at least partial selection and because of the continuing existence of grammar schools in many areas, the comprehensive 'ideal' was never quite achieved and that now it is being further diluted.' (Fogelman, 2006, p. 41)

Whilst at a simple level this claim may carry a degree of truth given that there was never any monolithic view of how comprehensive schools would operate in theory and practice which was implemented for all schools nationally, the claim also reduces and obscures the complexities, motivations and roles of significant individuals at national and local government level and at the level of school practice. The following discussion seeks to explore the policy nuances of comprehensive schooling in greater depth considering it as a complicated and contested policy development. Comments by Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) identify the need to view policy in a more problematic fashion:

The policy process is one of complexity, it is one of policy-making, and re-making. It is often difficult, if not impossible to control or predict the effects of policy, or to be clear about what those effects are, what they mean when they happen. (Bowe, Ball, and Gold 1992, p. 23, cited in Gewirtz 2002, p. 15)

The way in which the sample of teachers interviewed in North Town spoke positively of the notion of comprehensive schooling, and felt that they worked within comprehensive schools, suggests that the idea of the comprehensive school retains some discursive

power in the face of policy rhetoric largely focussed on a market led discourse of choice and diversity.

In the following discussion it becomes apparent that comprehensive schooling has always been a contested notion that has been fought and struggled over sometimes to its advantage and at others to its detriment. At policy level the development of comprehensive schooling was itself a compromise between conflicting opinions and pressures and as Chapter One began to show was given some space at varying times by both Labour and the Conservatives. Kerckhoff, Fogelman, Crook and Reeder (1996) commented on divided attitudes within the Labour Party at local and national level concerning comprehensive reorganisation from 1950 onwards. They also note that some Conservative local authorities in rural areas readily adopted reorganisation schemes.

Fogelman (2006) argues that views about comprehensive schools could not be divided clearly on party lines at local and national government level and that some senior Conservative politicians were sympathetic towards change:

Although the proposal [for comprehensivisation] was generally well received, it became modified in some important respects. In particular, other Cabinet members did not wish to be seen to be disrupting the traditional relationship with local authorities and, in any case, several were ambivalent about the proposals. That there were contradictions in the views of government members is illustrated by an amendment which was passed in the parliamentary debate which 'welcomed the efforts of local authorities to reorganise secondary education on comprehensive lines which will preserve all that is valuable in grammar-school education for those children who receive it and make it available to more children. (Fogelman 2006 p. 33)

This ambiguity was replicated at the local level. Inevitably, comprehensive schooling as a policy was interpreted in different ways at local authority and school level, dependent on the situation in the locale and on the value that the ideas were given by key players in the local authorities and schools. At the local authority level aspects of comprehensive reorganisation appear to have been largely affected and driven by county level politics and the power of particularly key individuals interpreting and developing policy in their own, often unique ways. This is supported by Kerckhoff, Fogelman, Crook and Reeder (1996) and by Fogelman's (2006) historical account which cite examples of the diverse responses of a number of areas to comprehensive reorganisation. For example, prior to the 1965 Circular Leicestershire under a Conservative led local government had planned to reorganise their schools into a system of high schools and upper schools. In Manchester Fogelman reports that the move toward comprehensive schools was led by the Labour Party which faced issues in

relation to the physical practicalities of rearranging schools in an ‘atmosphere of conflict and controversy’.

In most areas some form of comprehensive reorganisation did take place⁴⁷. However the form and speed of reorganisation appears to have been largely dependent on individual and area drivers.

As Ball’s (1981) account of Beachside Comprehensive identifies, comprehensive values were taken up to different degrees by individual schools and teachers, and meant different things. The ways in which comprehensive schooling was adopted by practitioners is something which policy itself may not have accounted for. There would have been specific issues facing specific teachers in particular areas. For example, the change in perceived status of working in a comprehensive as opposed to a grammar school, issues and beliefs surrounding the skills required for teaching classes of mixed ability and issues of controlling student behaviour in an institution with a wider range and larger number of students. Hence teachers themselves may have acted as a powerful force in relation to the actualisation of policies.

