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Metaphors of Choice – Narratives We Tell about our Children's Education

School choice is increasingly significant. In Australia, as elsewhere, there is a swelling tide of parents moving away from the public sector, in search of a better education for their children, and this is impacting on Government policy and funding. Parents are under enormous pressure and that as school choice becomes more complex their responsibility increases. Set in relation to increasingly aggressive marketization of schooling and an intensified need within the workforce for degrees, the responsibility of choice can be onerous, including for parents who select to contain the choice of school to within one system. Differences between public schools for example, are becoming more severe. Clearly this begs the question of what parents are looking for when they make choices about their children's schools. There are related issues about how they will recognise what it is they want, and the decision-making processes they use.

School choice is often an anxiety-provoking process. The stories parents tell about their decision-making are as important as the decisions themselves. Such stories can explain what for some are counter-intuitive decisions; for example, those who support public education and yet make the decision to send their child to a private school. The ways in which such seeming disjunctures are explained provide rich insights.

Choice is to some extent imagined and it is certainly prescribed to a great extent by place and time. In this sense, community is significant in shaping choice. Similarly, who the parents are – their own schooling experience, their backgrounds and professional status are enormously important.

This paper draws on research exploring parental decision-making about school choice. Framed using spatial theory, the focus is on the stories parents from one community tell about their decision in retrospect when their children are adults.