School Leaders’ View on Market Forces and Decentralisation: Case Studies in a Swedish Municipality and an English County

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Abstract

The overall aim of this study is to describe and analyse some of the consequences of market forces and decentralisation in the educational systems of Sweden and England.

Since the 1980s, many countries have restructured their educational systems and introduced decentralisation and market forces. The reasons have sometimes been the same and sometimes they have differed, but demands for better school performance and the need for economic cuttings in the public sector, including schooling, are two of the most common reasons. This study will describe the development towards market forces and decentralisation in some countries in the western world in general, and, in particular Sweden and England.

The thesis makes a general overview of research on these issues in different countries and focuses on certain key concepts. Interviews and document analyses are the principal methods used, and case studies have been conducted in seven secondary schools in one Swedish municipality, and in ten schools in an English county. Interviews were made with 20 school leaders in the Swedish municipality and 20 in the English community in order to study their opinions on market solutions like competition and choice of school, as well as decentralisation and local management of schools.

The findings indicate that the educational systems of Sweden and England differ in many aspects, even if both can be described as decentralised. While the Swedish system gives the schools a high degree of autonomy, whereby the school leaders are responsible for almost everything in the daily running of the school, the English system includes more aspects of centralism, and provides less local decision making. The findings also indicate that the school leaders in Swedish municipalities are more satisfied with both decentralisation and market forces in schooling than their English colleagues. Several plausible interpretations could be made of the interview answers from the school leaders, but it seems that the higher degree of decentralisation in the Swedish educational system is perhaps the most important factor in this case.

Finally, the findings also indicate that the school leaders see positive aspects of choice and competition in schooling, like increased quality and better efficiency, as well as negative aspects, primarily the risk of segregation due to free school choice.

Descriptors: catchment area, choice, competition, educational quality, educational restructuring, decentralisation, market forces, school leaders, segregation, vouchers.
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List of Abbreviations

DfES       Department for Education and Skills
EAZ        Education Act Zone
GCSE       General Certificate of Secondary Education
GM         Grant Maintained
LAs        Local Authorities
LEAs       Local Education Authorities
LMS        Local Management of Schools
OFSTED     Office for Standards in Education
PSAs       Public School Academies
RSG        Revenue Support Grant
SALSA      Skolverkets Analysverktyg för Lokala SambandsAnalyser
           The National Agency for Education’s analytical tool for analyses of local connections
SBM        School Based Management
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Part One
Chapter One

General Background

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a general background to the study as well as to present the overall aim and the objectives of this dissertation. The limitations, the significance of the study, and an overview of the organisation of the thesis are also included in this chapter.

1.1 Introduction

In 1980 I started my professional career as a teacher in a lower secondary school in a municipality just outside of Stockholm. The school system was very centralised at that time and the state had a great impact on every day life in the Swedish schools. There were rules and regulations determining the teachers’ salaries, what teacher the school should employ, the number of pupils in each class, how much money the school should receive from the state for children with special learning needs and so on. The educational system in Sweden of the 1980s was, as Miron (1996) says, centrally steered and egalitarian.

It is now 2007 and I still work, but for the last twelve years as head teacher, in the same school, and the situation in the Swedish schools is completely different. The educational system is now decentralised and the former regulations from the state no longer exist; and, since the beginning of the 1990s, the municipalities have the responsibility for the schools (Daun, 1996).

If the 1980s was a decade of rules and regulations with schools all over Sweden organised in almost the same way; the same class sizes, the same finances, the same number of pupils per teacher, and so on, the picture of the 1990s and this decade is totally different. Market forces have now been introduced in many municipalities and there is competition among the schools, both between the increasing number of private, or independent schools, and the community schools, and between the community schools in the same municipality.
The municipality, where I work, is a good example of a community that has introduced market forces and competition in its education system. A voucher system is one of the innovations and the parents have the opportunity to choose among different schools, if, for instance they prefer a special pedagogic profile, for their children.

This free choice revolution, as Miron (1996) calls it, has totally changed the situation for the schools in Sweden. They now have to compete for pupils/vouchers and the finances of the schools are to a very large degree dependent on the number of pupils the school is able to recruit. Furthermore, the decentralised steering system that has replaced the old centralised educational system, together with the other innovations has to a large extent changed the educational sector of Sweden.

The transition towards choice and market forces in education has been a general process in the western world during the last two decades and the development in Sweden is therefore not, in any aspect, unique (Daun, 2002).

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The overall aim of this study is to describe and analyse some of the consequences of market forces and decentralisation in the educational systems of Sweden and England. The focus in this study will be mainly on seven lower secondary schools in a municipality in Sweden and partly on ten schools in a county in England. Decentralisation, market forces, free choice, vouchers, and competition are the key words of this study and a picture will be presented of two educational system with these concepts in practice for more than a decade.

In order to understand the background to this development and to reach the aim above, the objectives of this study are:

(1) to present some examples of the international trend of restructuring schools with a description of the development in some capitalist countries
(2) to describe the background of and the reasons for the changes in the educational systems of Sweden and England in general
(3) to discuss the similarities and differences in school
development that can be seen in both countries

(4) to detect some of the consequences these innovations have had on the schools in this study in particular

(5) to describe and analyse the situation for the lower secondary schools in the municipality/county mentioned above, on the basis of interviews with school leaders and official documents; issues concerning finances, consequences of the system and social segregation are in this context discussed

1.3 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation concerns the issue of objectivity. Since I am head teacher in one of the seven schools in this study, I am a part of the study. This might be a limitation, even if the ambition has been to describe the situation, both of my school and the others, as objectively as possible. Another aspect of my role is the fact that the schools compete with each other in order to attract more pupils and I could be regarded as a representative from a competing school instead of a researcher. This would be a limitation, if the school leaders in the other schools had not been willing to answer my questions truthfully.

The third limitation concerns the fact that the seven schools are organised in different ways; three of them are both primary and lower secondary schools; two of them are just lower secondary schools, one is both lower and upper secondary and finally, the school I represent educates children from primary up to lower secondary school. This fact has made it difficult to compare the different schools. As an example if for instance the primary section in a school has problems with recruiting pupils, it will affect the economy of the whole school. Further, the pupils that choose a school in the first grade continue in general in the same school up to the ninth grade. The schools that only recruit to the lower secondary level are therefore disadvantaged in this context.

A fourth limitation concerns the fact that it was not possible to get documents from the county in England that could have been useful for this study. Budget figures, statistical material, and so on, were not possible to obtain for the different schools. The discussion and the analysis are therefore mainly based on the interviews with the school leaders in the lower secondary schools in the county. Consequently
the presentation of both the schools and the education system is more holistic and extensive for the Swedish municipality than for the English county.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The interest in educational issues in general has escalated during the last decades all over the world. The idea that the quality of a country’s educational system in the long run can contribute to the economic growth and prosperity has been a strong motive for many countries to restructure their educational systems in the last decades.

The introduction of a more decentralised, market oriented educational system that took place in Torp* at the beginning of the 1990s is an example of how the education sector of Sweden changed radically during this decade. Decentralisation and market solutions during the 1980s had been introduced in many other countries, e.g. in England and the United States, so these “aspects” of education were not just a Swedish innovation.

A study was carried out in 1999 (Söderqvist, 1999), based mainly on interviews with head teachers in the lower secondary schools of Torp, a Swedish municipality, where some of the consequences of the innovations, mentioned above, were discussed and analysed. Together with the present study, where interviews with school leaders have also been conducted, the lower secondary schools have been studied for a period of ten years hopefully contributing to the discussion of positive and negative aspects of market solutions and decentralisation in schooling. Furthermore, the educational system of Torp is to some extent compared with schools in an English county, Villa*, where interviews also have been conducted with school leaders, in order to analyse and discuss similarities and differences in the two educational systems.

Finally, in my point of view, in general all research about schooling is interesting and can provide useful information about the complex educational sector. So, even if this is a study made at a local level, it can perhaps help to provide a better understanding of the concepts of restructuring, decentralisation, and market forces in a wider perspective.

* Torp and Villa are not the real names of the municipality/county
1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first part includes chapters 1 to 5 and is organised as follows:

Chapter 1

The first chapter presents a short background to this study. The overall aim of this study is defined as well as the more specific objectives. Four limitations of this study are also mentioned as well as the significance of the study.

Chapter 2

The second chapter describes some key concepts that are relevant for this thesis such as restructuring, decentralisation, choice, vouchers as well as market forces. International examples of e.g. restructuring and decentralisation are also presented.

Chapter 3

The third chapter describes the background to the study and how the interviews were organised and completed. It further discusses the research methodology used and how the data collection has been conducted.

Chapter 4

The background and the development in the Swedish educational system during the last ten years is one of the focuses in this chapter. The other is the educational system in the municipality Torp. The innovations in the educational system during the last decade are discussed, as well as how the choice of school, school funding, and so on are organised in the municipality.

Chapter 5

The English education system is presented as well as some brief general information about Villa and how the education system is
organised in this community.

Part 2 of this study includes the chapters 6 to 10 and is organised as follows:

Chapter 6

A presentation of the schools of Torp is made and includes general information about the schools geographical location, pedagogical profiles, the finances, and so on.

Chapter 7

The results of the interviews with the school leaders are presented together with a discussion and an analysis of the findings.

Chapter 8

A presentation of the schools in Villa is made and the results of the interviews with the school leaders are presented together with a discussion and an analysis of the findings.

Chapter 9

A comparison between Torp and Villa is made followed by a discussion of the reasons for the similarities and differences in the leaders’ opinions.

Chapter 10

Finally, this chapter discusses and analyses the results of the study as well as suggestions for further studies.
Chapter Two

Key Concepts

The main purpose of this chapter is to define some key concepts relevant for this study. Based on a literature review these concepts and their implications will therefore be described and analysed together with some international examples regarding these issues.

2.1 Background

Many of the countries in the western world have restructured their school systems during the last two to three decades and the reasons for this development will be discussed and analysed.

The second concept to describe and define is decentralisation. In this section some arguments for and against decentralisation in the educational sector are discussed. Decentralisation can further mean different things from one country to another and a definition of the different types of decentralisation will therefore be made.

The third concept to describe is school choice. During the last two decades, many countries have introduced this opportunity in their educational systems firstly in order to meet wishes and demands from parents as well as secondly, increase the competition between schools in order to both improve the quality and increase the efficiency from a financial point of view. It has been debated whether free choice of school is good for all pupils and some of the arguments for and against choice will be presented, as well as some international examples.

The next concepts to present in this chapter are vouchers and market forces. The former implies a system used in educational sectors in some countries with the purpose of the schools getting money for every pupil they can recruit in order to increase the competition between schools; the latter that there exists an educational market with elements like choice of school, vouchers and competition with the purpose to e.g. improve the quality of schooling.

Finally, the last two sections in this chapter will give a short description of the concept catchment area as well as some other
essential information about the schools, the school leaders interviewed in this study, and why pupils and parents are described as customers in a schooling context.

2.2 Restructuring Schools

2.2.1 Background

Restructuring is a common term in the educational debate, when structural and governance changes in a country’s educational system take place (Daun, 1996). The term restructuring is borrowed from economics, and even if there is no commonly agreed definition of it, it is often used when three types of changes occur: decentralisation, privatisation and freedom of choice (Daun, 1997).

Sweden and England are not the only countries that have tried to improve schooling during the last two to three decades by restructuring their educational systems. The United States of America, Finland, Norway and New Zealand, are all examples of countries that have used the same approach, during this period. (Daun 2002; Walford, 2003). Even if the term restructuring means different things in different countries and states, Daun (2002) claims that it is a fact that restructuring has been an international trend during the 1980s and the 1990s.

In the following, principal reasons for restructuring education will be presented.

2.2.2 Reasons for and goals of restructuring

Daun (1996) notes, that there are cultural, social, political and economic differences between countries, which make it difficult to draw general conclusions about the reasons for restructuring. There are however, at least six reasons (Daun, 2002; Murphy 1991; Meyer et al 1997) used to explain the rapid adoption of the idea in many countries in the western world:

- economic decline or recession
- decreasing legitimacy of the state
- demands of a changing population
- declining levels of educational achievement
- purely ideological and political factors
- an increasing tendency to borrow and imitate educational models

Many of these reasons are interconnected and can consist of a number of different aspects:

a) Economic decline in a country leads to demands for budget cuts. All tax financed sectors of the society must save money and education is not excluded. To decentralise the education and let the schools be more responsible for its finances was one way to restructure schooling and meet the recession in many countries at the beginning of the 1980s.

A main argument for decentralisation is that the actors with the best information are likely to use the resources more efficiently (Hannaway, 1993), and that it is better for the local school to decide where to save instead of getting decisions from the central level. It is also more convenient for the politicians to provide the resources in a lump sum to the schools and reduce the risk of making unpopular savings (Söderqvist, 1999).

During the 1980s, education became “high politics”. Guthrie and Koppich (1993) claim that one of the reasons for this development was increasing global economic competition. Many countries experienced economic recession and education was considered as a way to improve the economic growth and gain market shares. It became important to restructure the education systems in order to achieve this. Decentralisation, more competition, choice of school and privatisation came to be seen as solutions to both meeting the needs of budget cuts and school improvement. Levin (2001) argues that the perhaps most common argument for privatisation in schooling is that “it will improve efficiency by producing better results given the resources” (ibid. p. 9).

b) Decreasing legitimacy of the state contributed to the development to restructure the education systems. According to Daun (1996) economic decline and increasing cultural homogenisation led to ideological attacks on the state from segments of the population. Firstly, the number of parents who searched for pedagogical alternatives increased. Secondly, education administrators and parents at lower levels in the hierarchy could have a feeling of powerlessness in relation to the education system (ibid.). Thirdly, in the United States the large education bureaucracies were considered too inefficient to meet the demands of the 1990s (Beare & Boyd, 1993). Organisation and management needed to be developed
and restructured to meet the demands in post-industrial society.

c) Demographic changes in post-industrial society are also important in the process of restructuring schools. Murphy (1991) mentions several aspects that are relevant in this context; the schools are increasingly populated by children from less advantaged homes, the number of pupils from single-parents homes are also increasing as well as the number of youngsters with an immigrant background. Historically the schools have been unsuccessful in the handling of these at-risk students which have led to demands to make changes in the educational system. Daun (1996) also mentions that the migration within and between continents has made it difficult for the states and their education systems to respond to the needs and the demands of their respective populations; for instance, the number of independent Moslem schools has increased during the last decade in Sweden.

d) Declining academic achievement can be another reason for restructuring the educational system. Both Britain and the United States experienced declining test scores, both in a nationally and internationally perspective, during the 1960s and the 1970s (Falkner, 1997) and changes in the educational systems were demanded. The report “A Nation at Risk” published in 1983 supported the idea that changes in schooling were necessary if the United States would be able to meet the competition on the global market. Daun (1996) claims that discussion of education is linked to the issue of economic progress in the UK and the United States to a larger extent than in other countries; consequently, educational achievement is seen as the solution to the problem of economic growth in society and restructuring was believed to improve educational achievement.

e) To introduce market forces, privatisation and choice in education in some cases can also be explained from an ideological perspective. Both the USA and the UK had conservative governments during the 1980s and to introduce competition as well as to advocate more private alternatives in schooling could for these countries be motivated from political conviction. On the other hand, both in Sweden and New Zealand Social Democratic governments initiated these reforms, which indicates that the ideological motives for these innovations can differ from one country to another.
Finally, some researchers claim (Meyer et al. 1997; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) that there is an international trend to borrow and imitate educational models, which can also explain the development towards more decentralisation and market solutions in schooling.

There could also be other reasons for restructuring the educational system, but those mentioned above seem to be the most common in the literature.

2.2.3 Examples of restructuring – The United States and New Zealand

Even if there has been a trend in many countries in the world, during the last two decades, to decentralise or centralise their educational systems, the issue is not new. In the United States the advantages and disadvantages of a decentralised educational system have been discussed for more than a century. Thyack (1993) describes how governance reforms have changed in a cyclic way for a century and a half. He notes how the same arguments have been used in one period for centralisation and in the next for decentralisation. In one era advocates argued for more central administration in order to achieve more efficiency. Reformers today want more school level control for the same reason.

Carnoy (1993) agrees with Thyack and describes how the educational system in the United States has changed during the last fifty years. The waves of criticism and reform in public education have often been linked to “crises” in the society. One example is the competition during the 1950s with the Soviet Union. When the communist country managed to send up the first spacecraft, the Americans decided to invest more money to raise the education standard in the country; more centralisation was also a part of the strategy to face the challenge from the Soviet Union (Falkner 1997).

Even if more money was invested in the educational system the outcome was not considered good enough during the 1960s and 1970s; declining scores on standardised tests, both nationally and in an international comparison, and complaints from the business community about the standard of the students who graduated from American high schools, are examples of criticism of the school system during this period (Guthrie & Koppich, 1993).
Major public reports on education argued that the schools were in a crisis and, as already mentioned, in 1983 the report, “A Nation at Risk” was published. Beare and Boyd (1993) call it the bible of the reform movement and the report suggested a number of measures to increase the standards in the American schools like new basic subjects, better leadership, increased demands on the students and so on (Falkner 1997).

By the turn of the decade several changes in the education sector could be observed. Schools should be more open to the demands from parents and many of the central regulations were abandoned. The large education bureaucracies were also considered too ineffective to meet the challenge from the 1990s. The management, structures and organisations needed to be upgraded and developed and school based management came to be one of the solutions. Decentralisation, choice of schools and vouchers were other remedies to increase the standard in the American education system (Beare & Boyd 1993; Falkner 1997).

The trend for the late 1990s in the education system of the United States also followed the same track. President Clinton said in a speech before the Congress in February 1997 that his number one priority for the next four years was “to ensure that all Americans have the best education in the world” (Presidential Documents 1997 p. 137). In his speech, President Clinton presented a plan based on ten principles on how to improve the American education system and reach the goal mentioned above. Raise the education standard by developing new national tests in reading and maths, reward the best teachers and make it an attractive job for those young people that consider teaching as a career were examples of the president’s plan. And the parents’ right to choose public school is also an important part of the strategy since it would foster competition and therefore improve the standards in the schools. Finally he said that “.. education is a critical national security issue for our future, and politics must stop at the schoolhouse door” (Presidential Documents 1997 p.140).

Looking at the reasons for restructuring schools previously described, the following seems to be relevant for the United States:

a) Economic decline; the rate of economic growth started to decrease in the 1970s and was from the beginning of the 1980s followed by a recession (Daun 1996). This fact made it necessary to make cuts in the budget in The United States as well as in many other countries during the 1980s.
b) Educational decline; poor results on school achievement tests led to demands for changes in the educational system; there were also parents who wanted pedagogical alternatives, which led to demands for new solutions.

c) Ideological and political factors; the report “A Nation at Risk” was initiated by president Reagan at the beginning of the 1980s, and besides the economic recession at that time a conservative president could also have other motives than purely economic ones for restructuring the school system. Market forces and more competition in the public sector are examples of measures that could have been motivated from ideological reasons.

New Zealand is also a country that has restructured its education system during the last decades. Compared with the United States, the reasons for this development are however different. Until the middle of the 1970s New Zealand had a comparatively large part of the population employed in agriculture, and as a former British colony had very strong economic and political links with Great Britain. The economic growth rate was however one of the lowest compared to other industrialised countries, and the situation became even worse when the UK joined the European Common Market. It resulted in difficulties in exporting products to Britain and New Zealand even lost shares on the world market to other countries at the beginning of the 1980s and consequently economic growth was low (Daun, 1996). At that time the Labour party came into power and initiated a policy that can be described as neo-liberal and included decentralisation, choice, budget cuts and privatisation in both schooling as well as in the whole public sector. Since before the Second World War the education sector was centralised and only two percent of all primary school pupils attended private schools at the beginning of the 1980s (ibid.). The Labour government also privatised state enterprises and in the educational sector, budgets and decision-making were decentralised at the school level. Private alternatives in the education sector were also encouraged in the restructuring of the schools in New Zealand during the 1980s (Daun 2002; Fiske & Ladd, 2003).

Looking at the reasons for restructuring that have been mentioned previously, the picture for New Zealand is similar to the development in United States in one aspect: economic decline. The low economic growth in New Zealand from the 1960s to the 1980s could be seen as a reason for the politicians making changes in the public sector (Daun,
This kind of restructuring could hardly be described as typical for a Labour party so it was probably not implemented for ideological reasons.

When it comes to academic achievement, the picture is different for New Zealand. Unlike the United States, the results have been among the highest in the world, so this could not explain the changes in the education sector.

Fiske and Ladd (2003) argue that reforms emerged from the conviction that the new system would lead to improvements in schooling. Daun (2002) suggests that the governments’ basic reason for restructuring seems to have been an ambition to gain shares on the world market in other sectors than primary commodity production.

Australia is another country that also restructured its educational system during the 1980s. External pressure, like industry development in other parts of the world, political changes and economic adjustments, as well as granting more powers to schools, led to demands on changes in the educational sector (Warren Louden & Browne, 1993).

As these examples show, countries had different motives to restructure their education systems during the 1980s. The development in Sweden and England will be discussed later in this study, but especially for the latter country, many of the reasons for restructuring are similar to the ones in the United States.

2.3 Decentralisation

“No element of restructuring has received more attention than the issue of devolution of authority to the school site. The key constructs in this discussion are political and administrative decentralization.” (Murphy 1991 p.36)

2.3.1 Background

Decentralisation has been a concept introduced since the beginning of the 1980s, on the educational political agenda all over the world (Daun, 2002). The advantages and disadvantages of decentralisation in the education system is an issue frequently discussed during the
last decades in Sweden, England as well as in many other countries. From time to time the pendulum has moved from one point to another and it is interesting to see that advocates of different steering systems have used the same arguments in order to achieve improvements in schooling (Carnoy, 1993).

If the debate about the advantages and disadvantages of decentralisation has been carried on for a long time in the United States, the situation in Sweden, England and other countries of the western world, has been different. The educational system of Sweden, since the introduction of Folkskolan in the 1840s has been centrally steered and egalitarian (Miron, 1996). It was not until the 1990s that a decentralised system was introduced in this country.

Levacic (1995) claims, that the educational system in post-war England has not been as centralised as it has been in the United States. Further, she argues, that the 1988 Education Act did not start the process towards decentralisation for the schools, there already existed a high degree of autonomy for the headmasters and the teachers in, for instance, curriculum issues.