The outcomes of different reorganisation patterns were evident in North Town and East Town. North Town began plans for comprehensive reorganisation as early as 1955. However reorganisation did not begin until 1966. A result of the reorganisation was to create sixth form colleges separate from the comprehensive schools. This system largely remains in North Town. East Town has eleven through to eighteen schools and the popular schools today appear to be the grammar schools which became comprehensives. In relation to the findings of the study, one possibility is that North Town embodied and adopted comprehensive schooling to a different degree to East Town, and so the differing perceptions of comprehensive schooling expressed by the teachers may also reflect the differing histories of the locales.

As Chapter One identified, a central problem with comprehensive schooling as a policy was that the associated aims and ideals were not well defined, hence in practice it could

⁴⁷ With the exception of the areas which retained a selective or partially selective system as identified in Chapter One.

be interpreted in several ways at the school level. Every policy is open to interpretation by practitioners. However, the content of Circular 10/65 as explored in Chapter One is particularly open to interpretation. Since it suggests a number of possible plans for reorganisation and contains a number of philosophically complex ideas such as the idea of a common school.

Whilst Gewirtz (2002) supports the idea that policy implementation is complex, she also argues that by only focussing on the complexity of policy implementation primary patterns may be overlooked:

The process of policy implementation is messy, complex, adhoc and results in unintended and unforeseen outcomes. This is because those who produce policy texts have never been able to control precisely how they are interpreted and put into practice on the ground. However I want to argue that it is possible to overstate the messiness , complexity and ad hocery associated with policy implementation. (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 16)

This suggests the need to look at policy in terms of both a complex and messy micro level picture and at the same time the macro direction of what is happening. Hence with comprehensive organisation it is important to look at both the complexity and confusion surrounding its introduction alongside wider questions.

Ball (1981) supports the claim that plans for comprehensive schooling did not adequately address what comprehensive schooling might look like in practice. He identifies a rhetorical gap between policy and practice:

Much of the political and educational rhetoric which surrounds the notion of comprehensiveness in this country ignores, or is irrelevant to, what actually goes on in schools. (Ball, 1981, p. 1)

No agreement either in government policy or in educational theory about the goals and purposes of comprehensive education. There is not even a generally accepted notion of what comprehensive schools are able to achieve, (Ball, 1981, p. 2)

In part this hesitancy in the circular may be viewed as the result of a political compromise. As Ball (1981) argues pro-comprehensive Labour governments were not keen to legislate on comprehensivisation or to 'lay down any policy about its aims and objectives'. This sense of compromise is evident in circular 10/65 where despite the Labour party's previously firm acceptance of comprehensive policy it is not taken forward with the same zeal.

[A] vacuum created by the absence of formulations that encompass the *practice* of comprehensive education, once the children are in the schools , has only tended to perpetuate the values and attitudes of selective schooling within the new comprehensives. (Ball, 1981, p. 3)

In part this may have been to do with what was practical on the ground and at local authority-level, and in part the result of conflicting party positions. Whilst in some areas comprehensive schooling was positively taken forward there were other areas which were reluctant to move away from a grammar school system.

Ball further identifies the ways in which the different philosophies which lie behind comprehensive schooling are often combined at the level of practice and how policies are interpreted and transformed on many levels within the school.

And although it has been possible to find examples for the meritocratic and egalitarian models, most comprehensive schools would undoubtedly demonstrate a mixture of these philosophies, if only at the ideological level. This may be evident in a conflict between the stated objectives defined by a headmaster and the actual day-to-day practice of his teachers; alternatively, different ideologies may coexist within different sectors of the same school. (Ball 1981, p. 10)

Ball's case study of Beachside Comprehensive provides an illustration of the turbulence of transition to comprehensive schooling and the complexities of translating policy into practice. It also goes some way to suggest why there was an uneven pattern of change, since as much appeared to be dependent on personalities and opinions within the school and wider authority as on government policy pronouncements.

North Town sample teachers' positive views on comprehensive schooling compared with East Town sample teachers' negative views may be explained in relation to Gewirtz's (2002) notion of a 'values drift' whereby certain values are gradually replaced over time with new values. Gewirtz suggests that comprehensive-values of equity and community, universalism and collectivism are part of a 'welfarist' value position concerned with distributive justice, which is in a process of drift toward a Post welfarist commitment to 'market democracy and competitive individualism'. (Gewirtz, 2002, p1)

there is a diminishing concern with need, equity, community and co-operation and an increasing concern with image, discipline, output measures, academic differentiation and competition. (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 29)

Gewirtz qualifies the ways in which values may conflict, causing a value mismatch for the teacher, for example, between student need and performance, school co-operation and competition and caring as opposed to academic emphasis. The data gained from North Town and East Town supports this as it identifies tensions experienced by some

teachers when their ideas of their role as a teacher entrenched in old comprehensive policies are challenged by the implicit values of the market.

As explored in depth in Chapter Eight, despite the small sample size, teachers interviewed in North and East Towns had adopted market discourses to different extents and valued notions of comprehensive schooling differently. This idea of a values drift explains the way in which a new policy may gradually gain discursive power replacing existing discourses. It may be argued that East Town teachers are experiencing values drift towards competition whilst North Town teachers still embody community based values. Three of the teachers in East Town identified a sense of unease in relation to conflicting value and policy positions they were experiencing. They valued the ideas of comprehensive schooling, yet felt that the positions of their schools were in conflict with their values as they experienced changes in the schools as a result of having to compete with other schools for students and outcomes, which was resulting in viewing students as commodities.

There is a danger of oversimplifying the complexities surrounding comprehensive schooling at the policy level to see it solely as a drift from state A to state B, where A is old comprehensive values and B is market values. This is problematic since value position A or value position B may be held incompletely. For example, comprehensive policy allowed room for multiple interpretations and notions of equity surrounding it were interpreted in different ways. Comprehensive values are themselves broad and it may be that some teachers never embodied such values to begin with, favouring selection by school at age eleven and separate schools for different children. Similarly, policy as interpreted at the level of school practice has evolved, been challenged and contested and developed into a representation of the original policy, often dependent on the extent to which individual LEA's, schools and teachers are amenable to change. Some values drift is inevitable with any policy. This values drift may also be applied to other policy developments at times where conflicting values are operating. This non linear 'messiness' of values drift alongside and in response to policy is identified by Gewirtz:

[I]t is important to reiterate that this shift is not smooth and nor has it gone uncontested. Those involved in schools are differently located along the 'values spectrum', which ranges from 'comprehensivism' on one end to 'marketism' on the other (Gewirtz et al 1995, p. 57)

This notion of values drift provides a model to explain the way in which policy changes may gradually take affect at the level of practice to varying extents often dependent on contingent local factors. The ways in which choice itself appeared to operate in North Town and East Town may be viewed on a similar scale, with Veiled Choice operating alongside comprehensive values and Overt Choice operating alongside market values.

As illustrated the initial historical account does not fully explore the complexities and nuances of policy which is continually developed in a context of both political and local challenges and struggles. Circular 10/65 can be seen as the result of a struggle between conflicting ideas at policy level which was then replicated by a serious of struggles at a local and school level. Some areas were driving comprehensive schooling on the ground way ahead of policy, whilst others were reluctant to reorganise grammar schools.

By considering both choice policies and ideas of comprehensive schooling, the thesis provides an overlooked account and explanation for how the current situation has arisen, and has shown how certain discourses of comprehensiveness are still a powerful frame of reference for teachers, particularly in locales which do not experience high degrees of choice.