However, it is not always clear what the concept decentralisation really stands for. Daun (2002) claims, that there are different types of decentralisation and that it is not always evident what literature and reports describe, when the word decentralisation is used. There exists a conceptual confusion as to different types of decentralisation, and in some cases, different terms are used in some countries for the same type of decentralisation (Abu-Duhou, 1999; McGinn & Welsh 1999). Further, decentralisation has often been one part of the process to restructure the education system in a country, where choice, vouchers and market forces have been others (Daun, 1996; Söderqvist 1999).

In the following, different types of decentralisation, as well as reasons for and goals of decentralisation, will be described in general.

### 2.3.2 Types of decentralisation

Researchers make a distinction between political and administrative decentralisation, where the former means a transfer of power to lower levels than the national one, and the latter i.e. that the responsibility for management, allocation of resources and planning, is transferred from the central government to the local field units of government, which follow the directives from the central level (Daun, 2002; Murphy,

Hanson (1995) and Daun (2002) also mention three other types of decentralisation; devolution, delegation and de-concentration. The first concept relates to autonomous units that get the opportunity to act independently; the second type that the decision-making authority has been transferred from higher to lower hierarchical levels, and the third, that transfer of work, but not power, has moved from higher to lower levels in an organisation. Daun (ibid.) argues that the most radical type of decentralisation is to be found on the individual level, with home education as an example. He also claims that: “Choice and market forces are according to market proponents, the most radical form of decentralization” (Daun, 2002, p. 2).

School based management is another type of decentralisation that is important in this context. The concept can be divided into different varieties: site based management, shared decision making, school based decision making or school site decision making. Daun (ibid.) argues that the different terms can denote real differences, but can also be different terms for one and the same type of decentralisation. Abu-Duhou claims (1999) that many English speaking countries have introduced school based management in their educational systems in some cases, resulting “in a definite move towards devolution of powers” (Abu-Duhou, 1999, p. 18).

Levacic (1995) claims that school based management is the most widely used term for decentralised school management: “…a term particularly in vogue in North America at present” (Levacic, 1995, p. 3). It can also be described as site based management, school autonomy, delegated management, or in England, local management of schools (ibid.).

Murphy (1991) suggests that the core of improving schools lies in the thought that the individual school must get more responsibility for both the resources and the authority. Teachers, administrators and parents in the community are best fitted to improve education since they are the closest to the pupils. Murphy argues that there are four different types of decentralisation:

- changes between levels of the organisation (school based management)
- changes among roles at the school level (shared decision making)
- changes between the school and its regulatory environment (e.g., waivers)
Key Concepts

changes between the school and the larger community
(partnerships and choice)

There are many definitions and descriptions of the concept school based management (SBM), but two elements are essential: structural decentralisation and devolution of authority. The former “generally entails the dismantling of larger organizational units into smaller, more responsive ones” (Murphy, 1991, p. 37), the latter that the individual school gets more influence and responsibility for its own affairs.

If SBM deals with organisational arrangements of schools, shared decision making is a separate aspect of restructuring concerning the distribution of authority to the actors at school level. To increase the teachers’ roles in decision making is a main component in this context. Even if schooling is decentralised and devolution of the authority takes place, there are other obstacles for local improvement. The level of freedom for the schools is limited by e.g. state regulations and union contracts. However, it is possible for schools and districts to achieve more local control. Granting schools exemptions from existing regulations, waivers, is according to Murphy (ibid.) one tool for the state to increase the power of the local authorities a method used in for instance the United States. The fourth broad category concerns the relationship between the school and the larger community, where parental empowerment and the opportunity for the parents to choose schools are important parts.

There is further a relatively recent innovation in schooling, initiated at the beginning of the 1990s in Minnesota, called charter schools (Rock Kane & Lauricella, 2001). The charter school movement has increased rapidly from two schools in 1992 to 2036 schools in 2001 and has spread to 36 states in the USA. According to Koldrie (in Rock Kane & Lauricella, 2001) site based management has limited the potential for fundamental improvement in public education, since the incentives for systematic changes are not provided in this system. He argues further that a monopoly of the school districts is the heart of the problem, since local school boards are more responsive to the adults in the educational system i.e. teachers and administrators, than to the children. Nathan (in Rock Kane & Lauricella, 2001) presents the following operative definition of the key characteristics of charter schools:

- autonomy for accountability, fewer regulations and rules for schools in exchange for responsibility for increased student achievements
- choice among public schools for children and their families
innovation, opportunities for parents and educators to create the kind of school they want  
carefully designed competition in public education  
the central ideas of public education should be used, no tuition charged, no admission tests, equal access, and a non-sectarian curriculum

However, that the charter school concept can look different from one state to another will be discussed later.
The examples above show that it is difficult to use these terms, since they sometimes are the same term for different types of decentralisation and sometimes the opposite applies. When the concepts of decentralisation - centralisation are discussed it is also important to notice that even in educational systems described as decentralised; national goals, national tests and a national curriculum, are decided at the central level, while details and interpretations of the curriculum and local funding are decided locally (Abu-Duhou, 1999; Daun, 2002).

Murphy (1991) also argues that there are five domains of decentralisation:
1) goals; with the school site determining both the goals and the strategies to reach them
2) budget; control over the budget is a key area, when the goal is to decentralise authority
3) personnel; the right for the single school to employ teachers is an important part of a decentralised education system
4) curriculum; in school based management the schools have the right to teach in any manner they like, and have near total authority in curriculum matters, even if the board and the state has defined goals and so on in broad outlines.
5) organisational structures; freedom for the individual schools to organise how many pupils there should be in each group, how long the lessons should be etc. is also an important part in a decentralised school

2.3.3 Summary of restructuring and decentralisation

Due to several reasons many of the countries in the western world have restructured their educational systems during the last two decades. The reasons have sometimes been the same and sometimes they have
differed in some aspects. Decentralisation has been one strategy to restructure educational systems where the basic idea behind the former concept seems to be that stakeholders at a local level are best fitted to improve education, since they are closest to the pupils (Murphy, 1991).

In this study a comparison of the decentralised educational systems of Sweden and England will be made in general as well as a comparison between Torp and Vila in particular.

2.4 Choice

2.4.1 Background

One of the innovations in schooling introduced during the 1980s in many countries is choice. It is perhaps the most important aspect of restructuring/decentralisation and it gives pupils and their parents the opportunity to choose between different schools. However, it is important to notice that choice in the educational sector was possible in many countries prior to the restructuring trend that started during the 1980s; for instance in the United States where home education was, and is, one option for the parents/pupils. (Arsen et al., 2000). The innovation in schooling was the introduction of choice in combination with the financial incentive of a voucher. This concept will be described in section 2.5, but it means briefly that schools get a certain amount of money for each pupil they recruit.

Levin (1995) claims, that the introduction of choice in schooling is a way to increase the efficiency in public education. He suggests that this is less of a research-based approach than a theoretical approach. The perspective is based on the view that schools will improve, if they have to compete for students. Parents will seek the best education and schools will tailor their offerings to become more client oriented. In the quote below, the former president of the United States, Bill Clinton supports the idea of letting parents and students choose among different schools; the competition between schools for pupils will lead to improvement, the public schools will improve. If the pupils are assigned to a certain school in the neighbourhood, which is often the case in a centralised system, schools will not improve in the same way, as if they have to compete for students.
“… every State should give parents the power to choose the right public school for their children. Their right to choose will foster competition and innovation that can make public schools better.” (Presidential Documents, 1997 p. 139)

2.4.2 Arguments for choice in schooling

There are many reasons why choice, in combination with vouchers, came to be an important component in many of the countries that restructured their education systems during the 1980s and 1990s.

According to Levin (1994a), one of the main purposes of using market forces, like choice combined with vouchers, in the educational sector is that the schools need incentives to improve and therefore the voucher was introduced. More pupils/vouchers give more revenues and this was the incentive that the new system provided to improve schooling. Furthermore, if the schools have to compete with each other they will develop in different ways, in pedagogical profiles and so on, and the family can choose a school that best serves their needs (Miron, 1993).

A third argument for choice in schooling concerns the social segregation in society. If the parents get the opportunity to choose, pupils from socially deprived areas can choose a school in a better environment, which would not be the case if the pupils were enrolled according to the catchment area (Söderqvist 1999, Rock Kane & Lauricella, 2001).

According to Arsen et al. (2000), there is a fourth argument supporting the idea of choice in schooling. They claim that it is basically good for people to get the opportunity to make choices. Parents and pupils get more involved in schooling, if they can choose between schools and different pedagogical alternatives. The authors describe the purpose of a report that discusses school choice in Michigan with the following words: “This report seeks to shift the debate about school choice policies in Michigan from the ideologically polarized question whether such policies are ”good” or ”bad” to the more fruitful question of how to design policies that reap the benefits of choice while minimizing potential harms” (Arsen et al., 2000). Another purpose of this report is to investigate how schools have responded to the challenges and opportunities offered by the system of choice policies. They also make
clear that policy makers must focus on the rules and the administrative procedures that govern the operation of choice policy. Their point is that the rules matter, since different rules create different incentives. Furthermore, different rules also produce different outcomes and consequently carefully designed rules can make the market work more effectively. It is therefore important to investigate how schools and districts have responded to the challenges of school choice.

The authors (ibid.) of the report further say that the new policies seek to decentralise control over education to the local community in order to increase the parents’ influence on schooling. The orientation towards market oriented competition in education is also a way to force the schools to be more attentive to parental wishes. Since the schools have to compete with each other for students, the former will get a strong indication that they must improve, if they want to stay in business. The quality will therefore improve in schooling and the market thinking also creates opportunities for entrepreneurs and private companies to provide educational services (ibid.).

In Michigan, parents always have had a lot of choices in the educational system. They can for instance choose to educate their children at home. They can choose, at their own cost, to send children to a private or religious school etc. In 1994, Michigan also introduced two new options in education; charter schools and inter-district choice. The two existing school choice policies in Michigan, charter schools, officially called Public School Academies – PSAs, and inter-district student transfers are the official names of these innovations. Even if the proportion of pupils that attend PSAs and inter-district choice has increased rapidly during the last years, the system with school choice has, so far, had a limited impact on enrolments in most school districts (ibid.).

However, there are big differences between the school districts in Michigan:

- about 85 percent of the PSAs are located in metropolitan areas, and half of these schools are located in central city school districts.
- PSAs are more often located in districts with a relatively high number of poor and minority students.
- about 50 percent of the school districts in Michigan are open to enrolment of non-resident students.
under inter-district choice policies many affluent areas are closed to choice.

students that transfer under inter-district choice policies tend to move towards districts with lower concentration of minority students, and where the family incomes are higher.

**Trends in American society**

As already mentioned, decentralisation and market forces are trends in Michigan as well as in many other American states. According to Arsen et al. (ibid.) the market thinking reflects many Americans’ suspicion of big, bureaucratic institutions. It also reflects the idea of how important it is for the individual to get the opportunity to make a choice. And last, but not least, competition will motivate the schools to improve.

Arsen et al. (ibid.) suggest further that fairness is another American value that motivates the development of more choice. They say that most citizens would agree that all pupils should have access to a good education. Since catchment area is the other option, choice will provide poor families with the choice of a school in a more affluent area. It is therefore a fairer system since pupils from e.g. ethnic minorities, have the opportunity to get a better education by choosing a school in another residential area.

Another trend in American society is the increasing reliance on private companies for accomplishment of public purposes. Arsen et al. claim (ibid.) that many citizens are sceptical of the competence of public officials, and consequently are positive to other actors on the public stage.

They also mention that the debate on school choice in the United States moves between the market-oriented view and the critics that claim that school choice increases the inequalities in society. The latter argue that a free choice “…reduces the opportunities for interactions across lines of race, class, and religion that are essential to democratic citizenship” (ibid p. 7). They suggest further that both advocates and opponents of school choice also rely on ideological arguments. It is, however, too early to reach any conclusion about the effects of choice since the system is new.
The rules matter

Arsen et al. (ibid.) argue, in contrast to advocates and opponents to school choice, that the social and educational consequences of this system are not predetermined. They claim therefore, that the key question for policy makers is not for or against choice. As an example they mention that the legislation around charter schools has created different kinds of charter schools in different states. In California, most of the charter schools are high schools located in small towns and suburbs. They have a smaller number of minority and poor pupils than the neighbouring school districts. In Michigan most of the charter schools are elementary schools, located in school districts in urban areas. And, as previously mentioned, they enrol a larger share of minority and poor pupils. These differences are partly a result of the different rules about charter schools in California and Michigan.

In the former state, charter schools may select their students and they can get the parents to sign contracts committing resources and time to the school. The charter schools are therefore very attractive to white and middle class parents, who are not pleased with the public school system. Compared to the regulations in Michigan, it is obvious that the charter schools system in this state is not something that middle class families can benefit from. Since charter schools cannot select pupils and cannot sign contracts with the parents, all pupils have the same opportunity to attend a charter school in Michigan.

Arsen et al. also suggest (ibid.) that the charter school system in California creates a hierarchy with the public schools and their pupils as losers. Talented pupils will be attractive to the charter schools, and pupils that are less desirable do not get the same opportunities. Their conclusion is therefore that the policy makers in Michigan have a great opportunity; by using the right legislation they can support the positive effects of choice and limiting the negative consequences.

2.4.3 Arguments against choice in schooling

Critics to choice in schooling claim that the system is more beneficial to middle and upper class parents than to other types of families. The former have the opportunity to get and understand information about the schools and they have the knowledge and interest to decide what they think is best for their children. Children from less advantaged social background are therefore losers in this system since their parents
are not as active in this process (Fiske & Ladd, 2003; Skolverket, 2003). Due to this situation the segregation between schools and different social groups in society will increase.

Another argument against choice in schooling has been discussed by Levin (1994b), who claims that there is a conflict between the single family and society when the issue of choice is discussed. From a family perspective it is rational to choose the school that suits their child and their values best. But consequently this will lead to segregation between families based on social class groups, religion and so on. From the societal perspective, schooling shall create a common language, civic values and understanding between different groups in the community, which, according to Levin, cannot be achieved with market mechanisms in the educational system (ibid.).

Fiske and Ladd (2003) made a study in New Zealand covering the years 1989 to 1998, when educational reforms, such as the opportunity to choose between different schools, were initiated. The parental choice started a movement of students away from schools with many disadvantaged and minority students toward schools with fewer social problems. Other innovations in the educational system also led to more segregation in schooling.

The enrolment patterns were also affected by three other policies regarding parental choice. Firstly, the decision not to finance transportation in urban areas, favoured families with higher incomes to choose a school outside the neighbourhood. Secondly, the decision to encourage the schools to get extra funding from the parents also played a roll in the choice process. Thirdly, and probably most important, as many of the popular schools became over-subscribed the schools had the right to establish “enrolment schemes”. By creating special criteria, the schools got the opportunity to select students; parental choice became school choice (ibid.).

Choice in education also makes it difficult to plan for the future, since it is impossible to know what the parents/pupils will choose the following year. Hence, it is both economically and administratively inefficient to have a system with choice in schooling.

Finally, a free choice does not work as planned, if there are oversubscribed schools in an area. If a school cannot receive all pupils applying for a place, usually only students that live in the catchment area are given the opportunity to begin.

Even if the rules regarding the choice among schools of Torp and Villa differ, to be described later in this thesis, choice means that parents
and pupils have the right to choose between different alternatives, community or state schools as well as independent or private.

2.5 Vouchers

Another word that is closely connected with choice is vouchers. Miron (1993 p. 6) claims that: “School vouchers serve as a form of currency in the educational market.”

The word voucher was introduced at the end of the 1940s by Milton Friedman, and as Miron (1993) argues, it is something that is valuable on the educational market. When the parents choose a school for their children, the voucher goes to the school and increases the revenues for that school. The purpose of this system is to motivate the schools to improve their education in order to attract more pupils/vouchers. Miron (ibid.) also claims that another purpose of the vouchers is to get better schooling at reduced costs for the community. The word voucher in this study means a form of currency in the educational market where the money follows the pupil to the school that is chosen.

New Zealand, according to Fiske and Ladd (2003), has a “quasi-voucher” system by which the schools’ revenues depend on the number of students they can recruit. However, in contrast to a true voucher system, the system has few incentives for new private school to be established. Therefore, New Zealand’s reforms during the 1990s led primarily to competition between the existing schools (ibid.).

In Sweden the vouchers were introduced in the education sector at the beginning of the 1990s and initially few private alternatives were available for the parents. But at the end of this decade the picture was totally different and several new private or independent schools were established in Sweden. In 1999, 3% of the pupils in Sweden attended independent schools and in the large city areas the number was even higher; 8.2% of the pupils in Stockholm were enrolled in this type of schools. (www.skolverket, 2007a)

2.6 Market Forces

Market forces in schooling, implies that there is an educational market regulated by supply and demand (Miron, 1993). The consumers
have the opportunity to choose between schools; and the voucher system leads to a situation giving parents and students more influence, since the market element is supposed to make the schools more open to wishes by their customers. The system rewards schools that perform well and are efficient, while the schools that perform badly will have problems recruiting pupils.

Walford (2003) claims, however, that the market forces introduced in schooling differ from a free market on both the demand and the supply sides. He argues, for instance, that all families are forced to make some kind of “purchase” and that money need not change hands between supplier and purchaser. So even if there is competition, choices and vouchers within schooling, the system should be described as a “quasi-market”.

When the concept market force is used in this study, it implies a situation of competition with choice and vouchers, even if there is no completely free market.

2.7 Catchment Area

Another concept that is essential for this study is catchment area. In the old centralised education system of Sweden, the pupils “belonged” to a certain school located in the pupils’ neighbourhood. Normally it was the nearest school, and the school the pupils should attend was decided by the authorities in the municipality based on the pupils’ home addresses. Since choice was not an option for the parents, all children were enrolled, based on the addresses in the (catchments) area where the pupils lived.

When choice was introduced in schooling, it was still necessary to keep some kind of structure to guarantee that all pupils actually had a place in a school not so far from their home. In both Sweden and England the distance to the school is relevant, especially when schools get oversubscribed and some pupils must be enrolled in other schools; therefore the catchment area is still an important factor in Torp and Villa and the rules concerning catchments in both the studied communities will be described later.
2.8 Other Important Concepts

The schools in Torp will be called community schools in this study, while the English schools of Villa will be named state schools. Normally the Swedish schools would be described as public schools, since they are financed by taxes and open to all pupils, but since public schools mean a form of private, or independent schools in England, this concept will not be used in this study. State schools will be the term for the schools in Villa since community schools is one type of school in England that is mainly financed by the state and can therefore not be used in this context. The different types of schools in England will be discussed more later in this thesis.

The school managers interviewed in this study are described in different ways; the words school leaders, heads and leaders have been used interchangeably to describe them as a group. However, if for instance it is an opinion expressed by the head in the school, it means that it is the head teacher or principal. The title headmaster has not been used since it, according to English colleagues, from a gender perspective is not correct.

The word customer could also be worth mentioning, when different concepts are discussed. In Torp the word customer is often used to give a collective description of pupils and parents in the system with choice, vouchers and competition and since Torp in many official documents describes pupils and parents as customers, this term will sometimes be used in this study. However, initially there were arguments in the municipality, from both professionals in schools as well as the political opposition, against using the concept customer to describe pupils and parents, but in the last years it has been more generally accepted to use this term.

The term concern is also used to describe the schools of Torp in an economic context from the year 2001 and onwards, and it means that the schools in the municipality belong to the same financial organisation. The concept “concern” is used by the authorities in Torp and is therefore used in this thesis.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methods used in this study as well as to describe how the data collection has been conducted. A presentation will also be made of the benefits and limitations of a case study design as well as a discussion of the questions of validity and reliability; but first the background to the study will be presented.

3.1 Background to the Study

In 1999 a study was carried out (Söderqvist, 1999) concerning how market forces and decentralisation had affected the lower secondary schools in the municipality of Torp in Sweden. Seven years earlier market elements had been introduced in schooling and the overall aim of the study was to describe and analyse some of the consequences of the introduction of market forces and decentralisation in the Swedish educational system. The focus of the study was on the seven lower secondary schools in Torp, where interviews were made with the head teachers. Many of the results from this study will be presented in the following chapters, but in the last paragraph, “Suggestions for further studies. I wrote that it would be interesting to return to the seven schools in five or ten years time and study the development. “Will the system be the same?” “Are there any private alternatives?” ”Has the social segregation increased?” “Are the same schools successful?” These were questions formulated in 1999, and this study is in some aspects a continuation of the former thesis. Even if the present study is more extensive and includes interviews with school leaders in England, the core of this study is the same: the seven lower secondary schools in Torp.
3.2 Planning of the Study

My plan was therefore to follow up the development for the seven lower secondary schools in Torp and study what had happened during the subsequent five years. The first study analysed mainly the period from 1994 to 1998. The start of the period to study was set at 1994 due to two reasons: first, 1992 and 1993 were the starting years for the new system, and much of the statistical material, like budget figures and so on, was not possible to obtain in 1999. Second, only one of the seven head teachers had worked since 1992, while the others got their positions during 1994 to 1996; consequently, they could not contribute with much information about the years 1992 and 1993.

In the planning for the present study, which aimed at covering the five years from 1999 to 2003, the decision was made to widen the picture and make interviews with both the head teachers and their deputies in order to study what they thought of the system in Torp. Another purpose was to study their views on and consequently ask them general questions about decentralisation and market forces in schooling. Altogether it resulted in 20 interviews, with seven head teachers and 13 deputy heads, who were more or less all of the school leaders working in the lower secondary schools in Torp in 2002 and 2003.

I also wanted to make a comparison with another country and to ask the same questions and to compare the results. The choice became England, even if there were other possible options, like New Zealand or the United States. At that time, in 2002, Torp collaborated at the school level with a county located not so far from London, Villa, a collaboration that had resulted in many contacts with English colleagues who had visited Torp and many school leaders from Torp had been on study trips to Villa. When this study was initiated, I had visited Villa three times and among other things “shadowed” a head teacher in a secondary school for a couple of days. In other words, I had a rather good insight into the English school system in general and in Villa’s in particular and had also established several contacts with key persons, who could help me arrange interviews, school visits and so on.