The data gained from the schools in North and East Towns, paints a clear picture of the disparity and inequity I observed. The fact that students in one school feel positive and happy about their school, value the outcomes it gives them and have teachers who are positive about the students, whilst students in another school only a few miles away feel that they stand less chances in the future, are often unhappy to be there and are perceived by their teachers as being at the bottom of the pile, raises serious questions of social justice and equity. Is society such that it is happy to accept a system of education, in some cities, where experiences are so disparate and inequitable for the children within the city, based largely on their families' capital, both economic and cultural?

The idea of comprehensive schooling, that education for all be provided in a common school where class and wealth are less significant and where social inclusion is a central aim, as the historical account showed, has faced many challenges. The more comprehensive schools in North Town faced their own issues of inequity and segregation. However, there was less disparity for students in the school. The lot of the North Town students appeared more equitable than for those in East Town, although the

fact that North Town was missing large swathes of the middle classes from its population needs to be taken into account. There was observable inequity in both locales but the ways in which it operated were different. There was no ideal system and it is very difficult to measure the extent to which one is more or less desirable than the other. Whilst East Town provided a positive experience for some students, this has to be weighed against the largely negative experience for others, experiences which may have long term effects over this life course, affecting both their potential to engage with the labour market and their self perceptions. Whilst this disparity was less visible in North Town, it was not absent but merely disguised by the large absence of the middle class from the potential choice market. However, the students in North Town had less iniquitous experiences of school and were viewed more holistically by their teachers.

The thesis ends at a time when the 2005 White Paper ‘Higher Standards, Better Schools for All More Choice for Parents and Pupils’ has entered the public domain, and been taken forward as the 2006 Education and Inspections Bill. The White Paper appeared to have been designed to incorporate those aspects and ideologies of comprehensive schooling which held sway with the voter in 1965 by using the terms alongside those of diversity and choice, creating a logically problematic, but discursively powerful discourse. For example in the introduction Tony Blair notes that:

We must put parents in the driving seat for change in all ability schools that retain the comprehensive principle of non-selection, but operate very differently from the traditional comprehensive. (Higher Standards, Better Schools for All, White Paper, 2005, p. 1)

This is a rhetorically powerful, yet logically incompatible and practically problematic claim since, as this thesis has shown, if parents are allowed ‘to take the wheel’ schools will inevitably become stratified by class, race and ability. The comprehensive principle of non-selection by schools on the grounds of ability⁴⁸ has been largely retained within the Bill, instead of a return to eleven plus type school selection system. However, a selective system is in operation through the vehicle of parental choice.

The Bill retains the rhetoric of opportunity but removes the problem of ‘equality of opportunity’ which is logically problematic in the face of school choice:

Clause 13 A:

⁴⁸Whilst the principle of non-selection has been retained within the 2006 Education Bill, specialist schools may continue to select, and banding of students by ability prior to secondary school admission in order to get a more evenly distributed intake by ability will be possible. (Part 3.49)

- (b) in the case of a local education authority in England, ensuring fair access to educational opportunity, and
 - (c) promoting the fulfilment by every child concerned of his educational potential
- (2006 Education and Inspections Bill, clause 13A)

This statement epitomises the way in which the Bill fails to address equality of opportunity and student equity and to challenge social inequities. The idea of fulfilling every child's educational potential also allows the restriction of equality of opportunity to be justified, since it is implying that there is an 'educational potential' which may be understood as ability. Educational opportunity as experienced through the operation of choice in East Town is iniquitous, and the act of choice is allowing this inequity. It also raises the question of how exactly fair access to educational opportunity is to be achieved in a parentally directed choice system and through a Bill which allows for increasing diversity of school provision.

Clause 3A:

A local education authority in England shall exercise their powers under this section with a view to-

- a) securing diversity of provision of schools, and
- b) increasing opportunities for parental choice.

(2006 Education and Inspections Bill, clause 3A)

As the case of East Town illustrates, through choice the schools have become stratified along the lines of grammar and secondary modern schools, without themselves selecting by ability. The East Town Schools exhibit the same inequalities, in terms of a lack of social inclusion and lack of equitable experiences for students, as the old eleven plus system, which Labour itself strove to eradicate.

The White Paper and Bill show little regard for previous sociological research (Reay and Lucey (2000), Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995)) which has demonstrated the ways in which the action of choice becomes the selection mechanism which creates highly diversified schools, particularly in terms of social class and, this thesis would suggest, race. The Paper and Bill retain the social justice discourse of the comprehensive school era, whilst surely being in full knowledge that the proposals will allow the continuation and further development of socially segregated and exclusive schools and therefore are, in light of this thesis, inherently socially unjust.

The White Paper and Bill reflect the ambiguities surrounding education policy which were contained within Circular 10/65. Like the circular, the White Paper and Bill do not set out a clear blue print for schools to follow, instead providing a range of options to increase diversity whilst at the same time promising equity and inclusion, although in a

'New Inclusion' sense. A discursive reading of this paper suggests that new policy discourse deploys rhetorical tools by adopting old discourses and changing their meanings.

The relationship between choice and inequities in relation to social class and race implicit within this thesis and other critical policy sociology produced over the last two decades is allowed to go unacknowledged by the Paper and subsequent Bill.

Conclusions

There is little doubt that the notion of school choice for parents has become entrenched over the last twenty years, despite, as the thesis has begun to show, this choice being only significant in some locales. Policy having set and reinforced the precedent of supposed choice means that we are on a treadmill of choice, where any removal of such a choice strategy would appear as a policy to usurp individual freedom. However, the implications of choice made apparent in East Town require addressing as they have significant implications for social justice. The thesis has highlighted the ways in which comprehensive schooling (as experienced in North Town) masks and fails to challenge the inequalities which have been made visible by the operation of school choice in some locales. However, the visible inequities between the schools within the choice market locale of East Town (inequities also visible in other locales) are not being addressed by policy.

A comparative evaluation of school organisation and social inclusion in other countries is required along with serious consideration of the ways in which equity may operate through schools. There is the need to focus on school structures and how they operate, instead of just the current emphasis on standards and market outcomes. School funding is inevitably a primary criteria and means to overcome social inequity within the school, along with the need to heighten teacher awareness and concern for issues of social justice and the damaging effects of labelling students in relation to a fixed notion of ability and their expected outcomes.

Whilst this is the primary large scale evaluative area for further research identified by the thesis there are also several particular examples and areas requiring assessment and analysis. There is a need to examine further the relationships between policy and

practitioners, how policy is interpreted and experienced and the effects of social and physical geography in relation to the actualisation of policy. School choice policy has very different outcomes in rural locales where geographical distance means that there is no choice of school. It was hoped to include a third locale within this study, a successful school in a rural locale which geography placed outside of the choice market. However, this was outside the scope of this study. An analysis of successful rural schools may provide data and ideas concerning the ways in which schools may operate successfully within a comprehensive framework, although, from brief consideration one assumes that the central issue for rural schools will lie with the range of social class groups within the school catchment area.

A further area of research is to consider longitudinally the impact of choice in low choice locales such as North Town where, as a result of the 2006 Bill, local education authorities must strive to increase awareness of and access to choice. Also research is needed to consider the effects of experiences of school choice on individual students, for example by tracking students from East Town who had both positive and negative experiences of choice. This would provide an examination of any long term effects on identity and esteem which may result from attending a school which the student did not choose and which they viewed negatively as a barrier to progress, compared with students who had a positive experience of choice. Evaluation of programmes and policy initiatives concerned with social inclusion are also required. Assessment of the ways in which redeveloping social housing into mixed community neighbourhoods may effect the operation of school choice in the neighbourhood, and may affect the social mix of students within schools is a possible option.