It was, however, clear from the beginning that one of the main focuses of this study should be on the school development in Torp with the perspective of the period from 1994-2003. Even if the number of interviews was the same in Villa, nine head teachers and 11 deputies in nine schools, it was not possible, as already mentioned, to obtain
the same information as in Sweden, about for instance budget figures for the schools making a comparison at school level impossible. In Sweden legislation forces the community schools to deliver all sorts of information to anyone who asks for it, but this is not the case in England. So even if all the persons I met in England, during my visits and interviews were most friendly and helpful, statistical material of the same kind as for the schools in Torp, needed for comparisons, was not possible to obtain in Villa. However, another main focus of this study was to compare opinions and attitudes of the school leaders in Torp and Villa and to describe and analyse their answers in order to find similarities and differences in their opinions about among other things decentralisation and market forces in schooling.

### 3.3 A Qualitative Approach

The advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative methods have been discussed frequently among researchers in social sciences over the years (Brooks, 2005) and will only be described briefly in the following.

According to Patton (1987) there are differences between quantitative and qualitative methods in educational evaluation and research. The former approach “..gives a generalizable set of findings”(p. 9), while the latter “produces a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases” (ibid.). Bryman (2004) claims that qualitative research is a research strategy that normally emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data, but three further features are particularly important. Firstly, the qualitative method has an inductive view of the relationship between theory and empirical research, with the former is generated from the latter. Secondly, an interpretivist position where the focus, unlike the adoption of a natural scientific model used in quantitative research, is on the understanding of the social world through a study of the interpretation of this world by its participants. Thirdly, a constructionist position implying that what happens in the social world is the result of the interaction between individuals, rather than outer phenomena separated from those involved.

Patton (1987) suggests that the decision about method to use depends on the type and quality of the information being sought as well as on
the design of the evaluation. The qualitative method is subjective and is concerned with validity. It also provides a holistic analysis of a phenomenon, and a suitable approach in this context is a case study. The quantitative method on the other hand, focuses more on reliability and objectivity. It also deals with large samples and is interested in generalisations. Questionnaires are often used in a quantitative study to enable dealing with large samples. Since there are limitations in both methods, they can complement and supplement each other depending on the field to investigate (Patton, 1987; Bryman, 2004).

The qualitative approach is used in the thesis. This method was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, since interviews were used in the former study in Torp, the same qualitative approach was used in order to make a comparison; even if the number of interviews were extended in Torp as well as supplemented with interviews in Villa. Secondly, the holistic perspective provided in a qualitative study was further to prefer consequently excluding the quantitative approach. Thirdly, since it was possible to conduct interviews with almost all school leaders in Torp the qualitative method was considered the best option in this context.

3.4 The Case Study

There are also different types of research designs within the field of research. Merriam (1988) argues that there are differences between an experimental and a non-experimental design. The former is characterised by its intent to investigate cause-and-effect relationships, the latter is often undertaken …” when explanation and description (rather than prediction based on cause and effect) are sought (Merriam, 1988 p. 7). Survey research is a descriptive and explanatory method that according to Merriam “.. assesses a few variables across a large number of instances..” (Merriam 1988 p. 7); the case study is more concentrated on many of the variables relevant to investigate in a single unit or a few units. The case study is also a research design that is suitable, when the focus is on a holistic description of a phenomenon. Any method of data collection can be used in this kind of design, and may include both quantitative and qualitative approaches. (Merriam 1988; Sturman 1994) Further Patton (1987) claims that case studies are particularly useful when one needs to understand some problem in great depth.
Looking at Merriam’s definition, this study is obviously non-experimental. It is a descriptive and partly a holistic study. As previously mentioned, it attempts to describe how the market forces have affected the lower secondary schools in Torp as well as to study the school leaders’ attitudes towards market forces and decentralisation in both Torp and Villa. Even if the word holistic is a rather pretentious concept, this study aims to present how the lower secondary schools in Torp have developed over a period of ten years. Different aspects, such as financial consequences, pressure on the personnel, segregation and so on, as seen by the school leaders and evidence from documents, will be discussed and analysed in order to draw some conclusions about the change in the educational systems in both communities. The study will not be as thorough or holistic, when the educational system and the schools of Villa are described. As previously mentioned, it has not been possible to obtain the same kind of information about the schools’ finances and so on making it impossible to compare the schools in the two communities in these areas. The interviews that discuss and analyse the school leaders’ attitudes to decentralisation and market forces have, however, been conducted in the same way. So in this context the study aims to provide a holistic perspective.

To summarise the discussion above, this study can be described as a qualitative case study that uses interviews and other sources in order to describe and discuss the development in schooling as well as attitudes regarding the issues mentioned above, among school leaders in Torp and Villa.

3.5 The Interviews

According to Patton (1987) there are three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through interviews, with the approaches all having their strengths and weaknesses. The alternatives are: 1) the informal conversational interview; 2) the general interview guide approach; 3) the standardised open ended interview. The first approach does not include any predetermined set of questions and, consequently the data will be different for each person interviewed. The second approach includes a set of questions that are to be explored and the purpose of the interview guide is to make sure that the same information will be obtained from the persons in the study. It includes more flexibility
than the next approach, since it allows more spontaneity during the interviews. The third approach consists of a set of question whose purpose is to ask the respondent the same questions with essentially the same words. The advantage of this approach is that the bias is reduced, compared to the other two types of interview approaches.

Patton (ibid.) claims further that it is possible to combine the different styles and combine an interview guide approach with a standardised open ended approach, since it permits the interviewer more flexibility and to explore certain subjects in greater depth.

3.5.1 The interviews with the school leaders in Torp

The approach used for the interviews in Torp was a combination of an interview guide approach with a standardised open ended approach since it was both necessary to ask the same questions in the same order as well as to allow more flexibility in the discussion than the latter approach permits.

Before the interviews started, contacts were taken with the school leaders in the seven schools and the purpose of the study was explained. They all agreed to an interview after they had been guaranteed that they, as well as the name of their schools and the municipality, should be anonymous in the study. Some of them also said that they preferred that the interviews were not recorded and two of them even said that they were not willing to participate, if a tape recorder was to be used; therefore, none of the 20 interviews were recorded. The fact that the interviews were conducted by one of their colleagues from a competitive school could of course have had an impact on the willingness to record the interviews, but since there were no other options available, the answers were recorded by hand during the interviews.

The numbers of interviews conducted were 20 covering all, with one exception, of the school leaders that worked in secondary schools in 2002 and 2003. For various reasons one of the deputy heads in one of the schools was not available for an interview during this period, but all heads in the seven schools were interviewed as well as deputy heads from the same schools. One problem was how to deal with the “interview” in my school and there were two options; to describe my picture of the education system in an “interview” with myself; or exclude my attitudes and opinions from the study. The former alternative was chosen for the following reasons: firstly, I have worked for a long time
in the municipality both as a teacher and school leader which has given me extensive experience in the development of the educational system in Torp over the years. Secondly, since I considered it important to make interviews with the head teachers in all the other schools, it was better to include my opinions in the study than to exclude them.

The questions asked to the school leaders concerned four different issues related to the impact and consequences of decentralisation and market forces in schooling and followed to a large extent the same pattern as the former study made in 1999 (Söderqvist, 1999). On average, the interviews lasted about 50 minutes with one for 35 minutes and two of them for 90 minutes. There were no differences between heads or deputy heads in this context so the “willingness” to answer and discuss these issues was, in my opinion, related to the persons and not to their profession.

3.5.2 The interviews with the school leaders in Villa

As previously mentioned, Torp collaborated with Villa at school level resulting over the years in many personal contacts and some of them were very useful when the planning of the interviews in England was made. The Chief Education Officer as well as the International Links Officer in Villa, responsible for international contacts in the county, were both very willing to assist in the arrangements of this study. The former by supporting the study and most likely simplifying the whole process, the latter by assisting in the selection of the schools as well as booking all the times with the school leaders in the different schools. Since Villa is a much larger community than Torp, and the number of interviews with the heads, according to my plans*, should be the same, it was not possible to conduct interviews with leaders in all schools enrolled with pupils in lower secondary schools and therefore a selection had to be made.

I therefore asked the International Links Officer to help me select at least seven schools in the county, where it was possible to interview the head teacher as well as the deputy head. It was also important to get schools from both different social areas as well as schools located in urban and rural part of the county.

* In order to make a comparison from different aspects, I considered it to be the best option to interview the same number of school leaders in Villa as in Torp.
Totally there were nine schools from different parts of the community with nine head teachers and eleven deputies interviewed. For different reasons it was not possible to conduct all the interviews during the same period and therefore the sessions were divided into two parts with 14 of them conducted during September and the rest of them in May 2004.

The same questions were addressed to the leaders in Villa as in Torp and the same methods were used and the answers were recorded by hand. On average the interviews lasted 55 minutes with the shortest 40 minutes and the longest more than two hours. The interviews took longer in Villa because general facts about the schools had to be gathered, which was not necessary in Torp, before the leaders’ personal opinions were discussed.

3.5.3 Other interviews

In order to get a deeper understanding of the schools in this county it was necessary to make interviews with other key informants in Villa which in some cases were less formal than the interviews with the school leaders, but nevertheless important from different aspects. These interviews were organised as follows:

- an interview with a finance officer in one of the secondary schools in this study responsible for financial issues in the school gathering information on the funding system, salaries, and so on
- an interview with a head teacher from a middle school who was mainly asked the same questions as the other school leaders; the purpose was to get a broader picture of the school system in Villa
- an interview with a teacher from one of the schools in this study providing a good complement in order to find out more about schooling in this community
- an interview with the County Education Officer, who provided general information about the county and the LEA in Villa
- an interview with an administrator at the City Hall working with schools’ finances and budgets for the LEA, which further contributed to a deeper understanding of the funding system.

These interviews were a good complement to those with the school leaders, and helped to create a better understanding of how the system
was organised in Villa. As an observer I also attended a meeting, discussing educational issues in the county. I was also given the opportunity to put a few questions to the participants, members of the LEA Excellence Group, resulting in a more thorough picture of the education system of Villa.

Furthermore, informal discussions were held with, for instance, other head teachers, the International Links Officer as well as the Chief Education Officer during the visits in Villa, also providing a valuable source for this study.

3.6 Data Collection

Four major sources of information have been used in this study:

- literature references, mainly for the literature review in chapter 2, discussing the key concepts relevant for this thesis.
- interviews and informal discussions, described previously in this chapter
- documents, mainly from and about Torp providing information about the school finances, the school system, figures, etc.
- web-sites, consisting of statistical material as well as other information from the National Agency for Education’s website (http://www.skolverket.se). Facts about the English school system have been gathered from two web sites; firstly, DfES – Department for Education and Skills (http://www.dfes.gov.uk); secondly, TeacherNet – the education site for teachers and school managers (http://www.teachernet.gov.uk).

Another “source” of information has of course been my knowledge about the school system in Torp since I, as mentioned, have worked in the municipality for more than two decades. In addition to the five times I have visited Villa, four other study visits to England have been conducted. Worth mentioning in this context are two trips to Brighton during 2006 and 2007 whereby the former study trip included visits at two independent schools and the latter lectures with inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education, OFSTED. Both this visits have contributed to my understanding of the English school system. (The OFSTED–inspections will be described later in this study).
It is difficult to estimate to what extent lectures and study visits have contributed to my knowledge about the English school system in general and schooling in Villa in particular; but although the interviews have been the basic source of information about the education system in Villa, lectures and study visits have contributed to the understanding of these contexts.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

According to Merriam (1988), qualitative research has often been contrasted to the “traditional” or “scientific” paradigm, which depends on a different view of the world. Traditional science is based on the assumption that there is an objective reality that can be observed and measured. This research is focused on outcomes and the reliability of measurement is stressed. Qualitative research, on the other hand, assumes that there is more than one reality; it is a subjective phenomenon that needs to be interpreted instead of being measured. This research is exploratory and beliefs, rather than facts, form the basis of perception (ibid.). So even if the reliability of a study refers to a researcher being able to replicate a study and get the same results, given that the same methods are used (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Bryman, 2004), it is important to have Merriam’s assumptions about qualitative studies in mind, when these issues are discussed. Goetz & LeCompte (1984) claim that unique situations cannot be reconstructed in exactly the same way. Due to human beings changing their opinions and that interaction takes place between the researcher and the respondents, the reality changes constantly, and so on, it is impossible to replicate a qualitative study exactly. However, the difficulty to replicate the research is obviously a limitation in a study like this with interviews being one of the main sources of the gathered information. On the other hand, especially regarding Torp, several documents have been used in order to support opinions and arguments among the school leaders, at least to a certain extent. E.g., regarding the development of quality in schooling in relation to market forces, documents have been used that are likely to have increased the reliability in the study. Furthermore, literature references have also been a valuable source in this case.

Validity is, according to Bryman (2004), the most important criterion for research; it is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are
generated from a study. He also claims that there are different types of validity with measurement validity applying primarily to quantitative research and he makes a distinction between internal and external validity. According to Goetz & LeCompte (1984), the concept validity should be divided into two parts, internal and external validity. The former refers to whether a study measures what it intends to measure and the latter concerns if the research findings can be applied to other situations. They argue furthermore that qualitative studies in general, due to the technique used for data collection, are strong in internal validity and weak in external validity. Given the descriptions of qualitative studies and the holistic perspective is particularly interesting, even this study seems to have it is strength in this aspect. The lower secondary schools in Torp have been followed for a period of ten years, data has been collected from interviews and by studying documents, during more than a decade providing a deep knowledge of the system from an inside perspective. According to Goetz & LeCompte (ibid), collecting data for a long time provides opportunities for continual data analysis and comparison.

External validity deals with the issue of generalisation. Brooks claims (2005) that a single case study examines a small, non-random sample selected with the purpose of in-depth understanding and not generalisation. She also argues that this does not mean that the findings may not be applied in other similar situations and refers to Erikson (in Brooks, 2005), who claims that the general lies in the particular. What is learned in one specific situation may be an aspect of properties that can be transferred to other similar situations. So even if findings from the present study on decentralisation and market forces in lower secondary education cannot be generally applied worldwide for this sector of the educational system, the findings can hopefully contribute to the discussion on the impact, these aspects can have in schooling.

3. 8 Biases

In a qualitative study using interviews as the main source it is important to comment on the issue of bias of both the informers as well as the researcher. Slenning (1999) claims that there are different types of biases that are assumed to possibly affect both the informants and the researcher:
Cognitive bias is related to the knowledge of both the informants and the researcher. Slenning argues (ibid.) that a cognitive bias of the researcher “could result in not taking into consideration important fields of knowledge”…(Slenning, 1999 p. 97). A cognitive bias of an informant can also affect the relevancy of the answers. It seems reasonable to assume that a newly recruited school leader would have more problems than a more experienced one to assess the impact of certain issues in schooling.

In this study questions about decentralisation and market forces will be discussed and it seems evident that a school leader that has worked for a long time in the municipality/county and has experienced different steering systems has a deeper understanding of these issues. It is, however impossible to estimate how, and to what extent, this fact has affected the answers.

A positional bias can be created, if the informant feels that certain opinions are not allowed. The informant might also have personal opinions and feelings that cannot be expressed due to the formal position of the informant. As an example, some of the informants in Villa, could have felt this, since this study was actively supported by the Chief Education Officer in the county, they could not be too critical of the educational system in Villa due to their formal position. On the other hand, since the interviews were not recorded and since they were anonymous it should reasonably limit this type of bias for the informants. For the researcher, on the other hand, the risk in this context is more evident. Even if I have tried to be as objective as possible it is obviously difficult to describe the school system in Torp without any positional bias.

Emotional bias can, according to Slenning (ibid.), exist when the informants, or the researcher, are affected personally by changes in e.g. the educational system, which can create this type of bias. Another aspect of emotional bias could have existed in Torp, when the interviews were conducted with the school leaders. It is however impossible to estimate, how the school leaders responded to a colleague and a representative of a competitive school asking the questions. This fact could have had an impact on both the informants and the researchers in this context.
There could be even other types of biases that affected both informants and the researcher, but the ones mentioned above seem to be the most relevant for this study.
Chapter Four

Sweden and Torp - the School System

The purpose of this chapter is firstly to describe how the Swedish educational system is organised as well as to present a historical background to the development towards decentralisation and market solutions in schooling; and secondly to present the same kind of information for the school system in Torp.

4.1 Background

In 1991 the responsibility for schooling in Sweden was transferred from the state to the municipalities and the old centralised education system was replaced by a decentralised system with the latter differing due to among other things the ideological ideas among local politicians. Critics of this reform claimed that more local decision making would lead to more inequalities in both schooling as well as in society, while advocates argued that more decentralisation would lead to better education. The arguments used in the Swedish process towards more decentralisation followed the same pattern as in many other countries where the reasons for and against decentralisations were more or less the same as e.g. in the United States.

4.2 The Swedish School System

Before the brief historical background is presented, it is important to mention that the focus in this chapter is on compulsory education in general and lower secondary in particular. Non-compulsory school forms like preschools, upper secondary, as well as universities, will be mentioned just briefly.
4.2.1 **Historical background**

Compulsory elementary school, (Folkskolan) was introduced in 1842 in Sweden, but already in 1686 a law stated that the priest should educate his congregation in Christianity and he visited people in their homes and held “examinations” (husförhör) in order to fulfil his obligations. Consequently, the literacy ability was high, when the compulsory education was introduced in the 19th century (Nationalencyklopedin, 1991).

During the same century popular movements, like labour movements and free churches emerged in society with demands on influence and rights in the national state. At the beginning of the 1920s, the constitution was changed so that more or less all citizens, regardless of economic situation and gender, were allowed to vote in municipality as well as in national elections (Daun *et al.*, 2003).

Many in the growing working class were attracted by the Social Democratic Party and in the 1930s it was the largest political party. When the Social Democrats formed a government for the first time, they were determined to achieve equality as well as to eliminate poverty in society and the strategy they focused on was investments in education and research (Husén, 1988; Daun *et al.* 2003). During the subsequent decades a welfare system was constructed and a comprehensive school system was established with the aim to generate economic growth, democracy, and equality (Daun *et al.* 2003).

The Social Democratic Party has predominantly ruled Sweden since the 1930s and they lost power for the first time in 1976 to the Centre-Liberal-Conservative coalition, which during the six years they were in power followed the same track as their political opponents had done earlier and expanded the public sector with the help of high taxes. In 1982 the Social Democrats returned to power and they started to decentralise the public sector, as well as to privatise parts of it and to make budget cuts (ibid.). These measures were against the core values of many in the party, but it was necessary, according to the leading group within the party in order to save the welfare society (Montin, 1992 in Daun *et al*, 2003).

Urbanisation, centralisation and international influences have all affected the political development in Sweden during the latter half of last century and as an example of these changes in society the number of municipalities, for both demographic and economic reasons, have decreased from 4,000 at the end of the 1940s to 288 in the middle of
the 1990s (ibid.).

During the last three decades of the 20th century, economic growth in Sweden was one of the lowest among the OECD countries (Daun, 1998). At the same time the cost per pupil was among the highest in comparison to these countries. The stagnation in the economy, together with the world-wide recession at the beginning of the 1990s, made it impossible to maintain the extensive public sector in Sweden. Something had to be done and restructuring the education sector was one of the strategies in order to cut expenses and to change the development.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the centralised system was abandoned in the Swedish education sector. From 1991 the responsibility for the public school system was transferred from the state to the local authorities on municipality level. The state had up to then, not least as the provider of the economic resources, had a large impact on the daily running of the schools in Sweden.

One step towards a more decentralised system was to change the conditions for the allowances from the state to the municipalities. In the old system, there were sums earmarked for different purposes determined by the state. For instance, schools with many immigrants as well as pupils with special learning needs received more allowances from the state than schools situated in high status areas. From 1991, the municipalities received the money from the state in one lump sum and the previous regulations were abolished.

At the beginning of the 1990s, The National Board of Education and its provincial bodies were abolished by the government and replaced by a new authority. The responsibility for inspection, development work and evaluation was taking over by the municipalities and the new Swedish Agency for Education should supervise that the local authorities carried out their new tasks according to the goals decided on the national level.

In 1991 a new government, Conservative- Centre- Liberal, came into power and the move to a more decentralised system in education continued. The former government led by the Social Democrats, started this process by handing over the responsibility for the schools to the municipalities at the beginning of the 1990s. A Parliamentary committee also proposed that private schools should receive large subsidies and a system of freedom of choice among community schools was introduced. The process to restructure the educational system in Sweden was initiated by the Social Democrats and the development in this direction escalated, for example by increasing funding to independent schools,
during the period 1991 to 1994 when the political power was in the hands of the Conservative and Liberal parties (ibid.).

The decentralisation continued and a voucher system was introduced with the purpose of the school receiving a certain amount of money for every pupil they enrolled. This resulted in competition between the schools, primarily between the community schools since the number of independent schools was low during this period. Less than two percent of all compulsory school pupils attended independent alternatives at that time (ibid.). The number of independent schools has increased since then, but still a large majority, 92.4 in 2006, (www.skolverket, 2007e) attend community schools.

The competition between the community schools was, in some urban municipalities, very hard and the schools had to profile and market themselves, in order to attract more pupils since the economy of the school depended on this. In rural areas the new system had little impact since it was not possible for the pupils to choose another school due to the distance to another school.

In 1994 the Social Democrats won the election, but no significant changes were made in the educational system. In the same year a new national curriculum was introduced (Lpo-94) which put more emphasis on centrally defined goals, with a great deal of local freedom on how to reach them, and on evaluation than on central government planning. The new curriculum was and is another aspect of the new decentralised education system of Sweden during the 1990s.

Daun (1996) argues, as has previously been mentioned, that the reforms in Sweden during the 1990s was most likely motivated by economic factors. The decline in the economy, which was a development that started at the beginning of the 1980s, led at the beginning of the 1990s to demands for more efficiency in all social sectors of society. The state had to lower its costs for the education sector and the solution was decentralisation and market forces.

Another factor that probably had an impact on the way to a decentralised education system in Sweden was the general trend towards decentralisation that started at the beginning of the 1970s. Demands for more democracy and influence were topics on the political agenda during this period and decentralisation was a way to reduce the power on the central level and increase the influence on the local. It is reasonable to assume that this trend also had an impact on the development in the education sector.

Political factors, according to Miron (1996), have also been important.
Miron argues that the collapse of the communist states in the East in 1989, affected the Social Democrats in Sweden to be more positive to market solutions in society. The Conservative and Liberal parties advocated this type of solutions to ideological reasons, so both political and ideological factors may have affected the development in Sweden, even if it is difficult to evaluate to what extent. However, the economic situation has probably been the most important factor on the way to decentralisation and market forces.

4.2.2 Organisation

The Swedish school system consists of compulsory and non-compulsory schooling. The former includes regular compulsory school, specials school, and programmes for pupils with learning disabilities, the latter preschool classes, upper secondary school, upper secondary school for pupils with learning disabilities, and municipal adult education (www.skolverket, 2004a).

All public education is in general free of charge. The parents do not have to pay anything for school meals, teaching material, transports, or health services. Some municipalities charge their upper secondary pupils for school meals, but in general parents do not have to pay for anything in upper secondary school.

The school system is organised as follows:

Pre-school classes
The year the children turns six, the parents have the opportunity to enrol their children in a pre-school class. The municipalities are obligated to provide a place for every child at this age. The pre-school classes are often located in conjunction to a compulsory school, but there can be other arrangements (ibid.).

It is not compulsory for the children to attend a pre-school class, but an overwhelming majority of the children in Sweden are enrolled in this type of education.

Compulsory education
The children in Sweden normally begin the nine-year compulsory school the year they turn seven, but it is possible to begin one year earlier if it is requested by the parents. However, the number of pupils
that attend compulsory schooling at the age of six is very low and in for instance in Torp, it is less than one per cent of the children that begin in year 1 when they are six years old.

The schools in the compulsory system can be organised in different ways. In some schools they enrol children from year 1-5 and attend lower secondary school in year 6, others are organised from year 1-6 and consequently the pupils attend the next level in year 7, and finally there are compulsory schools that includes all cohorts from year 1-9.

When the latest curriculum, Lpo 94 was introduced in 1994, the central regulation with different stages was abandoned. Up to then the compulsory schooling was divided into three parts: year 1-3 lower level, year 4-6 intermediate level, and year 7-9 upper level or lower secondary school (Lpo 94).

Even if this curriculum gave new directives in 1994, the organisation with three stages still exists in many Swedish municipalities.

**Upper secondary education**

Upper secondary education also had a new curriculum in 1994, Lpf 94, and is now organised into 17 national 3-year programmes, and shall offer broad education with some compulsory core subjects, in order to ensure that all programmes will give basic eligibility to studies at post-secondary level, and other subjects are optional. Besides the national programmes there are also a number of specially designed and individual study programmes (www.skolverket, 2004a).

Almost all pupils continue to upper secondary level after nine years in the compulsory school, but not all of them are qualified to attend a national programme. The pupils that have not reached a certain level in the core subjects in the ninth grade must begin at an individual study programme in the upper secondary school. The individual programme is determined by the individual needs of the student and the aim is to reach pass grades in Swedish, English and Mathematics. When the pupils have reached this level in these subjects, they are qualified to begin a national programme (ibid.).
Figure 4.1 The educational system

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<td>Pre-school</td>
<td>Comprehensive education</td>
<td>Gymnasium (upper secondary)</td>
<td>Principally: University</td>
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<td>Classes at age 6</td>
<td>Grades 1-9</td>
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<td>Primary grades 1-6</td>
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<td>Lower secondary grades 7-9</td>
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*Independent schools*

The number of pupils that attend independent schools has increased during the last two decades, and in Sweden, 5.3% of the pupils attended these type of schools in 2003. In urban areas the figure was higher and 13.7% of the pupils in the Stockholm area attended independent schools in the same year (www.skolverket, 2007e). Independent schools are publicly subsidised, in the same way as the community schools, and are not allowed to charge any fees. They can be owned by a: single person, the staff, a foundation, an organisation, or a company.

4.2.3 *Grading system and National Tests in compulsory schooling*

*Grading system*

When the new curricula for compulsory and non-compulsory schooling were introduced in 1994, a new system of grades came into effect. (www.skolverket, 2004b). The grade system is goal oriented and the grades are related to the pupils’ level of knowledge, related to the goals defined in the syllabuses. In compulsory schooling grades are awarded two times a year, after the autumn and spring term, and two times in year 9 (ibid.).

The pupils receive grades in 17 subjects (see below) and 16 of them count, when they apply for a place in upper secondary school. Grades are awarded by the teachers and comprise three categories: pass, pass with distinction and pass with special distinction.

The objectives in each syllabus correspond to a pass grade. For the next level, pass with distinction, there are nationally agreed criteria.
The qualitative level, pass with special distinction, was initially decided locally by the teachers of each school, but since 2000 The National Agency for Education has formulated national criteria even for this level. (www.skolverket, 2007c) The pupils must have pass grades in Swedish, English, and Mathematics, when they leave lower secondary school, in the spring of year 9, in order to be qualified to begin at a national programme in upper secondary school (see above).

One important difference compared to many other countries is the fact that no examination takes place after the ninth grade in the Swedish school system. The pupils do not have to face any external teachers who decide if they have reached the goals in the different subjects. Instead it is the teacher in each subject who is responsible for the grades that the pupil receives.

There seem to be both advantages and disadvantages of this system; it is good for the pupils that their ordinary teachers are responsible for the grading and consequently to decide if the pupils have reached the goals in the different subjects. On the other hand, the assessments from one school to another can differ depending on how “hard” or how “generous” the teachers are. It has also been debated in Sweden if this grading system together with choices can be a temptation for schools to be more generous, when they assess the pupils, since it is positive for a school to have good results. In order to help the teachers put the right grades the Agency for Education provides national tests in the three core subjects.

The 17 subjects:

*The core subjects:*
Swedish
Mathematics
English

*The other subjects:*
Art education
Crafts
Domestic science
Foreign language
Music
Biology
Physics
Chemistry  
Physical and health education  
Pupil’s option  
Civics  
Geography  
History  
Religion

*National Achievement Tests*
In year five and year nine it is compulsory for all schools to conduct National Achievement Tests in Swedish, English, and Mathematics. The tests are delivered to the schools from the National Agency for Education and there are strict rules when and how the tests shall be given to the pupils. In year nine there are both oral and written assignments in all the three subjects and the oral part can be held with the pupils as soon as the tests arrive at the school. The written assignments are to be opened and delivered to the pupils on a special day and time in order to guarantee that no pupils have access to the tests in advance. Even the teachers are not allowed to look at the tests, before they are given to the pupils to ensure that the teachers are not tempted to prepare their pupils. Together with the tests the schools get the keys to the tests with examples on how the correction should be made as well as how many points that are necessary to achieve a certain grade. However, even in this context it is the teachers that are responsible for correcting the assignments and to assess the pupils’ performances, even if the teachers have key models to guide them. The basic ideas of the National Tests is that they both shall be a help for the schools in the evaluation process, to assess if the pupils have reached the goals in the three core subjects, as well as serve as a national evaluation instrument in order to compare the results at both school and municipality level (Swedish Ministry of Education and Science, 1997).

4.2.4 *The Swedish Curriculum*

According to Guthrie (in Slenning, 1999) it is common that many national curricula give detailed directives to the schools regarding the subjects, lesson plans, teaching modules, and so on. Slenning (1999) describes this as a major international trend towards more central control
over school curricula and argues that the Swedish curriculum from the middle of the 1990s is an example of the opposite with an evident degree of decentralisation. As can be read in LPO-94, the curriculum does not regulate the schools in detail. It sets out the direction to be followed, goals to be obtained, and the local schools and the teachers have the responsibility to make sure that the goals are reached. In other words, the local responsibility for the curriculum is substantial and the schools have a very high degree of freedom in this context.

In order to ensure that standards are equivalent throughout the country, a timetable was introduced in 1995 which guaranteed teacher or supervisor-led instruction of a total of 6,665 hours in compulsory schooling divided between different subjects. The timetable also provided the opportunity for schools to focus on one or more subjects, to for instance start special profiles with a reduction for other subjects.

During this decade it has been possible for the schools to work without any timetable at all for a test period of five years with the only restriction that schools are not allowed to reduce the total number of 6,665 hours that they are guaranteed. Torp is one of the municipalities that have been a part of this project and some of the schools in this study have used the opportunity to work without a timetable. The main purpose of this initiative has been to find more individual solutions for the pupils, like for instance more focus on mathematics, if they need more time to reach the goals in this subject.

4.2.5 The National Agency for Education

As previously mentioned, the National Board of Education and its provincial bodies were replaced by a new authority at the beginning of the 1990s The National Agency for Education (Skolverket). In 2003, this authority was divided into two parts: The National Agency for Education and The National Agency for School Improvement. The former is the central authority for the state school system, childcare, pre-school activities as well as adult education and should provide information to the government, local authorities, and so on. One further priority task for The National Agency for Education is to conduct inspections of the Swedish schools and the plan is that all schools, both community and independent schools should be inspected during the period 2003-2008 (Skolverket, 2007f). They are also responsible for statistics in schooling and to follow up the results of individual
schools and to assess attitudes among parents, pupils, teachers. The latter should support the schools in their development to improve the quality.

4.3 The School System of Torp

In the following a presentation of the school system in Torp will be made and this section of the thesis starts with a brief presentation of the municipality.

4.3.1 The political situation – a background

Torp is a municipality just outside Stockholm. For the last three decades this community has been governed by a coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberals. When the innovations in the education system were introduced in Sweden at the beginning of the 1990s, the political majority saw the opportunity to restructure the schools. As has been mentioned previously, Sweden was in the middle of an economic recession in 1991, which resulted in substantial cuts in the state budget. The result was that the municipalities received less money from the state with a strong impact on the economy in the municipalities. In Torp the allowances to the schools were reduced as a result of this and cuts had to be made. The solution to the difficult situation was to introduce market forces in the educational system of Torp. The new system consisted of three parts, decentralisation, vouchers, and choice, supposed to increase the competition between the schools and lead to better quality.

Besides the problematic economic situation it is important to point out that there were ideological reasons for the restructuring too. Especially the Conservative party had advocated market solutions for a long time in the public sector. And when the government made it possible for the municipalities to take over the responsibility for the schools, the politicians at the local level saw the opportunity to realise their political ambitions.

The description below shows both how the new system was organised in 1992, when it was introduced as well as how the education system has changed over the years.
4.3.2 Decentralisation in Torp

In the new system of the 1990s, the economy was decentralised as well as most of the decisions regarding the daily running of the school. Issues concerning what teacher, and how many, to employ, the number of pupils in each class are examples of decisions that became an affair for the head teacher and the school personnel in the new system. Previously, these decisions were taken on higher level, but it now was the schools’ responsibility.

One other basic argument for decentralisation in Torp formulated by the political majority in the 1990s and is still valid in the municipality, is that schools will develop in different ways, if there is large local freedom. Consequently, parents/pupils can choose a school of their preferences, with for instance a special pedagogical profile increasing the educational options and the diversity, for the citizens in Torp.

Every school in Torp was its own unit in 1992, with its own budget. The schools received the money in a lump-sum, through the vouchers in relation to how many pupils the schools enrolled, and it was the task for the schools, or the head teachers, to keep their budgets. When the economic decisions were decentralised to the schools, they had to determine more or less everything about the daily running of the schools. E.g. if cuts had to be made from a financial perspective, it was a responsibility for the head teachers. This was obviously a convenient solution for the politicians, since the decisions on what cuts to make were taken by the schools instead of the politicians at the central level.

Moreover a new order was introduced between the different public actors in the municipality; they had to buy and sell services from each other. For instance, the schools had to pay rent to a special department in the municipality that was responsible for the public premises in Torp. The rent was supposed to be adjusted to the situation on the market in the municipality and every school was “assessed” from different aspects and the schools with the highest standard had to pay more in rent for each m².

If the schools did not manage to pay the rent they had two options. Firstly, enrol more pupils, which would increase the revenues. Secondly, reduce the costs for the premises by trying to rent some other buildings, a measure which obviously was not easy, or rent a smaller part of the school. The last alternative has been chosen over the tears by a couple of the schools in order to reduce the costs for the premises.
There were also other services in the municipality that the schools had to pay for. Financial administration, cleaning and so on was now an affair for the school to decide upon. The schools obviously needed those services, but the head teacher could decide where to buy them. The schools could buy them from a department within the municipality or buy it from a private company. It was not just the schools that had to compete for customers; even other administrative bodies in Torp had to face the new market oriented organisation in the municipality.

Over the years, the system of buying and selling services has been further “developed” and since the middle of this decade all lower secondary schools buy their school meals from an external private company which is responsible for the personnel as well as serving the school meals in the schools’ canteens. In this case the schools cannot decide what company they want to purchase this service from since there is legislation that regulates this type of affairs due to the amount of money involved. For instance, in 2006 school G paid about 2.8 million SEK to the company that provided the school meals to the school. However, it is permitted by legislation for the head teacher to decide, if the school itself shall take over the responsibility for the school meals, and the personnel, if he or she prefers this option. Some of the primary schools have used this alternative in order to reduce costs for the school meals and they seem so far to be pleased with this arrangement.

4.3.3 The voucher system and the school finances

The next innovation in the market oriented system was the voucher system. Every pupil/parent got the right to choose school and with every pupil a certain amount of money went to the school that was chosen. In 1992, the voucher was worth about 42,000 SEK, in 1998, 53,670 SEK, and in 2003, 64,700 SEK, for a pupil in lower secondary school (Torp, Budget figures 1992, 1998, 2003).

Every month the schools got, and still get, money for each pupil in the school. If a pupil moved to another school or if the school got new pupils, from one month to another, it would immediately affect the economy of the school. The voucher system therefore led to a situation where the economy of the school to a very large extent was dependent on the number of pupils the school could recruit. In 1997 the vouchers constituted about 85-90 % (Torp, School budgets 1997) of the lower
secondary schools’ revenues in Torp, which reveals how important it was, and still is, to recruit enough pupils.

Apart from the vouchers, there were basically two ways for the schools to get additional revenues. Firstly, every school was classified, from one to five, on the basis of socio-economic criteria, see section 6.1.2, and the schools in high status areas did not receive any money from the municipality and the schools in low status areas got the most. The basic thought behind this idea was that these allowances from the municipality should increase the equality between the schools from different social areas. In areas with many immigrants and social problems, schools had to give the pupils more support in different subjects resulting in an increase in the costs for these schools. Secondly, the schools could also apply for more resources for pupils with special learning needs. The money that the schools got for these pupils was, however, earmarked and could not be used for any other purpose. Even if these two allowances from the municipality were important for the schools, the basic revenues came from the vouchers. However, at the beginning of this decade the rules changed and the politicians argued that the free choice of school had lead to a situation with pupils attending schools outside their living areas. Therefore, the system of socio-economic allowances based on the schools’ location was abandoned and replaced by more individual resources for pupils with special learning needs. Due to this change of the rules, the schools depended even more on the vouchers; in 2003, 95-97 % of the lower secondary schools revenues came from the vouchers (Torp, School budgets, 2003).

Another financial innovation introduced at the beginning of the 1990s was that schools with surpluses in their budgets got the opportunity to reserve the surplus for the coming year. On the other hand, schools with deficits were forced to start the next budget year with a minus. Both the surpluses and the deficits were transferred to 100 % to the following year and it was very problematic for the schools that were not able to keep their budgets to start their financial planning with a minus in the budget. There were only two options for these schools; either reduce the school costs by making cuts or increase the revenues by recruiting more pupils. The latter was obviously a more pleasant way for the schools to go, and the schools in Torp began to develop strategies in order to attract more pupils. A paradox in this context is that it was not possible for all schools in the municipality to increase the number of pupils. If one school managed to get more students, another school had to loose since the number of children was limited. For example,
809 pupils began their studies in lower secondary schools in Torp in the autumn term 1998 (Torp, statistics 1998). If one or two schools were “winners” and got more pupils than expected, the other schools got fewer since the number of children in this age group was 809, and consequently, the latter schools were “losers”.

However, in 2001 the rules for surpluses and deficits in the schools’ budgets were changed, with consequences for the schools’ finances. This will be more discussed thoroughly later, but to describe it shortly: surpluses and deficits in the budgets were not automatically transferred to the following year and the schools became, from a financial point of view parts of the same concern. This was a strategy for the municipality to decrease the economic imbalance in the educational sector of Torp. Previously schools with surpluses could use them the following budget year, while schools with deficits should repay them the following year. However, it was impossible for schools with large deficits to repay old debts and this lead to escalated economic problems for the educational sector as a whole.

Anyway, the schools were responsible for their own finances and had to find ways to recruit more pupils. One strategy used by the schools was to create attractive pedagogic profiles. Sports, drama, natural science are examples of profiles that have been developed in the lower secondary schools in Torp since the 1990s as a way to attract more pupils. Another strategy to recruit more students since 1992 has been marketing. Advertising in newspapers, letters to the pupils/parents, and so on, were ways for the schools to reach their potential “customers”. The school catalogue and the evenings of information were, and still are, probably the most important means in the schools’ marketing. The catalogue is sent out to every parent/pupil in the municipality during the autumn. An information evening is a meeting when the parents and the pupils are invited to the schools before the choice of school takes place.

4.3.4 The free choice

The third innovation introduced in 1992 was the free choice of school. Previously the pupils were enrolled in the school closest to their home address, in the catchment area, but now the parents could choose which school they wanted for their children. They could choose between the public and the independent alternatives in Torp or select a school
in another municipality. In Torp, there were no independent lower secondary schools to choose from, when the system was introduced in 1992, since all schools for this age group were community schools. At the beginning of the 2000s, the first independent schools for lower secondary were established, and even if they have recruited about 11.5% (www.skolverket, 2007a) of the pupils of the lower secondary pupils in 2003, the competition for pupils has been mainly an affair between the community schools, even if some schools have lost pupils to independent competitors. It is, however, important to notice that Torp’s population had increased from 1992 to 2003, which for the community schools has reduced the pressure from the independent schools.

Even if the pupils have the right to choose a new school each year, the basic choice is made, when they begin in the first grade at the age of seven, and when they begin at lower secondary school at the age of thirteen years. There are of course a small number of pupils who move to another school every year, but the basic choice is made on these two occasions. This means that the choice has become very important both for the pupils and the schools, since a pupil that chooses a school, in general stays there until it is time to start at a new level.

As previously mentioned the school catalogue was sent out to the families in the autumn. The catalogue consisted of a short introduction where its purpose was presented as well as a description of the choice procedure. It also contained a presentation of each school in the municipality. The text was written by the personnel in the schools and was supposed to be a help before the choice was made. At the end of the catalogue there was an application form which the parent should fill in and send to the school they had chosen. More than a decade later the annual edition of the catalogue looks basically the same, as it did in 1992. For the lower secondary schools the information of each school has been supplemented in the catalogue from 2000 and onwards with statistics of the pupils’ grades. During this decade the school catalogue has been provided with other statistical material like results on national tests as well as information of how pleased the parents are with the education in their child’s school. Every year a questionnaire is sent out to the parents giving them the opportunity to answer several questions about the performance of the school; the results are then published on the web-site of Torp as well as in the school catalogue.

The statistical material presented in the school catalogue reflects the issue of openness, another key concept, besides diversity, advocated by
the political majority in the municipality.

The school catalogue was, and still is, one important source of information for the parents; another was, and is, the evening of information. During these evenings, the parents and the pupils had, and still have, the opportunity to talk to the teachers and other personnel in the school. Many pupils/parents made their choice on the basis of these meetings. The information evenings have perhaps become even more important for the schools over the years; the number of attending parents has increased. When the first information evening was held in school G in 1992, about 40-50 parents visited this school. Ten years later the number had increased to about 300 parents, an indication of the development of the importance of these evenings for the schools.

During the period 1992 to 2002 the parents/pupils made their choice by sending in an application to the school of their preference. The point was, and still is, that every family should make an active choice instead of handing over the decision to the authorities. The parents/pupils had to make two choices and if the first school was oversubscribed, the application was sent to the next school. If the pupils/parents did not choose a school they were contacted by the central administration in Torp urging them to make a choice. After this contact there could still be a few pupils that had not made any choice and they were placed by the central administration in the nearest school that was not oversubscribed. It is important to mention that even if a pupil did not choose a school, he or she had, and has, always the right to get a place in a school in the neighbourhood.

In 2003 the system changed and instead of sending in an application to the school they wanted to attend, the pupils/parents should make the choice by e-mail. The pupils/parents had, and still have, to make three choices of school in case the first two schools are oversubscribed. Critics in Torp claimed, when the system was introduced, that the inequality would increase due to the fact that not all families had access to computers. Although parents could get help in schools and libraries with the choice, many argued that choice over the net would make it much more difficult for pupils from deprived areas. Even if there were some initial problems during the first year, the numbers of pupils/parents that have made their choice during the stipulated time, which was, and still is, about one month, were about 95 % in 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Although it was possible to choose any of the schools in Torp, most of the pupils selected a school close to where they lived in 1992. This
is still the situation, although it is evident that the number of pupils that choose another school has increased since the system was initiated. It is in this context important to know that even small changes in the mobility among the pupils can be essential for the school finances. For instance if ten children were to choose another school than the closest one the financial consequences are severe. The voucher had a value of about 64,700 SEK in 2003 which meant that a loss of ten pupils would decrease the revenues by more than 600,000 SEK. Given that some of the costs: books, school meals etc., for the school will be lower, it will result in a substantial economic reduction. The school that received ten more pupils will, on the other hand, get much better finances.

One aspect of the free choice, that can be problematic for the system to deal with, emerges if a school cannot enrol all pupils that apply for a place. The school is either very popular or there can be many children in the neighbourhood resulting in more applications than the school can handle. In this situation there are rules, decided by the politicians stating that the pupil who lives nearest to the school shall get the place provided that an active choice has been made during the stipulated time of the school choice.

If the parents/pupils fill in the application too late, the child is not guaranteed a place in the school of their preference despite living in the catchment area; if the school is oversubscribed the pupil will get a place in another school they have chosen given that this school has available places. The five per cent of the pupils that have not made any choice are placed by the central administration in the nearest school with available places. When the school is oversubscribed is also an issue that has been delegated to the head teachers in the school to decide.

There are, however, two related problems, regarding the choice that also need to be mentioned, when a school in Torp gets too many applications: the “borders” of the catchment area and the principle that regulates which school is the nearest for a pupil. There are no fixed catchment areas in the municipality, hence the borders vary from one year to another and it is the school leaders in the oversubscribed school that decide which pupils that they must say no to, since the decision to determine when the school is oversubscribed has been delegated to the head teachers. The situation is complicated moreover by the rules stipulating that it is the distance to the next community school, den relativanärligprincipen, regulation which pupils will get a place in an oversubscribed school (Torp, Välja skola, 2002).
For example, see figure 4.2 below, pupil A has three kilometres to school X and six kilometres to school Y, while pupil B has two kilometres to school X and three kilometres to school Y, and both of them have chosen school X as their first choice of school and school Y as their second choice. According to the rules, pupil A will get the place in this school because the distance to school Y is much longer than for pupil B. This case is clear, given the rules, but there are examples with more or less the same distance to both schools for several pupils making it almost impossible for the school leaders to decide which pupils have the right to get their first choice of school. Nevertheless, the leaders have to make a decision and it happens every year that parents complain if it has been negative for their children about the result of the choice. Some of the parents even measures the distance to the school in order to find out if the school has handled the admission correctly, other parents contact the administrators or politicians at municipality level in order to get the school to change the decision.