To conclude, the thesis, based on its limited sample has identified some of the potential effects of choice for one locale, and how in another the old discourse of the comprehensive school, and schooling in the form of common schools for all, is being held on to, although increasing choice is being introduced and encouraged. The Education Bill places school choice and parent autonomy firmly at the centre of education for the foreseeable future and is also supported by the Conservative agenda, meaning it is likely to remain largely politically unchallenged. In light of this, the qualitative small scale findings from the thesis imply the need for critical and informed reflection, research and dissemination on the effects of parental choice, particularly in

relation to social class and ethnicity. The thesis has illustrated the ways in which schooling and education are theoretically complex, since currently the aims of autonomy for parents in choice of schooling and the socially just ideas of student equity and social inclusion as a right for all children appear mutually exclusive. Schooling needs to be monitored closely to assess whether parental choice is seriously challenging student equity, and the findings discussed within the public sphere.

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Year	Education Bill or Act
1870	Education Act
1902	Education Act

1944	Education Act
1979	Education Bill
1988	HMSO 1988 School Standards and Framework Act
1993	Education Act
1998	School Standards and Framework Act.
2002	Education Act.
2006	Education and Inspections Bill.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview schedules

The interview schedules were used to guide the interviews. They were not kept to rigidly but each interview attempted to cover the same questions.

Interview Schedule for Students

Introduction etc

Section One: School choice

Did you choose to come to this school?

Can you remember how you chose this school?

(Did your parents choose?)

Were you happy with the choice?

What other schools might you have gone to?

What do you think of your school?

(how does this compare with other schools in the locale?)

Section Two: Opportunities

What sorts of things (subjects, extra curricular activities etc) do you get to do at school?

Do you have the same opportunities to do these things as everyone else?

(maybe talk about grouping, options etc)

Section Three: Inclusion and Equality

Do you feel included in your school?

Is everyone an equal part of the school?

Is everyone in school treated fairly?

Section Four: Comprehensive Schooling and Selection

Do you know what a comprehensive school is?

(clarify and ask what they think of this)

What do you think about schools that can select/ choose kids and schools, which parents have to pay to send their kids too?

Interview Schedule for Teachers

Introduction

Section One: School Population and Market

How would you describe the schools student intake?

How do you view your school in relation to other schools in the area?

Is your school in competition with any other schools?

Does parental choice affect your school in any way?

What are your views on this and does it affect your teaching?

Section Two: Catering for Student Population, Equality and Inclusion

Do you feel able to meet the needs of your students in the classroom? (academic, social etc)

-and how do you try to do this?

Does the school offer support with this?

How well do you feel that the school is able to cater for and meet student needs?

Are you able to provide equality of opportunity for your students?

Do you face any problems with this?

Do you think that the school is socially inclusive?

Is social inclusion important to schooling?

Section Three: Comprehensive Schooling

What do you think comprehensive schooling means?

What ideas do you associate with comprehensive schooling?

What are your feelings about comprehensive schooling?

Advantages / disadvantages etc

Is your school comprehensive?

Is parental choice over schools having any effect on comprehensive schooling?

What do you think will happen to secondary schooling in the future?

Interview schedule for Senior Management Team

Introduction

Section One: School Population and Market

How would you describe your student population/ intake?

Are you in competition with other schools?

How do you view your school in relation to other schools in the area?

Does parental choice affect this/ your intake?

Section Two: Catering for Student Population, Equality and Inclusion

How, at school level, do you meet the needs of your intake?

How well do you feel that the school is able to cater for and meet student needs?

How do you think the staff manage this?

How do you support staff in meeting student needs?

Are you able to provide equality of opportunity for your students?

Do you face any problems with this?

Do you think that the school is socially inclusive?

Is social inclusion important to schooling?

Section Three: Comprehensive Schooling

What do you think comprehensive schooling means?

What ideas do you associate with comprehensive schooling?