Figure 4.2 Den relativa närhetsprincipen (regulation which pupils will get a place in an oversubscribed school)
Over the years it has been possible for schools to expand their premises, if the schools have been oversubscribed, or invest in new buildings. But since the single school has been responsible for this investment, it has not been a realistic alternative since the revenues from more pupils have not covered the costs for a new building, the rent, cleaning, new furniture, and so on. The risk emerging from an expansion of the premises has also been substantial, since it is impossible to predict what will happen in the future; will this school be as popular in the following years? Will an independent school be established in the neighbourhood? What will the demographic development look like?

Even if it has been possible, at least theoretically, for schools to reduce the costs for the premises by renting a smaller part of the school buildings, in reality it is a more complicated process. There could for instance be special classrooms in this building that must be replaced in the remaining part of the school which costs money. It is a process that takes time since the department responsible for the premises must find new tenants; some schools have all their classrooms in the same building and so on. However, it is an option for the schools in Torp, and a couple of the schools have managed to reduce their renting costs with this measure, although it has been a time consuming and complicated process.

The school system of Torp will be discussed more later in this study, when the results of the interviews are presented.

4.4 Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been, firstly, to describe briefly how the Swedish educational system is organised as well as to provide the historical development towards decentralisation and market forces within this sector; secondly, to present the same kind of information for the educational system of Torp.

It is evident that the highly centralised educational system of Sweden restructured at the beginning of the 1990s changed towards a situation with substantial local freedom, of which the school system in Torp is an example.

Looking at the five domains of decentralisation, according to Murphy (1991), previously discussed in section 2.3.2, it seems evident that all these five aspects are valid in the Swedish educational system in general and in schooling in Torp in particular.
Chapter Five

England and Villa - the School System

In this chapter a brief presentation of the school system in England and Villa will be made. The purpose is to provide a picture of the complex English school system as well as to describe how schooling was organised in Villa in 2003/2004, when this study was conducted. The presentation will start with the English school system.

5.1 The English School System

5.1.1 A historical background

In 1870 compulsory primary education for children aged 5 to 12 years became available in England. Up to the 1940s, secondary schools charged fees and secondary education was not free for all children until the 1944 Education Act was introduced (Sammons et al., 2003). Three types of schools formed the basis of this education act: Grammar, for the most talented pupils, selected after examinations at the age of 11; Technical, which focused on vocational education; and Secondary Modern, for those pupils seen as less academically suited. However, in the 1960s and 1970s this system was abandoned since socially disadvantaged groups were under-represented in both Grammar schools and at university level (ibid.). This was seen as both a waste of talent and inequitable and led to demands for comprehensive reforms, like the one just mentioned, with the focus on increasing the opportunities for all pupils.

In the late 1970s the newly elected Conservative government led by Mrs. Thatcher began to implement the idea of more choice in schooling. From 1982 the right to express a preference for a school was introduced and the LEAs (The Local Education Authorities) in England were obliged to take the parents’ preferences into account. However, the LEAs still maintained the control over the distribution of school places in the area, which meant that they could say no to the parents’ choices if it was negative either for the community or for some less-popular schools in the area (ibid.).

The 1988 Education Act introduced several changes in order to reinforce market forces in the English school system. E.g. a decentralised system replaced the old system, but it is important to notice that the
latter included elements of decentralisation, as has been mentioned previously and the new system aspects of centralisation, which will be discussed later.

However, pupils were given the opportunity to choose between state schools and private schools, as well as to choose between the state schools (Falkner, 1997; Walford, 2003).

Walford (2003) argues that the idea to give the parents the opportunity to make a choice was initiated in the 1944 Education Act, enabling parents to make wishes regarding the religious denomination of schools, but not make choices between individual schools. He also claims that prior to the 1980s the opportunity to choose a particular school was mainly available for families willing to pay high fees for private schools (ibid.).

However, besides the extended parental right to choose a school, in 1988 the conservative government in Britain also introduced a national curriculum and national tests for the pupils. All secondary schools, and some primary got control over their budgets and the opportunity for the pupils-parents to choose school was extended (Daun, 1993). Market forces (choice and competition) became important features in the new educational system.

Since these innovations were introduced in 1988, the competition between the schools in Britain, according to Ball (1990) has increased. The schools’ responsibility for their budgets has resulted in a new climate in the education sector. The openness has disappeared, resulting in less influence for the parents. If the pupils and the parents are not satisfied with their school they must chose another school (ibid.). The schools have created new pedagogic profiles in order to get more pupils. The competition has forced the schools to invest in marketing like any commercial company in order to attract more customers. Critics claim that in the competition for pupils an attractive profile can be more important than good quality in education (ibid.). The decentralised system has even affected the teachers in the schools. The pressure on the teachers has increased as a consequence of the competition. A school cannot afford to have teachers that are not successful or competitive in the struggle for more pupils (ibid.).

England, as mentioned above, has restructured its educational system towards decentralisation, market forces and competition. The reasons for this development are similar to the ones in the United States. There were two reasons that motivated necessary changes in the educational sector: the budget situation and the fact that education was considered
to be very important in the strategy for economic growth in a global economy (Daun 1996). Educational decline was another factor. The government expenditures on education had increased without any improvement in student achievement. The system was furthermore considered to be difficult to influence from the central level due to the power of the LEAs. This caused demands for pedagogical alternatives as well as a different steering system for the schools (ibid.).

The parallel development in the United States is evident even from an ideological or political point of view. Beare and Boyd (1993) argue that the development in England is similar to the one in the United States. In both countries reports that advocated changes in the governing of schools resulted in new directives for the educational systems. In the United States it was “A Nation at Risk”, as previously mentioned and in England it was the “Taylor Report” in 1977 that initiated the changes. Both countries were also ruled by conservative governments during the 1980s, Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in England, even if the “Taylor Report” was initiated during the Labour government in 1977.

Labour came into power in 1997 with a strong ambition to focus on educational issues in general and to raise standards in every school in particular. According to Levacic (2003), the Labour government used the same model of managing the educational system that was developed by the previous Conservative Government with the focus on considerable management autonomy at school level as well as monitoring performance targets by using national tests at different school levels.

5.1.2 Organisation

The school system is divided into primary, secondary, further and higher education with compulsory education lasting for 11 years. Statutory ages are between 5 to 16 years and most pupils transfer from primary to secondary level at the age of 11 years. There exists in some parts of England, for instance in Villa, a system of middle schools for the pupils leaving primary school at the age of 8 or 9 and attending at primary level for four years, and after that they begin at secondary level at the age of 12 or 13 years (www.teachernet, 2004a).

Under the Education Reform Act of 1988, four Key Stages to education were established and these are as follows:
Key Stage 1: 5 to 7 years old
Key Stage 2: 7 to 11 years old
Key Stage 3: 11 to 14 years old
Key Stage 4: 14 to 16 years old

At the end of each key stage the pupils are assessed by National Curriculum tests and the assessments at key stage 4 leads to a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The results of the latter are then presented in performance tables for each school in England and these tables are often presented in local newspapers showing the results of each school in the area become.

After having completed the GCSEs the pupils have the option to continue their studies at school or college or to undertake employment (ibid.).

The administration of education
In England there are a number of bodies involved in the administration of education both at the national and local level. The responsibility for formulation of national education policy rests with the Secretary of State for Education together with a team of Education Ministers supported by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The LEAs administer the system at the local level and play an important role in this context even if the powers and responsibilities of the LEAs have been significantly reduced from 1988 and onwards (Sammons et al. 2003). There are 152 LEAs in England and they have a statutory duty to organise and provide public education in their area. The LEAs vary considerably in size due to the number of pupils and schools they are responsible for, but the LEAs are all lead by elected politicians and are a part of the Local Authorities (LAs) in England.

According to Vowles (2003), the Tory policy on education, from the mid-1980s, was to break the power of the LEAs which they saw, together with the teachers, as primarily responsible for the failings of schools. The penalty for this failure was therefore to remove the direct responsibility for local schools from the LEAs. Vowles (ibid.) further claims that the Education Act of 1988 was an inconvertible paradox with some of the innovations following a free market track with more local responsibility and accountability, decentralisation, whilst the National Curriculum, testing and assessment arrangements, earmarked central funding, and so on, were examples of increased control from the central government, centralisation.
Assessment and inspection

Besides the national tests mentioned above, inspections of schools also initiated in 1988, is another way to monitor educational standards in the schools of England. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) has a quality assurance function and is responsible for inspections of the state schools and LEAs and the former should be inspected at least every six years until the middle of this decade. The OFSTED is a non-ministerial government department accountable to the Parliament and they claim that their independence means that the inspections provide impartial information about the quality of education. (www.ofsted, 2007).

According to the government’s website, teachernet.gov.uk, the intention of the inspection is to help the schools improve by presenting a report presenting their strengths and weaknesses (www.teachernet, 2004a).

According to Linda Ellis (2007) a former Inspector of the Schools for the state system, the inspections were changed in 2004 and instead of being inspected every sixth year, the schools should be inspected every third year. Apart from the changing of the interval the form and contents of the inspection were also changed. Prior to 2004 the inspections were organised as follows:

- large inspection teams were sent out to the schools including subject and aspect inspectors
- schools were given up to a year’s notice of inspection
- the result were reports of over 60 pages

Ellis claims that the inspections were very tough, especially for schools with poor quality, and that the years’ notice from OFSTED about the inspections often created a lot of pressure among the personnel at the schools (ibid.). However, the system changed and since 2004 the current inspection arrangements looks as follows:

- inspections every three years
- emphasis on school evaluation
- short notice for the schools, sometimes only 2-3 days
- improved access to information on schools for parents
- short reports, not more than four to six pages
Key factors in the new arrangements are self-evaluation with a parental questionnaire as one tool for the schools. The inspectors will be in the school for no more than two days, and the inspectors will concentrate on the things that really matter to the school. Ellis claims (ibid.) that the schools are more pleased with the new “light” version of the inspections and that the pressure on the personnel has decreased as a result of both the short notice as well as the change of contents.

The National Curriculum

During the 1970s the schools taught more or less the same subjects, although with considerable local variations, only Religious education was legally required. English, mathematics and physical education were taught in all schools, but with varying time devoted to these subjects. Other subjects like music, history, and science, were to a large extent optional for the pupils and many girls opted out of science while the boys were more inclined to opt out of foreign languages (Sammons et al., 2003).

During the 1980s, this local freedom was abandoned and through the Education Reform Act (1988) a new National Curriculum was introduced. The Education Act provided a national core curriculum with three core subjects, mathematics, science and English, together with seven compulsory foundation subjects: modern foreign language, history, geography, art technology, music and physical education. For each foundation subject, detailed descriptions were formulated about Attainment Targets for pupils at each key stage. A huge amount of documentation was produced, providing guidance to the schools on all the areas of the new National Curriculum. However, an increased workload as well as lack of time for teachers led to demands of changes in the curriculum and an overview was conducted which resulted in: ..”a ‘slimming down’ of the curriculum and much simpler statutory testing programmes” (Sammons et al. p. 90, 2003). The reformation of the curriculum from the mid 1990s resulted in both the use of teacher assessment as well as the more important statutory assessments in English and mathematics, conducted with the purpose of making comparisons between schools since teacher assessments were considered less reliable.

Despite the changes from 1988, according to Sammons et al. (ibid.), the introduction of the national curriculum can be seen as a part of a strong centralisation trend from the mid 1990s.
**School funding**

In 1990 the policy of Local Management of Schools (LMS), under the 1988 Education Reform Act, was introduced in England which intended to decentralise decision making and to delegate budgeting to the school level. Previously the responsibility for equipment, staffing, books, internal maintenance and so on was a task for the LEAs, but now the these matters were an affair for the schools and consequently the power of the LEAs was much reduced. The LMS policy also focused on more parental choice of school with the intention that school budgets be linked to the number of pupils that the school could enrol; consequently, popular schools should be rewarded and unpopular penalised. From 1993, the LEAs had to ensure that at least 80% of school funding was based on the number of pupils in the schools. The cash allocation differed with the pupils’ age and secondary pupils attracted more funds than primary pupils (Sammons *et al*, 2003).

In 2003 the schools’ funding came mainly from the LAs (local authorities) which received Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from central government for about 75% of their expenditures on local services. This RSG is a complicated formula and the central government decides how much money the LAs can spend on each of its services and until 2003 the LEAs could spend more or less on education than the amount the LAs got from the central government. But in 2003 a new finance system was introduced which gave the DfES the power to force a LEA to increase the school budgets, if the budget was considered to be inadequate.

Levacic (2003) describes this innovation not as a major reform but as a further stage in the evolution started by the Education Reform Act of 1988, where the reform of 2003 clarifies "the schools’ entitlement to a basic amount of funding per pupil" (Levacic, 2003 p. 1). Schools can also receive extra funding if they become a specialist school (see below) or if they are located in a socially deprived area under the Education Act Zone (EAZ) programme.

Even if LMS led to increased powers and responsibilities for the schools the trend towards more centralisation, due to increased assessments and the national curriculum, was evident. According to Sammons *et al.* (2003), the devolution of power to local level combined with more centralism in other aspects has created a tension in the educational system since the 1990s.

The power of the LEAs was consequently reduced at the local level and the introduction of grant maintained (GM) schools during
this decade was another innovation, further diminishing the role of the LEAs. The GM schools got a very independent role, since they were encouraged to ‘opt out’ of LEA control. But they were “taken back” under the LEAs as Foundation schools after Labour won the election in 1997. The new government also focused on raising standards, but had the strategy to encourage collaboration between schools, rather than competition, with an increased diversity as a strategy in order to achieve better results (ibid.). Although the current government has had a strategy to focus more on partnership and creating networks between schools, it is important to notice that choice arrangements still exist in the English school system and that competition is a reality.

5.1.3 Types of schools in England

There are three categories of schools under the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998: Community, Foundation, and Voluntary (divided into Controlled and Aided schools). Schools in all categories have a lot in common; they receive funding from LEAs, they have to deliver the national curriculum, and they work in partnership with other schools, but there are also differences:

Community schools: The LEA owns the schools’ buildings and land and also has the responsibility for deciding the arrangements for admitting pupils as well as employing the personnel.

Foundation schools: The governing body or a charitable foundation owns the schools’ land and buildings and are also responsible for admission arrangements as well as employing the schools staff.

Voluntary aided: In this type of schools, of which many are church schools, the buildings and the land are normally owned by a charitable foundation. The governing body contributes funding of the capital costs of running the school; most of these schools are linked either to the Roman Catholic Church or to the Church of England, but there are also schools linked to other faith groups.

Voluntary Controlled: These schools are almost always church schools and the buildings and the land are often owned by a charitable foundation, but the LEA has the primary responsibility for admission
arrangements and for employing the school staff (www.teachernet, 2004b).

As previously mentioned, the new Labour Government focused on increasing the diversity in the English school system and one example of this was the emphasis on Specialist schools. This programme was introduced in 1994 and over the years has become a way for the government not only to increase the diversity, but also to raise standards in schooling. It is possible for any maintained secondary school in England to apply to be designated as a specialist school in one of eight specialist areas: languages, sports, technology, arts, business and enterprise, technology, engineering, science, and mathematics and computing. It is also possible for the schools to combine two specialities. The programme is intended to help schools reach their targets to raise standards in partnership with private sector sponsors and by additional government funding.

Independent schools: These schools are sometimes called private, but this is, according to Sammons et al. (2003), a misleading term since most of them are not privately owned. These schools are free of local or central control and funding and they charge student fees, but very able pupils from poorer families can get scholarships. A typical fee level for a secondary pupil varies from £6,000-£12,000 per year, but the most prestigious schools charge even more (ibid.). Some of the independent schools are boarding schools, with the pupils living at the school during the terms while others schools have day pupils. In some schools they enrol both categories of pupils.

There are also other types of schools in the English school system like Grammar Schools, academically oriented secondary schools for 11 to 18 year olds. This type of school selects almost all of their pupils by reference to high academic ability (www.teachernet, 2004a; Bullivant & Wallis, 1999).

5.2 The School System of Villa

In the following a short presentation of the school system of Villa will be made, but first the county will be described briefly.
5.2.1 Villa – some facts

Villa is a county located not so far from London with little more than 500,000 inhabitants. It consists of both rural and urban areas with both small villages and towns; the largest town has a population of about 200,000 inhabitants. From a socio-economic point of view the county was described as average by administrators on the LEA, and a little more than 85% of the population is white and the largest ethnic minority group comes from South Asia (about eight per cent of the population) (Wikipedia, 2007). When this study was conducted there was a conservative majority in the county.

5.2.2 The school organisation

Three stages
Unlike many other counties in England, see above, Villa has three different stages in their school system. This organisation was introduced after the Education Act 1998:

- lower schools age 5-8 years
- middle schools age 9-13 years
- upper schools age 13-18 years

Transfer to upper school
In Villa, pupils normally transfer to upper school after the age of 13+ (year 8) and all parents to children attending middle schools in Villa receive an application form and an information booklet at the start of year 8 with an explanation of the arrangements for applying for a place. It is also possible for the parents to apply for a school place online instead of using the application form. The time plan and the process for the choice of school look as follows:

September: information on upper school transfers is provided to the parents through the child’s middle school
October: schools have their open evenings presenting themselves to interested parents
November: the application transfer form must be returned to the child’s middle school or an application online must have been made
March: the outcome of the application will be sent to the parents.
In other parts of England children normally transfer to a secondary school at the end of year 6 (11+), but this is not an option in Villa. If parents want to enrol their children in a secondary school after year six, they have to apply for a place in another local authority area since Villa only have upper schools that enrolls pupils at the age of 13.

**Catchment area**
The children from every village and town in Villa belong to a certain catchment area, normally the nearest school in the neighbourhood; in addition foundation schools as well as voluntary aided schools do not serve a designated catchment area and have their own admission rules. Pupils that move into the area after the admission is completed are not guaranteed a place in the catchment area, if the school is oversubscribed. Parents have the right to express their preferences for a school outside the catchment area, but places can only be offered if the school is not oversubscribed. If the parents make their application late, or if they do not send in an application at all, a place will normally be offered at the nearest school with places available. The issue of choice outside the catchment and its consequences will be discussed further in another section.

**School governors**
When the LMS was introduced at the beginning of the 1990s the powers and role of School Governing Bodies increased (Sammons et al., 2003). This governing body is a local school board and the governors have three key roles:

- a monitoring and accountability role with the focus on school improvement
- a critical friend role to support the work of the head teacher
- a strategic role to provide a sense of direction for the work of the school.

According to Sammons *et al.* (2003) it was possible for the governing bodies in 2003 to choose their one size, but at least one third of the places should be taken by parents and one third by staff employed at the school. The rest of the governors come from the LEA and the local business community.

In Villa, the governing bodies of the schools in this study had an average of about 18 persons with larger schools having more governors than the smaller ones.
5.2.3 The finances of the schools

“No voucher system”
When this study was conducted, Villa did not have any voucher system, according to the Chief Education Officer. However, the schools got money for every pupil they enrolled, based on, as the administrators described it, a complex formula with many components like the number of pupils the school enrolled, the ages of the pupils, the number of ethnic minorities as well as the socio-economic background among the pupils. Consequently, the system is similar to the one in Torp, even if it was not described as a voucher system.

Funding
The finances were rather good until the beginning of this decade, but recently schools all over England have had problems due to under funding from the government, claimed one of the LEA administrators in Villa. The funding for schooling works in the same way as previously described; and the funding in England, grants from the state to the Local Authorities, vary from one part to another and Villa was described, even in this context, as average nationally.

5.3 Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to present the complex English educational system as well as to describe how schooling was organised in Villa, when this study was conducted in 2003/2004.

It is evident that the English educational system prior to 1988 had aspects of decentralisation and the local LEAs had substantial local influence on schooling. The reforms of 1988 could therefore not be described only as a transition from centralisation to decentralisation. The description provided by Vowles (2003) of the Education Act from 1988 seems relevant in this context. Some of the innovations followed a free market track with more local responsibility and accountability, decentralisation; whilst the National Curriculum, the OFSTED-inspections, earmarked central funding were examples of increased central control from the government, centralisation.
Part Two
Chapter Six

The Schools in Torp as Seen by the School Leaders

The purpose of this chapter is to describe, discuss and analyse the seven lower secondary schools in Torp.

6.1 The Schools – a Presentation

6.1.1 Background

The description of the schools is based mainly on the interviews and partly on some of the official documents from the municipality. Every school will be described shortly regarding the following aspects: geographical location – general information, economic outcome and pedagogical profiles. The financial situation and pedagogical issues concerning the units will be more thoroughly discussed later.

6.1.2 The socio-economic index

As previously mentioned, prior to the year 2001, every school in Torp was graded from 1-5, based on a socio-economic index. This grading regulated the allowances that a school could receive from the municipality, apart from the vouchers and grants for pupils with special needs. This classification related to the social background of the pupils. The purpose was to distribute more allowances to schools located in low status areas. The lower secondary schools were graded as follows:
Table 6.1  Socio-economic classification of the schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>SEK/pupil and year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Söderqvist, 1999)

The table shows that none of the lower secondary schools in Torp in 1998 had a higher classification than 3. School F was previously categorised as a school that belonged to group 5, but the development of this school during the second half of the 1990s resulted in a different rating. This system was, however, abandoned in 2001 because the politicians argued that the free choice had changed this socio-economic pattern in the schools and consequently a new system had to be introduced, see section 4.3.3.

Even if this index was not valid during the period 2001-2003 it is interesting because the table above shows that there were no larger socio-economic differences between the lower secondary schools in Torp in 2001.

6.1.3 School A

Geographical location-general information

School A is situated in a high status area on the outskirts of Torp. This part of the municipality is one of the most fashionable in the whole Stockholm area. The house prices are very high and the level of income is among the highest in Sweden and almost every family live in their own house and the number of blocks of flats is limited.

Finances

The school has both a lower secondary and a higher secondary section within its premises, which until 1995 were two separate units. The lower secondary sector was financially successful during the period
1994-1999 while the period from 2000-2003 shows totally different figures (see tables 7.5 and 7.6).

According to the leaders there were several reasons why they lost pupils at the beginning of this decade: it was difficult to maintain a good standard when the school was oversubscribed, no profile classes, the competing schools improved and so on. This demonstrates that a school in the most affluent area must perform well and be open to demands from parents/pupils in order to get enough pupils; it also shows how fast the financial situation of a school can change from one year to another.

**Pedagogical profile**

Unlike all the other lower secondary schools in Torp, school A did not start any profile classes during the 1990s in order to attract more pupils. During the last year of this decade, the personnel worked hard to increase the quality in the school (Söderqvist, 1999). The school started among other things, a pedagogical council among the teachers focusing on the issue to improve the pupils’ performances. They also limited the number of pupils in each class in order to increase the quality (Torp, Välja skola, 2000).

Obviously this was not enough because during the first years of the 2000s the school lost pupils to other lower secondary schools in the municipality and one of their strategies was to start profile classes in, for instance, sports and science in 2002 in order to attract new customers (Torp, Välja skola, 2002).

### 6.1.4 School B

**Geographical location – general information**

In the late 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s many children were born in Sweden. This so-called baby-boom has also affected Torp, even if the impact has been different from one area to another in the municipality. The area of Torp, where school B is situated, is an area that has experienced an increase in population in the last decades, partly due to the increasing birth rates and partly to the expanding house market in this part of the community. New houses have been built in the last few years, and old summer houses have been restructured to permanent standards.

Since the population has increased, many of the primary schools in
this area have been oversubscribed and consequently a new primary school, with a lower secondary section, was established in the late 1990s. However, the competition from this independent school has not been especially difficult for school B to handle.

**Finances**

School B has both a primary section as well as a lower secondary section within its premises and was until June 1998 two separate units. School B had from 1996 to 1998 its finances in balance, despite the fact that, during this period, it has lost pupils from its catchment area to the other lower secondary school, school G, in this part of Torp (Söderqvist, 1999).

As can be seen in table 6.8 the years from 1999 to 2002 were financially difficult for school B and the accumulated deficit during this period was more than 8.6 million SEK. In 2003 the unit managed to break the vicious circle and reached a small surplus for the first time since 1998. One explanation to this development can be found in their main competitor in this area, school G, unable to accept all applications in 2002 and 2003, because they were oversubscribed, and about 50 pupils each year could not get their first choice of school and instead got their next choice, which to almost 100% in this case was school B.

**Pedagogical profiles**

In the late 1990s the school introduced pedagogical profiles like special classes for sports and science and reduced the number of pupils in each class in order to meet the challenge from the other lower secondary schools in Torp.

### 6.1.5 School C

**Geographical location – general information**

Both school A and school B are situated on the outskirts of the municipality which can be both an advantage and a disadvantage in the choice of school, since most pupils choose the nearest school for many different reasons: they are satisfied with the school; it is convenient to attend the nearest school; the school in the neighbourhood is familiar; and so on. Despite this it is interesting to say something about how a school’s geographical location can affect the choice of school.
School C has a more central location in Torp than schools A and B. It is therefore easy for pupils to go to school C by public transport, from the outskirts of the municipality. It is, on the other hand, also easy for the pupils in the area to choose other alternatives due to the relatively short distance to some of the other lower secondary schools in the municipality. Within a radius of five kilometres from the school three other lower secondary schools are located. The worst competitor for school C, during the last three years has been school A. Pupils from a high status residential area that previously went to school C have instead chosen school A, resulting in large deficits in the former unit during the period 1994 to 1998. School C lost about 30 to 40 pupils each year from 1996 to 1998 with severe financial consequences (Söderqvist, 1999).

Why did the pupils from this area choose school A instead of school C in the late 1990s? Beside the obvious assumption that they, or their parents, thought that the former school provided a better or at least comparable education, the choice was also easy for practical reasons, because it was very convenient for many pupils in this area to go by train to school A. The train stops just outside the school and the time that it takes for the pupils to travel to the school is about the same for both units, which perhaps has been a disadvantage for school C.

On the other hand, school C managed to change the trend at the beginning of this decade despite the same logistics with the transportations, so it cannot be the only explanation to why the school lost pupils during the 1990s to school A, but it demonstrates that a school’s geographical location can be important, when the choice is made.

**Finances**

The school was until 1995 divided into a primary section and a lower secondary section and was one unit in 1996. The financial situation has been very problematic for the school during a large number of years and every year during the period 1992 to 2000 has resulted in deficits. The school has not been able to avoid deficits and had not survived without financial support from the central authorities in Torp. When the market oriented system was introduced in 1992, the plan was that the schools should be responsible for their own deficits and start the next year with a minus. This has not been possible to achieve because the deficits would have led to such large cuts for some of the schools that it would have been impossible to maintain a good standard in the
education.

Even so, the school made large cuts in order to get a more balanced economy, such as reducing a) the number of classrooms b) the number of teachers for children with special learning needs c) the cleaning costs by buying less cleaning d) the size of the school leader organisation and so on. Despite these measures, and other substantial savings, the school has not been able to get a balanced budget during the period mentioned above.

In 2001, the school managed, for the first time since the system was introduced, to reach a surplus of 1.2 million SEK, because they recruited a sufficient number of pupils.

Pedagogical profile

Since the late 1990s the school has created a model with a special profile for all classes instead of a system of both profile classes and “ordinary” classes and it has divided the classes into four different categories: maths/science, media, international, and music/dance. Consequently, all pupils choose a special profile in school C, not just a limited number which is the case in the schools that offer their pupils profile classes.

By this organisation school C managed to avoid a situation with many of the most motivated pupils making an active choice to a certain profile in the school while the others attended “ordinary” classes. The fact that not all pupils have chosen a profile has created problems in many cases. Normally, pupils that have made a choice of profile have been more motivated for studies than their peers in non-profile classes which has created a form of segregation many times between these types of pupils within the school.

6.1.6 School D

Geographical location – general information

This unit is one of the two schools in Torp that has only a lower secondary section. The trend in the municipality during the 1990s has otherwise been to create schools recruiting pupils from primary level to lower secondary level. In some cases this organisation has been logistically motivated since the primary school and the lower secondary school have been next door neighbours and sometimes
used the same premises. This school has, however, kept its old form of organisation, mainly because there is no primary school located in its neighbourhood.

School D is situated in an area of Torp that is isolated geographically from the other parts of the municipality; it is about ten kilometres to the nearest lower secondary school. School D is located in an area that can be described socially as “average” and it has both blocks of flats as well as residential areas. This part of Torp has a growing population and during the last years of the 1990s a number of new residential areas was established and the number of children expanded, as a consequence.

Its geographical location has been a problem so far for school D since its isolated location partly can explain why they have not been able to attract pupils from other areas in Torp over the years. The school has lost rather many pupils to other schools, most of all to school E, during this period and there could of course be a number of factors that have affected this development. According to the head teacher in this school, there are three explanations to the school’s recruiting problems:

Firstly, the pupils/parents were not satisfied with the quality of the education offered in the school. Secondly, as already mentioned, profile classes seem to be attractive to the students. In 1997, the choice of school showed that 38 of 128 pupils, from the catchment area of school D, wanted to begin in another school. School D managed to get 15 of them to return to the unit by starting profile classes, in sports and mathematics-science, which is further “evidence” of the popularity of profile classes. Thirdly, as already mentioned, the school’s geographical location was and is a problem. The head claimed that it was almost impossible to attract pupils from the central parts of Torp due to school D’s geographical location.

There are many examples of how pupils in upper secondary education prefer schools located in the central parts of Stockholm, while it is difficult to get enough pupils for the schools in the suburbs. The same trend seems to have been valid even in Torp for lower secondary pupils; schools with a central location seem to be more attractive since it is much more common that pupils living on the outskirts of Torp choose a school in the central part of the municipality than the opposite. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the schools’ geographical location from this perspective is essential. It seems to be easier for the pupils to travel to the central parts of the municipality than to go the other way.

Also school A is located on the outskirts of the municipality so why has not their geographical location been as problematic for them? One
of the school leaders in the former study (Söderqvist, 1999) suggested that the choice of school is a social marking. It is important for certain parents that their children attend a school in a high status area. The same school leader therefore argued that it was easier for school A to recruit pupils due to the social environment of the school. Schools in areas with more social problems must therefore work much harder to meet the competition from school located in affluent areas.

It would not be surprising if it was important for some parents to let their children attend a school in a high status area, but the development from 2000 to 2003 shows, as has already been mentioned, that even schools in affluent areas can be vulnerable to competition, even if school D probably has had more disadvantages of its geographical location than school A.

**Finances**

The finances were a big problem for school D during the whole period from 1994 to 1998, and the school had large deficits during the whole decade. The problem has continued during the next five years despite savings and assistance, of the same kind as for school C, from the authorities.

The loss of pupils to other schools has obviously affected the economy of the school. In the choice of school in 1997, they lost a substantial number of 23 pupils, about 18% of 128 of the pupils to other units. If these pupils had chosen school D, the revenues would have increased by more than 1.2 million SEK/year (roughly the costs for four teachers in 1997).

As previously mentioned, when the choice of school has been made, the pupils stay for three years in general, until it is time to move up to the next level in the education system. Therefore is it very important for the schools to convince the pupils to choose their school, when they begin in lower secondary school. School D lost more than 3.6 million SEK during this period in revenues due to these 23 pupils. Naturally the costs increase, if a school gets more pupils, but the revenues would in this case have been substantially bigger.

From 1999 to 2003 the financial situation has improved for the school to some extent, even if the period as a whole shows a deficit, and the school has been able to produce small surpluses for two years. As the population is growing in the area, the financial prognosis for the school seems to be good, since there will be many potential customers in the years to come.
Pedagogical profile

As already mentioned, one strategy of this school was to start profile classes in order to enrol more pupils to be able to meet the competition from the other schools. Sports and mathematics-science have been included in the school’s strategy in the struggle for more pupils and with the help of its profile classes, it has also been able to recruit pupils from other municipalities.

6.1.7 School E

Geographical location – general information

Like school D, this school recruits only lower secondary pupils for the same reasons. School E is situated in the central part of the municipality and the school is next door neighbour to the largest higher secondary school in Torp.

During the late 1990s the number of immigrants increased in the school because new blocks of flats were built in the late 1980s and a lot of immigrants moved in. One of the results was the change in the social and cultural composition of the school. The pupils with immigrant background were still a minority, but the school’s socio-economic classification (see above) was changed from category two to category three at the end of the last decade.

Another important fact worth mentioning is that the music-classes in the municipality are located in school E. The politicians in the municipality have decided that the pupils that attend the music-classes in the fourth grade in primary school shall continue their studies at lower secondary level in unit E. The music-classes have existed for a long time in Torp and are very popular. Pupils from the whole municipality apply to start in the fourth grade and the children that get the opportunity to start, normally continue in these classes until they have completed their compulsory education.

The music-classes are obviously a big advantage for school E. Every year the school enrols a number of pupils who must do it in unit E, if they want to continue in these classes. Even if these pupils have the opportunity to choose other lower secondary schools, it is very unusual that they choose this option. The school’s central location is very important in this context, since pupils from all the different areas in the municipality apply for places, and this explains why school E was given the opportunity to organise these profile classes.
Apart from the economic aspect, the pupils in these classes are positive to the school also in other regards. The students are motivated, they have good results on national tests, and they give status to the school, and so on.

**Finances**

As table 7.5 shows, the unit managed to get surpluses in its budgets during the period from 1994 to 1998, while the consecutive five years showed both surpluses and deficits.

There can be different explanations as to why a school financial outcome varies so much from one year to another, but the most common explanation for this school, as for the others, is of course that the schools do not have enough pupils, normally due to the number of pupils in the catchment area. Another important factor is the competition and the fact that pupils move to other schools for different reasons. It is especially difficult for the schools, if these drops in the number of pupils take place during the terms, since the organisation is normally planned for one year; while the costs are the same for teachers, cleaning, and the premises, the revenues are much lower.

**Pedagogical profile**

Apart from the music classes, the school also has a class with an international profile as well as a profile class in sports. (Torp, Välja skola, 2001) The latter, according to the school leaders, has been a very popular alternative and there are many applications for this class every year from the whole municipality. The pupils are then selected on the basis of a test, before they are approved to begin in the class and the school can choose talented pupils outside the catchment area.

This is not an option for the other lower secondary schools in the municipality, which offer profile classes and this fact is obviously an advantage for school E, when the choice of school is made.

### 6.1.8 School F

**Geographical location – general information**

This school is located relatively close, 2 to 3 kilometres, to school A, but if the latter is located in a high status area the opposite goes for school F. The area consists mostly of blocks of flats and there are
only small residential areas in this neighbourhood. Like schools A and D this unit is situated on the outskirts of Torp, even if the distance to the central part of the municipality is shorter than for school A, the geographical location of school F is problematic, based on the assumption that pupils prefer in general to travel to the central parts of the community.

This part of Torp also has a lot of immigrants, and until 1995 the school was rated 5 in the socio-economic classification indicating that the unit is located in a low status area. The school’s main competitor for pupils was, and is, furthermore school A situated in one of Sweden’s most affluent areas, school F’s opportunity to recruit pupils outside the neighbourhood was, and is, limited.

In the same year the municipality authorities decided that the school should get an international profile in order to break the negative trend. The school should be divided into two sections, one traditional Swedish and one international with the language of instruction in English. It was also decided that the school should recruit pupils from grade 1-9 and thus become a school for both primary and lower secondary pupils. There were mainly two reasons for this innovation; firstly, to break the social segregation that was beginning to be a problem for school F mainly because many of the middle-class parents in the area did not choose the school for their children. Secondly, to start an international school in this area was considered to raise the status of both the school and this part of the municipality.

**Finances**

Initially this innovation was a success, both in 1996 as well as in 1997 the schools managed to get surpluses in the budget, since they got so many pupils. The international sector received pupils from the whole Stockholm area, many of them had a high status background and children of diplomats and businessmen etc. were common in this section of the school and consequently the socio-economic index was changed from 5 to 3. Since the international sector of the school received many pupils from other parts of the Stockholm area, the Swedish sector was oversubscribed and school F managed to turn the negative financial trend (Söderqvist, 1999).

The financial situation was a huge problem for this school until the middle of the 1990s. The international profile was then the solution as more pupils resulted in a better economy. However, from 1999 and onward the financial problems have escalated for school F and it
has once again experienced a vicious circle that seems to be hard to break.

There are several plausible explanations to this development. Firstly the number of pupils in the area declined due to a diminishing population in this part of Torp. Secondly, many of the municipalities in the Stockholm area decided that they would not pay vouchers for pupils that wanted to attend schools outside of the home municipality. Thirdly, several competitors with an international profile were established, mostly all English Schools, in Stockholm during this period also made it more difficult to recruit pupils outside of Torp.

According to the heads in school F, a consequence of these new schools was both a drop of pupils to the international sector as well as fewer pupils with English as a mother tongue, since parents with this background preferred these types of schools for their children. This section of the school was still able to recruit pupils with high status background during this period, but they came from other countries than previously and their ability to speak English was not so good, hardly a positive factor in a comparison to the English schools in the Stockholm area.

In the Swedish section of the school, according to the same sources, it was more and more difficult to get the Swedish middle class pupils from the residential areas to choose this unit and consequently the number of pupils with this background were fewer and fewer, as can be seen in table 7.3 below. It would perhaps have been possible to change this vicious circle for the school, if the Education Act for Compulsory Schooling (Werner, 2004) had allowed pupils with a Swedish background to enrol in the international sector, but according to the rules, this type of education is only an option for pupils that stay in the country for a limited time, or if they have previously attended an English school.

There is moreover one big problem connected to the international section of the school. Since every unit in Torp is paid every month for the pupils, according to the voucher system, the schools’ finances can fluctuate from one month to another. This can be a problem for the other schools in the municipality as well, because children can move from the school. Anyway, in general the head-teacher of the school knows how much revenues the pupils will generate during the year. School F is an exception from this, because it is impossible for the school to know how long the pupils will stay in the international sector. The parents of these pupils can move from Stockholm or Sweden at very
short notice making it difficult to make budget plans for the school and, according to the school leaders, this has been a huge problem for school F.

**Pedagogical profile**

Beside the international sector, the school has started profile classes with more English on the time table and the teaching in some subjects is done in this language, but it has so far not been attractive enough to get pupils from other parts of Torp, to any larger extent, or to be an option for the middle class families in the area.

6.1.9 **School G**

**Geographical location – general information**

This school is situated in the same area as school B and, as previously mentioned, this part of Torp is growing, consequently many of the schools in the area are crowded and this expansion will continue and probably culminate at the end of this decade. School G is located on the outskirts of a traditional Swedish suburb of the 1970s with both blocks of flats and residential areas and was rated accordingly at the average level 3 in the socio-economic classification.

The school has experienced many reorganisations during the years, but is since 1994 a unit that recruits pupils from pre-school class to year nine. School G was one of the first units in the municipality that already in 1992 introduced profile classes. This innovation was very popular and many pupils have chosen the school just because of the opportunity to attend a profile class. In 1995 the unit introduced smaller classes with a maximum of 17 pupils (previously, there were about 25-30 pupils in the classes) in lower secondary, which was very popular and resulted in many pupils to the school. During the late 1990s, the school succeeded in getting more pupils from the residential areas in this part of Torp, and has recruited pupils from primary schools who by tradition have chosen school B.

School G received a lot of applications during the period 2000-2003 and has been an attractive alternative for the parents/pupils in the area. Looking at the year 2002, there were about 350 pupils in the area who began in year seven, 250 of them applied for a place in school G and 100 in school B. The former school was oversubscribed and could not
accept more than 200 pupils and therefore 50 of them had to accept the next school chosen, which tended to be school B.

It could seem like a very good situation for school G, and of course it was better to get too many applications than the opposite, but it also created a lot of problems. First, since the school was oversubscribed it was not possible to enrol all pupils. Many of those, who did not get a place in the school were very disappointed and many upset parents tried to get the school to change its decision. Second, in order to be able teach all the new pupils, since the number of new pupils was higher than the ones leaving for upper secondary, the school had to employ new teachers. Third, the school was more crowded which in general is a problem that should not be underestimated; a larger number of pupils can lead to a situation with the working environment deteriorating for both pupils and the personnel. The pupils will perhaps be more anonymous than previously. There can also be difficulties in designing a good timetable and so on. So even if the finances improved for school G, it would have been better for both schools, if they had got about 50% each of the applications. However, the system of choice can lead to these consequences.

**Finances**

This school has had strong finances during the period from 1994 to 2003, as can be seen in tables 7.7 and 7.8, and it is the only school among the lower secondary schools in the municipality that has been able to avoid large deficits. The school has been able to recruit many pupils and has managed to increase the number of pupils from 350 in 1995 to about 580 in 2003. The growing population in the area has obviously been an advantage to this school, but it cannot be the only explanation to the school’s popularity, given school B’s problems of attracting enough pupils during the same period. Further, the already mentioned independent school, which started in the late 1990s in this area of Torp, is located less than one kilometre from school G, but it has not so far affected school G’s opportunity to attract the pupils in this area.

**Pedagogical profile**

As mentioned above, this unit was one of the first to introduce profile classes in the municipality. Sports and drama were the first alternatives. A few years later came classes focused on science and English, and the
latter two have become the most popular options. The small classes have also been something that has attracted pupils; the opportunity to attend a class with a maximum of 17 pupils has obviously been popular.

6.1.10 Summary and conclusions of the presentation of the schools

The presentation above shows that a lot of factors the single school cannot affect are important, when the pupils/parents make a choice of school, like the units’ geographical location, the demographic situation, the legislation, decisions in other municipalities, the socio-economic situation in the catchment area and so on.

It also shows that a way to become more competitive, during the period 1994 to 2003, has been to introduce more profile classes; in the early 1990s there were only two profiles to choose from and in 2003 there were more than 20 available alternatives (Söderqvist, 1999; Torp, Välja skola, 2003). It is perhaps surprising that these classes have become so important in the competition, given that the only difference compared to an “ordinary” class is that the pupils have two or three more hours on the timetable each week in their profile subject, while they have a time reduction in some other subjects. But the evidence is clear; all the community schools have been forced over the years to introduce profile classes in order to meet the competition from the other schools.

Another interesting thing to notice, when the financial development of the schools is presented, is that the results have differed so much from one year to another. It is important to notice that poor finances for a school can be caused, at least partly, by other factors than too few pupils. So what other reasons can there be for this development, besides lack of pupils? Firstly, bad budget discipline from the head teacher; when it is impossible to balance the budget, some leaders have perhaps not been motivated to make cuts in order to reduce the deficits as much as possible. Although it has happened that head teachers have been forced to leave their positions due to a bad budget discipline, the normal consequence has been that the school leader must have a plan for reducing the costs for the following year. Secondly, when cuts have to be made, there is really only one measure available when substantial cuts are necessary, and that is to reduce the number of personnel. This is obviously not easy, since it is a very unpopular measure both for
parents as well as for the staff. It is also more difficult and takes a long time to reduce the number of teachers since there must be negotiations with the unions, before any reductions are possible. Thirdly, when pupils move from a school, the school’s revenues decrease already in the subsequent month. The costs are more or less the same, since it is often not possible to make cuts in the organisation during the terms. On the other hand, if pupils in the municipality move to another lower secondary school in Torp during the terms, the revenues for this school increases and since the organisation does not normally have to be expanded, these extra vouchers can perhaps result in a financial surplus. Fourthly, the rules in the municipality how the schools shall handle deficits and surpluses are also important in this context and will be discussed in the next paragraph in connection with the presentation of the interviews with the school leaders.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Geographical location</th>
<th>Residential area</th>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>Pedagogical profile*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>High status</td>
<td>Good/poor</td>
<td>Sports, International, Cultural, Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Good/poor</td>
<td>English, Maths, Science, Sports, Circus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
<td>All pupils choose a profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>large cuts during the 1990s improvement this decade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
<td>Sports, Science, International, Cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Mostly good</td>
<td>Sports, Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Low status decreasing population</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
<td>International, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Average growing population</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Drama, Science, English, Srts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Torp, Välja skola, 2002)

* pedagogical profiles 2003
Chapter seven

The Views among the School leaders in Torp

The purpose of this chapter is to present, discuss, and analyse the views among the school leaders on relevant issues for this study like, for instance market forces and decentralisation.