What are your feelings about comprehensive schooling?

Advantages / disadvantages etc

Is your school comprehensive?

Is parental choice over schools having any effect on comprehensive schooling?

What do you think will happen to secondary schooling in the future?

Appendix 2: data illustrating examples of high and low level choice locales

Type 1: High Level Choice and Highly Disparate School Results

SECONDARY SCHOOL (GCSE/GNVQ) PERFORMANCE TABLES 2003 GCSE/GNVQ Information:

	Pupils aged 15					GCSE/GNVQ Results				
	Total	with SEN, with statements	with SEN, without statements			5+ A*- C	5+ A*- G	no passes	Average capped point score	
LEA Average						35.3%	80.4 %	11.4%	27.5	Additional Info %Free school
England Average						52.9%	88.8 %	5.2%	34.8	Meals
School 1	188	7	3.7%	13	6.9%	37%	86%	5%	30.5	19.8
School 2	38					92%	92%	3%	54.3	Independent
School 3	195	12	6.2%	41	21.0 %	27%	83%	10%	27.2	16.3
School 4	292	11	3.8%	45	15.4 %	31%	74%	14%	23.9	17.3
School 5	56					88%	93%	7%	43.6	Independent
School 6	163	1	0.6%	12	7.4%	96%	98%	2%	54.1	Independent
School 7	12			20	15.7 %	81%	83%	6%	44.3	Independent
School 8	6	1	1.7%	2	3.3%	97%	97%	3%	54.3	Independent
School 9	9					91%	96%	3%	47.2	Independent
School 10	59					100%	100%	0%	55.4	Independent
School 11	161			16	9.9%	77%	98%	1%	44.4	8,6
School 12	106	2	1.9%	21	19.8 %	55%	96%	2%	36.5	
School 13	165	4	2.4%	38	23.0 %	24%	81%	11%	23.9	20.1
School 14	172	6	3.5%	36	20.9 %	29%	80%	13%	25.6	25
School 15	211	17	8.1%	13	6.2%	13%	75%	13%	19.9	Not available
School 16	100	6	6.0%	21	21.0 %	27%	91%	3%	26.4	Not available
School 17	168	4	2.4%	32	19.0 %	42%	90%	4%	29.9	25
School 18	187	7	3.7%	9	4.8%	21%	71%	14%	22.0	21
School 19	85					99%	99%	0%	53.9	Ind
School 20	65					92%	94%	0%	51.6	Ind
School 21	81					98%	98%	2%	54.8	Ind
School 22	195	14	7.2%	3	1.5%	31%	82%	9%	26.7	22
School 23	142	4	2.8%	14	9.9%	64%	96%	3%	38.9	12.3
School 24	148	8	5.4%	10	6.8%	56%	94%	4%	36.2	14
School 25	3					-	-	-	-	

School 26	194	4	2.1%	10	5.2%	76%	97%	1%	43.5	8.2
School 27	105	6	5.7%	12	11.4%	27%	81%	11%	25.3	9.6
School 28	41	1	2.4%	8	19.5%	59%	73%	27%	31.9	
School 29	145	6	4.1%	45	31.0%	31%	86%	8%	26.7	24
School 30	206	16	7.8%	74	35.9%	16%	65%	19%	17.6	49

Dark Grey shading = schools achieving over 80% five A*C grades at GCSE

Light Grey shading = schools achieving over 50% five A*C grades at GCSE

The remaining schools have a wide range of results.

In the above locale there is a large degree of disparity between schools in terms of intake and results suggesting a firm choice market in operation.