7.1 Further Results of the Interviews with the School Leaders

Background
One of the main reasons for introducing market forces in schooling refers to the argument that competition will lead to better quality. Schools, like any other corporations, that compete on a market must constantly improve if they want to attract customers. According to Levin (1994a) one of the main purposes of using market forces in the education sector is that schools need incentives to improve and this has also been a basic idea in Torp.

The study in 1999 (Söderqvist, 1999) showed that the first five years with market forces (1994 to 1998), according to the seven interviewed head teachers, led to better quality in the community schools in Torp.

7.1.1 Quality in schooling

The first question asked to the school leaders was: Has the quality in your school been affected by competition and market forces?

The concept of quality can mean different things in a school context, and the school leaders in Torp have in the interviews in general defined four different aspects when the issue of quality has been discussed. Firstly, the teachers have become more professional in their work and they are aware of the fact that the school can loose money, if pupils/parents are not satisfied with the performance of the teachers. Secondly, the school is more open to the demands and wishes from the pupils.
and their parents; the introduction of profile classes is one example. Thirdly, the results have improved during the last decade, which will be later described, and fourthly, the parents are, according to the school leaders, more satisfied with the education that the community schools provide.

All of the school leaders said that their schools in general had improved during the last decade, but not all of them were convinced that the introduction of market forces was the only explanation to this development. One of the latter argued that even if the competition has had an impact on the quality other things had also been essential: “the discussion of how to improve the quality in schooling has been important”. However, a majority of the leaders, 14 of them, claimed that competition between schools, combined with the financial incentives, was the most important issue in raising the quality; the schools have been forced to improve, otherwise some or many of their customers would choose other alternatives. “It makes it easier to introduce changes among the personnel”, one head argued. “The schools have to deal with problems in a more professional way due to the competition”, claimed another leader. “In general the quality has improved due to the competition”, argued a third school leader.

One of the school leaders also claimed that competition increases the quality in other sectors of society and consequently, it will raise quality in schooling, and argued: if the former general assumption is true it is likely that it is valid even within the education sector.

Four school leaders argued that the schools probably have improved due to the market forces, but in addition to this, other factors have also been important in the process of raising the quality in schooling. As examples they mentioned the new curriculum which was introduced in 1995, general discussions about quality in schooling, as well as the introduction of individual teacher salaries in the middle of the 1990s.

The two remaining school leaders claimed that it was difficult to say something definite about the impact of market forces in a comparison with other innovations during the 1990s, like, for instance, individual teacher salaries.

Comments to the issue of quality

To summarise: a large majority of the school leaders were convinced that the system with market forces had improved the community
schools in Torp at lower secondary level; teachers had become more professional, the schools were more open minded to demands from pupils and parents, the results, both on national tests as well as the grades the pupils had reached in year nine, had improved, and in general, the quality has to be good, otherwise parents would choose other schools for their children.

Looking at these arguments, it is difficult to argue against the opinion that the teachers have become more professional during the last decade, many of the leaders have worked in Torp for more than ten years and have had the possibility to compare the teacher performance over the years. There could of course be several explanations to why teachers have become more professional like the introduction of individual salaries, more collaboration in working teams in the schools, the new curriculum that focuses on different goals, a new grading system, and so on, but a majority of the school leaders argued that the introduction of competition among schools, was the main reason for this development.

The second argument that schools are more open minded to wishes and demands from parents and pupils is also evident; when the system with choice was introduced in 1992, the possibility to make choices between different profiles was limited, only one school offered a profile, ten years later every lower secondary school in the municipality had several different profiles to choose among. The reason for this development is clear, over the years, schools have introduced profile classes in order to meet the competition from other schools as well as to respond to wishes from parents and pupils.

Whether profile classes is a criteria of quality in schooling can of course be discussed, but since the school leaders have defined openness towards pupils and parents wishes and demands as a main characteristics of good quality, it is evident that the diversity of profile classes is an example of how schools, in order to be competitive on the market, have been more open than before to wishes and demands from pupils and parents; previously, one leader argued, “The schools were not interested in new pupils”, now they do what they can to meet the wishes from the parents.

The school leaders who answered that the development in the schools during the 1990s also had been affected by other innovations in the school system during this decade based their arguments on the assumption that it was impossible to decide to what extent the market forces have affected the quality in schooling. This group can have a
point when they claimed that the increased professionalism among teachers can be related to other innovations in the education sector during the 1990s, for instance, the new curriculum and the system with individual salaries that were introduced in the middle of the 1990s. On the other hand, market forces were introduced in 1992 and the new salaries came in practice four years later and many of the school leaders can verify that the process of more professionalism among the teachers started prior to 1996 (Söderqvist, 1999), but it is likely, however, that individual salaries is an important incentive for teachers to work harder and to improve their professionalism.

Looking at the third aspect of quality mentioned by the school leaders, there are four different variables that can be used in this context: grading results after year 9, the results of SALSA (a concept that roughly means value added and it will be later described), the results on national tests, as well as how the community schools have handled the competition from the independent schools.

The grading results

Firstly, the development of the grades is presented in table 7.1 below. In order to understand the figures in this table, some facts are necessary to present. As previously mentioned, the pupils get grades in 17 subjects after year nine and 16 of them are included in the total sum. If a pupil does not reach the goals in a subject, he or she will get 0 points, if the result is a pass grade, G, it will generate 10 points, a pass with distinction, VG, will give the pupil 15 points, and a pass with special distinction, MVG, will result in 20 points. The maximum number of points that a pupil can get is therefore 320 points, 16 subjects x 20. To get the average result of a school, the total point for every pupil is summarised and then divided by the number of pupils in the school.

As previously mentioned, Sweden introduced a new curriculum as well as a new grading system in the middle of the 1990s. The first cohort group of pupils with the new grades after year 9 completed in 1998, and therefore the statistical material prior to this year, from 1992 to 1997, is not possible to compare with the results from 1998 and onwards.
Table 7.1 The grades in year 9 1999-2003 in Torp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Skolverket, 2007b)

* No figure was presented for school F this year

Table 7.2 shows further the results of the grades from another perspective: the average of all pupils total sum divided with 16. If a pupil is awarded a pass in all 16 subjects, the average will be 10 (160 points/16). If a pupil is awarded eight grades of pass and eight grades of pass with distinction, the average grade of this pupil will be 12.5 (200/16).

Table 7.2 The grades in year nine, average in all subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>14,4</td>
<td>14,3</td>
<td>15,2</td>
<td>14,7</td>
<td>14,7</td>
<td>14,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>13,3</td>
<td>13,4</td>
<td>13,9</td>
<td>13,7</td>
<td>14,1</td>
<td>14,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>12,9</td>
<td>13,1</td>
<td>14,0</td>
<td>14,6</td>
<td>14,4</td>
<td>14,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>12,7</td>
<td>13,4</td>
<td>13,2</td>
<td>12,8</td>
<td>14,3</td>
<td>13,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>12,7</td>
<td>13,1</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>13,5</td>
<td>14,2</td>
<td>14,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>12,1</td>
<td>13,3</td>
<td>14,5</td>
<td>14,3</td>
<td>13,9</td>
<td>14,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>12,6</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>14,3</td>
<td>14,1</td>
<td>14,1</td>
<td>14,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totally</td>
<td>13,0</td>
<td>13,3</td>
<td>13,8</td>
<td>13,9</td>
<td>14,2</td>
<td>14,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Torp, Välja skola, 2004)

It is always difficult to compare grades from one year to another between different cohorts for a number of reasons: the teachers do not assess the criteria for the different grades in the same way, it is not
always the same teachers that grade the pupils in year nine, all teachers
do not have the same competence which reasonably could have an
impact on the pupils results, the pupils have spent their first six years in
primary school before they attend in lower secondary which in a high
degree make teachers dependent on what the children have learned
previously, different cohorts do not perform at the same level, and so
on. However, the trend is clear; the results have improved at all lower
secondary schools in Torp from 1998 to 2003 even if the results can
vary from one year to another due to several reasons, some of which
have been mentioned above.

In this context it can also be interesting to see how the results for all
pupils in Sweden, in year 9, have developed during the same period.
(www.skolverket, 2007b). It is clear that the results have improved
significantly more in Torp than overall in Sweden. There can be at
least three explanations to this development: firstly, the competition
between schools has improved the quality as the majority of the school
leaders in Torp claimed; secondly, the teachers have felt a pressure from
parents/pupils as well as the leaders in the school to put high grades on
the pupils due to both the competition between schools and the fact that
teachers have individual salaries; thirdly, schools interpret the criteria
differently, a fact that has lead to different outcomes. The National
Agency for Education has analysed, in a large study that covers the
years 1998 to 2006 (www.skolverket, 2007d), how grades can differ
between schools, and has concluded, that there are major differences
between schools when the grades in year nine are compared with the
results on national tests. Above all, it is pupils that have not reached
the pass grade on the national tests that are assessed differently when
the grades in year 9 are awarded. In some schools, 90% of the pupils
that have not got a pass on these tests have anyway been awarded a
pass grade, G, as the final grade in this subject, while the opposite
is the case in other schools. However, this report further concludes
that there are no indications that independent schools or community
schools that experience fierce competition put higher grades than other
schools (ibid.).

Results on SALSA

SALSA is a data set, which the National Agency for Education
has presented since 1998, showing how schools perform based on four
socio-economic variables (value added): the share of pupils born in
other countries, the share of pupils born in Sweden with parents from
other countries, the share of boys, and the parents’ level of education. (Skolverket, 2004c; www.artisan, 2005) The grades in each school after year nine are then compared with the expected outcome based on an index of these four variables and the results can be compared for each school, and municipality.

It is hardly surprising that three of the four socio-economic variables have affected the results, but perhaps is the fact that the share of boys in year nine also could have an impact on school performance not so evident. However, a report from 2004 shows that the gap between the girls and the boys results steadily increases, the girls are performing better and better compared to the boys (Swedish Ministry of Education, 2004).

If a school has a result better than 0 this means that the school has performed better than may be expected on the basis of its socio-economic situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>+13</td>
<td>+13</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>+7</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+9</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>+15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+16</td>
<td>+23</td>
<td>+13</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>+11</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>+16</td>
<td>+19</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (www.artisan, 2005)

* no figure was presented this year from The National Agency

The figures in table 7.3 show that the community schools in Torp from 1998 to 2003 have had better results most of the years than the expected outcome in SALSA (www.artisan, 2005). The trend is also clear: every school had better results in 2003 than they had when these assessments started in 1998, even if there have been differences between cohorts in the same school from one year to another.

The final aspect that supports the idea of improved quality in the community schools is the surveys that have been made on parent and pupil satisfaction with schooling in Torp. These surveys were initially,
they started in 1995, made every other year, but have since 2003 been an annual evaluation of schooling. These questionnaires are delivered to the parents in preschool class, year 2, year 5, and year 8, who then are requested to answer a number of questions concerning different aspects of schooling, such as quality of the education and if they would recommend the school to a friend or a neighbour. Even here the results, according to the heads, have improved over the years. Unfortunately the municipality has used different methods and questions to measure how satisfied the parents are with the schools in Torp which makes it impossible to present the results in a table and compare the results from 1995 to 2003; the trend is however clear: the parents were more satisfied with the lower secondary schools in 2003, than they were in 1995.

Results on national tests

The third variable that can be used in this context is the results on national tests; as previously mentioned, these tests are compulsory for all schools in Sweden and take place in year 9 in the three core subjects Swedish, Mathematics and English. Unfortunately it has not been possible to obtain the figures from The National Agency of Education or the municipality for all years during the period 1998-2003 in the three subjects. However, according to the school leaders the lower secondary schools in Torp perform well and the results have improved over the years even in this context.

The competition from the independent schools

A final argument that supports the idea that the competition has improved the quality is related to the independent schools. One of the heads claimed that it has been tougher for this type of schools to establish in Torp due to the quality of the lower secondary schools. In other municipalities, independent schools have managed to become oversubscribed as “soon as they have told about their plans”, he continued.

There are two arguments that support this head’s opinion: firstly, the fact that a smaller proportion of pupils, enrolled in independent lower secondary schools in 2003 in Torp than in, for instance, Stockholm. In year nine 11.5% of the pupils in Torp attended independent schools this year while the figure for the municipality of Stockholm was 17.2%. This is a substantial difference that is difficult to explain given the positive attitude that the political majority in Torp has, and have
had, to both competition and private alternatives within the public sector. As an example, all new schools that have been established in the municipality during the last decade, due to the increasing population, have been independent schools. This is a clear indication of the conservative/liberal majority’s positive attitude towards independent schools. Furthermore, Anders Hultin managing director of Kunskapsskolan*, admitted in a lecture given to all school leaders in Torp 2001 (Hultin, 2001) that it had been more difficult to recruit pupils in this municipality than in others. A second indication that the parents have been satisfied with the quality provided in the lower secondary schools is the fact that another new actor, a private company, tried to establish an independent lower secondary school in the autumn of 2006. They presented their pedagogical plans in the school catalogue of 2005 and had an evening of information for the parents, but even so they did not get enough applications, making it possible for them to start the school. As a comparison, the same concept was presented to the parents in an affluent part of Stockholm, and this school became immediately oversubscribed.

Arguments can of course be raised against all the three reasons mentioned above, but they seem, however, like strong indications that the community lower secondary schools in Torp have been able to meet the competition from the independent schools to a larger extent than what has been the case in many other municipalities. It seems, therefore, reasonable to assume that the customers have been satisfied with the quality provided in the community schools. “Parents vote with their feet”, one leader argued, and continued that parents are only loyal to their children and if they are not pleased with the quality they move their children to other schools.

7.1.2 The choice

Background
Even if the innovations introduced in 1992 are connected with each other, the free choice of school has probably developed to the most important issue for the pupils/parents and for the schools.

*Kunskapsskolan is a company that is one of the main actors on the independent school market in the Stockholm area. This company established a compulsory independent school, with both a primary and a secondary section by the turn of the century in Torp
As previously mentioned, initially there were a few pupils that did not choose the school in the neighbourhood, but over the years the possibility to choose between different schools has resulted in more choices outside the catchment area, according to the school leaders*. Therefore, the school leaders were asked the following question: What is most important when parents/pupils choose a school?

The school leaders listed the most important issues, the result in the following way:

1. the distance to the school
2. the reputation of the school
3. profile classes
4. the school’s socio-economic status
5. the size of the classes
6. the standard of buildings and classrooms
7. grades and results on national tests

Several of the school leaders claimed that parents are looking for a school with good reputation, where their children are safe from violence and bullying and where the teachers also are interested in the social development of the pupils in addition to their school performance. “Profile classes are very important”, one of the leaders argued and continued “..the schools must have them in order to attract pupils; it is important that people feel that they can make choices”.

Another school leader argued that it is difficult to decide what issue, apart from the distance to the school, which is most important when the choice of school is made since parents have different priorities. Many times, the choice is based on a combination of different aspects like a preference for a special profile and the reputation of the school, but basically the school has to show good results otherwise they will not get a sufficient number of pupils.

A third school leader claimed that schools located in socially deprived areas never can attract pupils from more affluent areas; “These schools can only loose pupils, they cannot attract pupils outside the area”.

* There are no official statistical figures available in this matter; a rough estimation for the lower secondary schools is that about 10-20% of the pupils in 2003 choose another school than the nearest
The Views among the School leaders in Torp

Comments to what is most important choosing a school

It is hardly surprising that all of the school leaders claimed that the distance to the school was most important for the choice of school. It is evident that a large majority of the parents/pupils choose a school in the neighbourhood. If a school located in another part of Torp is chosen, it can be very inconvenient for the parents due to the distance as well as the fact that they have to pay for the transports if they choose a school outside the catchment area.

Looking further at the list of the most important issues when it comes to choice of school, there is one thing that perhaps is surprising; the relatively low ranking on grades and results. Even if both parents and pupils are interested in these matters, it appears, according to the school leaders, that grades and results are not the most important issue when the choice is made. If school performance were more important, it is likely that the same schools, located in high status areas, would be the most popular year after year, since student performance is to a large extent connected with social background, a fact that Coleman made evident already in the 1960s (Coleman et al. 1966, in Levin 1995).

In the answers from the heads, there were no differences between school leaders that worked in high status areas compared to the others; they all agreed that pupil achievement is not the most important issue.

It is also essential in this context to focus on the issue of social segregation based on ethnicity. Only one of the lower secondary schools in Torp is located in an area where the majority of the pupils have immigrant background. In table 7.4, the figures show that the trend is clear; in school F, the number of pupils with Swedish background is decreasing year after year. It is of course difficult to speculate about the reasons for this development, but according to some of the school leaders in this study, the parents/pupils choose other alternatives where pupils with immigrant background are fewer. In the table below the number of pupils with immigrant background in the lower secondary schools during the period 1998 to 2003, expressed in percent, is presented.
Table 7.4: Pupils with immigrant background in year nine (in percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>1998</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (www.artisan, 2005)

7.1.3 Break a vicious circle

Background

One of the main arguments against the choice system and vouchers is that some schools will be winners while other will be losers. The study made in 1999 (Söderqvist, 1999) showed clearly that, from a financial point of view, there were substantial differences between the schools in Torp, during the period from 1994 to 1998. Successful schools attracted more pupils/vouchers and invested more in computers, textbooks and so on, while the others had to make cuts in order to get their budget in balance. Critics of the system therefore argued that market forces created A- and B-schools; the latter experienced a vicious circle where they had to make budget cuts which obviously made them less popular among the parents; the A-schools would attract more pupils/vouchers year by year and become more “successful”. Four schools, A, B, E, and G which all were financially successful during the period 1994 to 1998, seemed to belong to the A category with a good financial future, while the risk for the others to continue to be losers was evident (see table 7.5).
Table 7.5  The financial outcome from 1994 to 1998

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
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<td>-1700</td>
<td>-1700</td>
</tr>
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<td>+600</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>+1900</td>
<td>+1000</td>
<td>+2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Söderqvist, 1999)
The figures are expressed in thousands of SEK; 1000 means 1,000,000 SEK. All figures are round sums.

But, as can be seen in table 7.6 below, the subsequent years showed for many schools a different picture; firstly, a large surplus one year could turn into a large deficit in the next for a previous successful school. Secondly, it was possible for schools to break vicious circles. There are, however, two schools F and G, where the development follows the pattern from the second half of the 1990s; the former unit has not been able to break the vicious circle and the latter has during the period from 1994 to 2003 been a popular alternative and has managed to more or less avoid deficits and has most of the years generated large surpluses.
Table 7.6 The financial outcome from 1999-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
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</thead>
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<td>-2000</td>
<td>-300</td>
<td>-3200</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<td>-800</td>
<td>+1200</td>
<td>+400</td>
<td>+900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>+100</td>
<td>-2200</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>+3700</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The figures are expressed in thousands of SEK; 1000 means 1.000.000 SEK. All figures are round sums.

In 2001, the schools received a non-recurrent funding, 6% of the voucher revenues, from the municipality due to the problematic financial situation for the schools. As an example, School G got about 3 million SEK which explains the large surplus this year. If the extra funding has not been provided to the schools, all lower secondary schools, but school G, would have had large deficits this year. As the table show, 2002 was a financial tough year for the schools with a total deficit of about 12,2 million SEK.

The next issue to discuss, related to the free choice, is therefore what can be done to change a vicious circle and the school leaders were therefore asked: What can a school do in order to change a vicious circle?

On this question the school leaders suggested a lot of different measures, but two things were predominant in their answers: new profile classes and involving the parents and the surrounding society. As to the former item, many of the heads argued that it is impossible to make cuts in order to break the trend since it will only lead to more dissatisfaction among the parents. The schools must be offensive in their strategy; they must find ways to attract pupils and profile classes can be a possible measure. “Increase the number of teachers in deprived areas”, one leader argued. Another one claimed that it was not easy in this kind of system. ”You have to invest in computers and other equipment that can attract pupils”, she continued.

The leaders that advocated more involvement from the parents also claimed that the schools must find new ways to change the vicious
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Comments on to how to break a vicious circle

Looking at the tables above, 7.5 and 7.6, which show the financial outcome of the schools in Torp from 1994 to 2003, the heads seem to be right about the possibilities, or difficulties, to change a vicious circle for a school with many immigrant pupils (Söderqvist, 1999; budget figures 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003). The figures show that school F has had the largest deficits of all lower secondary schools in Torp during this period which is a clear indication of the difficulties to get enough applications for a school with many immigrants.

It is obviously not possible to draw general conclusions from one example, but studies from Stockholm have shown that many pupils from the suburbs have chosen schools in the central part of the city which has resulted in more segregation since the schools on the outskirts have lost many talented pupils to the schools in the more affluent parts of Stockholm (Hansson & Nilsson, 2006; Nordin, 2006).

A look at the other schools reveals that schools have the possibility to change a vicious circle. During the period from 1994 to 2000 school C had large deficits every year and it seemed to be very difficult to change this development. The school managed, however, to become more popular by, for instance, introducing new profiles which attracted more pupils and consequently better finances.

As previously mentioned, there could be a lot of explanations to why
a school get more pupils: the location of the school from a demographic perspective, if the school is located in a part of the municipality where the population is growing the number of potential customers is larger, the leadership, marketing, new profiles, parental involvement, the schools socio-economic location and so on, are examples in this context.

But it is also important to have in mind that factors outside the single school’s performance can have a large impact on the number of applications they get. Firstly, a good reputation is something that can deteriorate from one year to another; if the parents are not satisfied with the school, they can literally move their children from one day to another. Secondly, in some cases schools can not accept all applications since the number of pupils they can receive is limited, consequently these pupils must begin in another school. For instance, in 2002 and 2003, school G had to say no to more than 50 pupils both years, since the school was oversubscribed, which obviously was not popular among the customers. Thirdly, when a school enrolls as many pupils as possible in order to improve its finances, it could be more difficult to maintain a good reputation. Too many pupils can lead to a situation where the working environment declines for both pupils and personnel, the pupils will perhaps become more anonymous, there can be difficulties in making a good timetable, and so on.

7.1.4 Collaboration between schools

Background
In a former study (Söderqvist, 1999), the head-teachers agreed that the climate for collaboration had become worse, a fact that seems logical since the schools compete for the same pupils. And unlike many market situations the number of customers is limited, so if one school enrolls many pupils in an area, the neighbour school consequently will lose vouchers and has to make cuts in order to get the budget in balance.

The study also showed that the openness between the schools disappeared; they did not reveal any “business secrets” to each other, which is similar to the development in Great Britain at the beginning of the 1980s, according to Falkner (1997).