Type 2: Low Level Parental Choice and Low Disparity of School Results (with generally LOW results)

SECONDARY SCHOOL (GCSE/GNVQ) PERFORMANCE TABLES 2003
GCSE/GNVQ Information:

	Pupils aged 15					GCSE/GNVQ Results				
	Total	with SEN, with statements	with SEN, without statements	with SEN, without statements	with SEN, without statements	5+ A*- C	5+ A*- G	no passes	Average capped point score	
LEA Average						46.1%	88.0%	4.4%	31.5	% free
England Average						52.9%	88.8%	5.2%	34.8	schl meals
School	177	6	3.4%	32	18.1%	45%	82%	2%	28.1	28
School 1	163	9	5.5%	42	25.8%	33%	88%	3%	29.9	35.1
School 2	167	6	3.6%	17	10.2%	50%	87%	3%	31.3	33
School 3	140	4	2.9%	11	7.9%	46%	92%	4%	32.8	37
School 4	200	9	4.5%	26	13.0%	39%	86%	3%	29.3	Above av
School 5	2					-	-	-	-	-
School 6	186	9	4.8%	21	11.3%	29%	87%	2%	27.4	25
School 7	206	6	2.9%	11	5.3%	50%	88%	4%	31.3	
School 8	172	5	2.9%	9	5.2%	31%	81%	9%	27.0	Above av
School 9	169	4	2.4%	8	4.7%	43%	83%	7%	28.1	33.3
School 10	112	6	5.4%	31	27.7%	29%	85%	3%	26.2	53
School 11	133	7	5.3%	15	11.3%	47%	92%	3%	33.1	32
School 12	90			8	8.9%	100%	100%	0%	50.6	Low
School 13	166	2	1.2%	5	3.0%	63%	98%	1%	39.1	9
School 14	151	4	2.6%	4	2.6%	74%	97%	3%	41.0	10
School 15	184	2	1.1%	16	8.7%	65%	99%	0%	37.7	14
School 16	161	5	3.1%	22	13.7%	27%	89%	1%	27.2	Above av
School 17	153	6	3.9%	6	3.9%	49%	94%	0%	33.9	5.9

Dark Grey shading = schools achieving over 80% five A*-C grades at GCSE

Light Grey shading = schools achieving over 50% five A*-C grades at GCSE

Remaining schools have fairly similar results.

- Very little disparity between schools, more likely to be comprehensive
- Less evidence of a large choice market

Type 3: Low Level Parental Choice and Low Disparity of School Result (with generally HIGH results)

SECONDARY SCHOOL (GCSE/GNVQ) PERFORMANCE TABLES 2003
GCSE/GNVQ Information:

	Pupils aged 15					GCSE/GNVQ Results				Value Added Data	% Free school meals
	Total	with SEN, with statements	with SEN, without statements	5+ A*- C	5+ A*- G	no passes	Average capped point score				
LEA Average						54.8%	90.5%	4.2%	35.6		
England Average						52.9%	88.8%	5.2%	34.8		
School 1	255	10	3.9%	7	2.7%	66%	97%	1%	41.3	101.7	na
School 2	134	10	7.5%	28	20.9%	31%	83%	7%	26.6	96.2	
School 3	255	4	1.6%	25	9.8%	66%	98%	1%	40.2	101.2	below national av
School 4	209	4	1.9%	18	8.6%	58%	94%	3%	37.6	100.8	
School 5	228	6	2.6%	13	5.7%	68%	96%	1%	40.5	100.3	
School 6	226	7	3.1%	43	19.0%	64%	92%	3%	38.3	100.7	
School 7	197	11	5.6%	4	2.0%	58%	91%	3%	34.8	98.4	
School 8	46	1	2.2%	7	15.2%	72%	80%	17%	36.6	100.8	
School 9	171	7	4.1%	9	5.3%	53%	95%	2%	36.5	99.8	
School 10	236	9	3.8%	32	13.6%	52%	92%	2%	35.4	97.6	
School 11	177	13	7.3%	23	13.0%	22%	71%	15%	22.4	96.7	

Dark Grey shading = schools achieving over 80% five A*-C grades

Light Grey shading = schools achieving over 50% five A*-C grades

Appendix Three: project time scale