The next issue to study was therefore the collaboration between the community schools in Torp, and the question addressed to the leaders was: Has the collaboration between schools been affected by
The Views among the School leaders in Torp

Eleven of the school leaders claimed that the collaboration between schools had declined as a result of the competition. They argued that the openness had disappeared and that the schools were not as generous towards each other as previously. “You guard and protect your strategies, you don’t share it with others”, said one of them. “It’s easier to collaborate with schools in other parts of Torp”, claimed another.

Three of them answered that it was difficult to say if the cooperation between schools had declined since the organisation of working teams in the schools has reduced the need for collaboration between schools. However, they further argued that, the collaboration had probably declined, but it was difficult to say whether this was caused by market forces or not.

Five of the school leaders argued that initially it was difficult to collaborate due to the competition, but over the years the system has matured and the schools have adjusted to the rules. One in this group also suggested that “the independent schools have become an enemy for all of the community schools in the municipality.” According to this leader, the new competitor on the market had forced the community schools to more collaboration in order to meet the threat from the independent schools.

Only one of the school leaders claimed that the collaboration between schools has not been effected at all by the competition: “We did not collaborate before we became competitors either”, he argued.

Comments to collaboration between schools

In Torp the schools are supposed to work together and collaborate since they belong to the same concern, which will be further discussed later in this study. At the same time, they must compete with each other in order to get pupils and this is obviously an equation that is difficult to solve.

In the 1999 study (Söderqvist, 1999), a majority of the school leaders claimed that the collaboration between schools had declined due to the market forces. It was considered particularly difficult to cooperate with the schools in the neighbourhood since they competed for the same pupils.

Looking at the answers in this study, eleven of the heads claimed that
collaboration between schools had declined due to the competition, which is hardly surprising since they compete with each other. It is perhaps more surprising that five of them argued that the situation had changed; they claimed that the lack of collaboration between the schools was an initial problem. Over the years community schools have learned to handle the situation and were now both able and willing to cooperate with the schools in the neighbourhood. That the school leaders have learned to live with the system can be a plausible explanation in this matter, because basically nothing has changed; the schools still have to compete with each other on a limited market for the same customers. The fact that the number of independent schools has increased can be another; the community schools have got a competitor outside the concern which makes collaboration easier among the community schools.

7.1.5 Pressure on the personnel

Background

Another relevant issue is how the system of market forces has affected the personnel in the school. When the system with choice was introduced in 1992 in Torp, the schools soon became aware of the impact of this innovation (Söderqvist, 1999). Many parents were already from the start willing to enrol their children in a school outside the catchment area which came as a surprise for many school leaders. Parents also became aware of the fact that the schools could lose money if they decided to choose another school for their children. In the study mentioned (ibid.) the heads claimed that they all had experienced situations where parents had threatened to enrol their children in another school, if their demands/requests regarding, for instance teachers, were not satisfied.

The conclusion in the former study was clear; the pressure on the personnel had increased due to the competition between schools. The next issue to answer for the school leaders was therefore: Has the pressure on the personnel been affected by the competition between schools?

Almost everyone claimed that the pressure had increased, but there were different opinions about the impact of the market forces. The most common answer was that the pressure on the school leaders had increased due to the parents, since they know that the school will lose money if their children move to another school. “The parents’ demands
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...on the school have increased more and more for every year”, one of them argued.

There were also those who claimed that the pressure probably had increased due to the competition, but it was difficult to say since the working climate in general had become tougher in society as well as the increased work load due to the responsibilities with the decentralised system. “The working climate has become tougher due to both the increased responsibility and the demands from the parents”, one in this group argued. Both these groups claimed however, that the pressure had increased most for the heads, but even the teachers were affected by the increasing demands from the parents.

Only one of the leaders claimed that that the pressure had not increased. This school leader argued that it was evident that the schools must be open to the demands from the parents and that schools must see the parents as partners in this context.

Comments to pressure on the personnel

It is not surprising that almost all of the heads claimed that the pressure on the personnel had increased even if there were different opinions about the impact of the competition. In the answers, there are several aspects that support the idea that the pressure had increased.

Firstly, in the old centralised system the school had a monopoly situation where the pupils in catchment area automatically were enrolled in the nearest school; now they have to compete for each pupil. Secondly, the work load has increased compared to the old system since the school leaders now are responsible for almost everything in the daily running of the schools; employing personnel, marketing, the premises, the finances as well as the pedagogical issues.

Thirdly, the financial pressure on the schools has increased in the educational sector. In the old system the state was responsible for each schools revenues and the criteria for the grants were the same all over Sweden. Now the schools almost have the total responsibility for their finances and must be competitive on the market in order to get customers. It is also more difficult to make budgets and to make longer financial plans due to the system where the revenues are based on how many pupils a school has every month.

Fourthly, the demands from the parents have increased substantially in the new system which also increases the pressure on mainly the
school leaders. It probably has affected the teachers as well, especially the demands from the parents, but both the consequences of the decentralised system and the competition between schools, seem to have increased the pressure on the heads to a larger extent.

7.1.6 The decentralised system in Torp

Background
As previously described, the centralised system of the 1980s was steered from the state and offered few possibilities for the schools to take own initiatives. When the new system was introduced in Torp in 1992, the heads became responsible for almost everything in the daily running of the school.

The 1999 study (Söderqvist, 1999) showed that the head-teachers were pleased with the new system and that all of them preferred a decentralised system to a centralised. Even the head-teachers in schools with poor finances, where cuts had been made, advocated a system with more autonomy. In order to find out how the leaders perceived the decentralised system in Torp the question was: What is your opinion about the decentralised system in Torp?

The answers can be divided into two groups where half of the leaders claimed that the system was very good and the other half that it was good. In the first group there were really no negative comments at all towards the autonomy of the schools. One of them argued that it was not necessary with a central administration at all; the schools should be totally independent.

This opinion was not advocated by the rest of the group, they were satisfied with the system in Torp and argued that it gave the schools the opportunity to develop and increase the quality. One of the said: “It would be impossible to go back to the old system”, and claimed that the autonomy of the schools was the most important tool in the process of increasing the quality in education.

The other group agreed that decentralisation was better than to have more centralisation in schooling and argued that it was good to make your own decisions and have much autonomy, but they argued that they had to work too much. As one of them said: ”It’s good, but it’s tough for the head-teachers.” Another one said: “You have to spend too much time with finances and administration instead of focus on pedagogical issues.”
However, all in this group claimed that the decentralised system of Torp was good, and none of them wanted to abandon the system for a more centralised one.

Comments to the decentralised system

Even if the school leaders had arguments against the decentralised system, it is evident that they were very positive to the autonomy in Torp. The arguments against it were based on two perspectives: the increased work load and the financial responsibilities.

The work load had definitely increased particularly for the heads, since they have the responsibility for almost everything in the daily running of the school; at the same time they have to work in order to increase the quality and be competitive on the market. The financial responsibility was also considered to be tough, especially when cuts had to be made; previously cuts were decided on central level and the schools did not have any impact in this context. It is evident that the work load increases in a decentralised system, but on the other hand it cannot be both ways. Either the schools have much autonomy and get the responsibility over the finances, salaries, personnel etc, or the decision-making is centralised and the influence and the control over the school decreases.

The school leaders in Torp are of course aware of the fact that the work load increases in a decentralised system and since they did not consider more centralisation as an option, the only way to solve the problem would be to employ more personnel which could assist the heads. On the other hand, the financial situation for some of the schools was tough and several of the school leaders argued that they could not employ more personnel for administration when they at the same time have to make cuts for personnel working with the pupils. It seems further evident that the heads thought that it was harder to make cuts on local level for instance to increase the size of the classes or to dismiss personnel since cuts are not popular among the customers. The leaders were of course aware of the connection between autonomy and the financial responsibility and none of them could present some alternative steering system for schooling where the schools have the freedom, but not the responsibilities.

Finally, many of the leaders also claimed that the autonomy in the decentralised system gave the schools the possibility to develop
and to increase the quality, which seems to be a strong argument for decentralisation in schooling in Torp.

7.1.7 The market forces

Background
One important issue when market forces in schooling are discussed is if it will increase the segregation in society? This question has been frequently debated in Torp and in Sweden as well as in other countries as previously has been discussed.

Critics in Torp, for instance the political opposition, argue that the system with free choice and vouchers will lead to segregation in the municipality. They claim that the system leads to a situation with A and B schools where some schools will get more and more pupils/ vouchers and consequently better finances, while other schools will be losers. The critics also claim that the system with choice would be most beneficial to middle and upper class parents, and consequently markets forces also would lead to social segregation in society.

Advocates of the system, for instance the political majority, argue that competition between schools will lead to better quality for all pupils, since all schools have to improve if they want to get customers. They also claim that the different living areas already are segregated and that the free choice makes it possible for children from disadvantaged areas to attend a school outside the catchment area.

From the 1999 study (Söderqvist, 1999) it is evident that, during the period 1994 to1998, the schools finances developed differently (see table 7.5 in this chapter). The financial successful schools experienced a positive trend and the financial gap to the other units became bigger. The study also showed that the middle and upper class parents were more active in the process of choosing school. They also had more demands on the schools and if the parents were not pleased with the quality of the school, they were more willing to move their children to another alternative. The conclusion in the study was, however, that the system has not led to social segregation to any larger extent, but if the trend continued, the risk of more segregation both between schools and social groups was obvious. It was therefore interesting to find out what the leaders thought about market forces in schooling and the question was: What do you think about market forces in schooling?

The answers in this case can roughly be divided into three groups:
those who were positive, those who thought that market forces probably were good, and those who thought that it was hard to say. The majority of the heads could be found in the first group, they claimed that market forces in schooling had a positive impact on school performance since it forces the schools to improve, and consequently the quality increases which is beneficial to the pupils. One of the school leaders also argued that it was good for the parents since the school had to be more open to wishes and demands from their customers. “No monopoly is working in the long run”, another one said. Several of the heads in this group claimed that the segregation that was predicted never came true in Torp.

The next group, those claiming that market forces probably are good, argued that the quality in schooling becomes better, but it was likely that the segregation in the municipality would increase; middle and upper class parents have advantages was a common argument from these heads. Another one argued that the system was basically good, but it was difficult to plan for more than one year at a time, since it was impossible to predict how many pupils the school would get the next year. A third argument from a school leader in this group was: ”It works in 9 out of 10 schools, but it doesn’t work in deprived areas.”

Only two heads argued that it was difficult to say; they could see the benefits of competition, but one of them claimed that schools focus too much on popular profiles in order to recruit pupils. The other one argued that market forces lead to more segregation between schools and that the politicians did not understand the consequences.

Comments to market forces in schooling

Compared to the attitude towards the benefits of decentralisation, the enthusiasm over market forces in schooling was smaller. Nevertheless a, large majority of the heads was either positive to the system or thought that the advantages of market forces were to prefer, despite the risk of segregation. Looking at the arguments for market forces it is evident that they were the same as previously has been discussed; schools have to improve, the competition will lead to better education, it is good for the parents/pupils to have the possibility to choose between different alternatives, parents get more influence, and so on.

The arguments against market forces were also the same; middle class and upper class parents get advantages, there is a risk for segregation
in society, it is difficult to make plans for more than one year, schools can focus too much on popular profiles, and so on.

It is interesting to see that there was no connection between the schools' financial situation, or the schools' popularity, and the heads' opinion about market forces; arguments for and against the system were to be found among both “winners” and “losers” among the schools. It is perhaps surprising that heads in schools with financial problems were not more critical to the system since they have not been able to recruit as many pupils as necessary. There could of course be a lot of different explanations to the heads’ opinions about market forces, despite the fact that their schools were not the most competitive when the interviews were made; they have chosen to work in Torp since they like the system, they think that competition will improve schooling, the benefits of decentralisation are more important than the disadvantages of competition and so on.

There is, however, one important issue worth mentioning in this context and that is how the schools have performed financially and how the politicians and administrators have dealt with the problem of schools with large surpluses and deficits. As can be seen in table 7.5 the deficits were substantial for many schools during the period 1994 to 1998 (Söderqvist, 1999), and it was obviously not possible for the schools to make large cuts, since the consequences would have been too hard to handle both for the schools and for the politicians. There cannot be too large financial differences between the community schools in the municipality, so the administrators and the politicians allowed the schools to have these large deficits year after year in order to balance the negative outcome of the choice.

According to the initial rules, a school should be closed, if it had deficits for more than two consecutive years, but it was obviously not an alternative to close two or three of the lower secondary schools in the municipality, since it was neither possible politically nor manageable from a logistical point of view. The consequences were therefore that the financial “successful” schools had more money than the others, but the differences between the units were not as large as they would have been if the initial rules had been followed.

As mentioned before, in 2001 the financial rules for the schools in the municipality were changed and surpluses were not automatically transferred to revenues the next year. Instead the schools got their surpluses on a special account where the money was not available for the schools unless they got permission from the chief education officer
to make a “withdrawal”. But, as many of the other schools had large deficits, it became much more difficult for the financial successful schools to use their surpluses, since the community schools were “partners” in the same concern and the outcome for all the schools had to be considered before surpluses could be disposed by schools with good finances. It was further considered impossible for the schools with accumulated substantial deficits to deal with these large amounts. An innovation was therefore introduced in order to increase the budget discipline among schools with large deficits; if the units managed to balance their budget for two consecutive years the old debts were write-off.

The administrators and the politicians have hence tried to balance the financial differences, caused by the choice, by changing the rules for the “school market” in Torp, since the consequences would not have been possible to handle in the municipality. This innovation could also be an explanation to why school leaders in schools with large deficits were as positive to the system as their colleagues in more financial successful schools. It could also explain how vicious circles have been broken for schools and financial segregation has been avoided among some of the schools.

Another reasonable question in this context is of course how the system in Torp can be described in a market context? It is true that schools compete with each other, both the community and the independent schools, and that the financial incentives are based on the number of pupils the schools recruit. It is also a fact that parents/pupils can choose among different alternatives with different pedagogic profiles in the municipality. On the other hand, the bottle necks in schooling, like, for instance, limitations concerning the premises, have in some cases resulted in pupils not getting the school they have chosen and have to accept another alternative. The fact that the community schools financially are regarded as a concern, where the schools with surpluses can not automatically use them, is further a paradox in the “school market” of Torp.

7.1.8 Summary and conclusions of the interviews

The arguments for choice and other market innovations in schooling have previously been discussed, and it is clear that a majority of the school leaders in Torp supported the idea that the competition among
the schools in the municipality has led to better quality in education: the results have improved, the customers are more satisfied, and the competition has resulted in an increased professionalism among the teachers. Many of the leaders further argued that the competition has lead to increased parental involvement, more motivated pupils due to the profile classes, as well as more diversity in schooling where parents/pupils can make choices according to their preferences.

The arguments against choice and other market mechanisms were also the same as previously been discussed; the work load, above all for the school leaders, has increased, the collaboration between schools has declined, even if some of them argued that it initially was much more difficult to collaborate with other community schools and that the situation now was better, it is difficult to make plans for more than one year since the schools cannot be sure how many pupils they will get the next year, schools focus too much on popular profiles the system with choice is most beneficial for middle and upper class parents, hence it can lead to segregation both between schools and different groups in society. However, the fact that 95%, which has been the average number during 2004 to 2006, of the parents/pupils make their choice within the stipulated time, is an argument that contradicts the idea that it is only the middle and upper class families that benefits from the system. Obviously it is not good, that five per cent of the parents/pupils do not use the option to make any choice. However, the share of the parents/pupils that did not use this possibility was much higher in the 1990s.

An American study on choice (Schneider, 2001) shows that parents with higher education, and many times higher income, had fewer sources of information when they made the choice of school for their children. One explanation was that people with higher education relied more on their friends’ opinion than other social groups did. Schneider further argued that these types of parental networks did not exist among people from low socio-economic groups or minority parents (ibid.). Whether this is the case in Torp too is difficult to say, but it seems reasonable that people from middle and upper class background have better opportunities to get the information needed to make the “best” choice for their children. On the other hand, advocates of the system have a point when they argue that a free choice is a way for minorities to break the segregation that automatically will occur when a system with catchment areas is the only way to “sort” pupils.

However, a majority of the school leaders in Torp argued that the
benefits of market forces exceeded the disadvantages, while the other heads claimed that market forces were either probably good or that it was hard to say if competition and other market solutions had been beneficial for schooling in Torp.

It is obviously difficult to decide what is most important when advantages and disadvantages are compared; for instance what is most important parental involvement or collaboration between schools? Or is the opportunity for parents/pupils to choose between schools possible to compare with an increased work load for the personnel? From a societal perspective there are perhaps two aspects that are most relevant in this context, the quality that is provided by the schools and the risk for more segregation in society. When it comes to the latter, it seems that the predictions from the previous study (Söderqvist, 1999) about an obvious risk for a development towards A and B- schools has not come true. The changing of the financial rules seems to be very important in this context; it has stopped the more successful schools to make substantially larger investments than the others as well as provided the schools with poor finances the opportunity to start a new budget year without repaying old deficits. School C has, for instance, been able to change a long vicious circle during the 1990s with large deficits to budget surpluses during the first years of this decade. However, there are other aspects of segregation than purely financial ones. School F has experienced a development where fewer and fewer of the pupils have a Swedish background and from an ethnic perspective, the segregation has escalated during the period 1998 to 2003.

A couple of the leaders in school F also claimed that it has become more difficult for each year to recruit Swedish middle class pupils to the school due to the large number of pupils with immigrant background. The trend in school F during the period 2004 to 2006 has further been evident. Besides that the school enrols fewer and fewer Swedish pupils; many immigrant parents have chosen other schools for their children because they want them to attend a school where they have bigger chances to learn Swedish properly. This development has also affected the finances of school F negatively, and as an example this school has had very large deficits during the period 2004 to 2006 and they were further allowed by the chief education officer to under balance the budget for 2006 with 7 million SEK. Partly because the international sector of the school is more expensive, due to specific costs related to this program, but mainly because it has not been possible otherwise for the school to maintain a reasonable standard if severe cuts had to be
made. The cost for each pupil has therefore been substantially higher in school F during 2006 than in the other lower secondary schools since the others have been obliged to have a budget in balance. Furthermore, all schools in the municipality pay 1.5% of their revenues to a central fund, which among other things finances deficits for schools that have financial problems. From a societal perspective this has probably been the best way to handle the negative consequences of the system with school choice that can appear, even if it contradicts the initial ideas in the municipality of market thinking in schooling. Torp has avoided a financial segregation that would have been impossible to handle for school F by allowing the school to have a large budget deficit. In a wider perspective this example shows that a vicious circle can be very difficult to change and that it can be very difficult for schools in socially deprived areas with many immigrants to be competitive on a “market” with free choice, especially if the schools they are competing with are located in “better” socio-economic areas.

As previously has been described, the schools in Torp had a high degree of autonomy with the responsibility for almost everything in the daily running of the schools; but even if the work load had increased and the financial responsibility put pressure on the heads, all of the school leaders thought that the decentralised system was either good or very good and none of them wanted to replace it with more centralisation. So why were the leaders so positive to the system despite the work load and the responsibility? The answer is likely that they were positive to the big autonomy and to have the financial control; it created an increased job satisfaction. A study among Swedish head teachers (Daun, 2005) came to the same conclusion: there was a connection between a high degree of decentralisation and job satisfaction. It is hardly surprising that school leaders prefer to have the control over the finances and to have autonomy; it seems evident that leaders prefer to develop their schools together with personnel, pupils and parents instead of having a system where the decision-making is done on another level.

According to the heads the quality in schooling has increased in the schools of Torp during the last decade; many claimed that this was a result of the competition between schools, but the autonomy of the schools was also important in this context. When the issue of quality in schooling is discussed, it is further interesting to notice that one of the explanations that has been given to the success of the Finnish schools in the PISA-study of 2003 (Skolverket, 2004c; Jällhage, 2004), is the high degree of decentralisation that is characteristic for the educational system of Finland.
The purpose of this chapter is to describe the schools in Villa as well as present, discuss, and analyse the views expressed by the school leaders in this county according to the structure used for Torp. However, as previously has been mentioned, it has not been possible to obtain statistical information written about the schools budgets, choice of school, and so on. Consequently the financial situation of the schools as well as other information about the schools catchment area, the number of ethnic minorities in the schools, etc. will be described from a general perspective based only on the interviews.

The interviews with the heads in Villa followed the same pattern as in Torp. One difference was, however, that the head teacher, the first to be interviewed in every school, was asked to describe the school from a general perspective regarding the school’s catchment area, finances, educational profile, and so on. After this introduction the same questions were addressed to the head teacher as well as the other leaders in the school, and the first question was therefore: Has the quality in your school been affected by competition and market forces?

8.1 The Schools and Their Geographical and Socio-economic Situation

All the schools presented below are upper schools, according to the system in Villa, as previously mentioned, and recruit pupils between 13 and 19 years.
8.1.1 General Background

Villa is a county situated not so far from London and is a much larger community than Torp, both in a square area comparison as well as when the size of the population are compared. Due to the latter, the number of schools is higher and since Villa consists of both rural and urban areas the schools are located in the countryside, in villages, and in towns. The catchment areas of the schools vary considerably in size, and especially the rural schools have large catchments where the pupils come from both villages and small towns in the area.

8.1.2 School I

Geographical location - general information
School I is located in a rural relatively affluent area where the number of pupils with an immigrant background is only one to two percent. The distance to the next upper school is 15-20 kilometres and it is not a realistic option for pupils outside the catchment area to choose this school due to the distance. On the other hand, for the same reason, the school does not have any problems to recruit the pupils in the area because of the lack of alternatives in the neighbourhood.

The financial situation
The head described it as a successful upper school with good exam results. However, the funding was not sufficient and it was difficult to maintain a balanced budget. One explanation to this situation was related to the many experienced teachers in the school; since they had higher salaries this affected the finances. Another problem related to the lack of funding was, according to the head, that the quality of the premises in the school was poor.

The head’s strategy to improve the financial situation was first, to increase the revenues by trying to increase the number of older pupils in the schools because they received more money per pupil for this type of pupils, and second increase the funding by becoming a specialist school.

Pedagogical profile
School I focused on science and intended to apply to become a specialist school in this subject.
8.1.3 School J

Geographical location - general information
School J is also situated in the countryside in an area described by the head, as average from a socio-economic point of view. The number of ethnic minority pupils is less than one percent, and as for school I, the competition from other schools is limited due to the distance to other units. The head in school J even claimed that the school collaborated with the nearest school in an open and frank atmosphere.

The financial situation
According to the head, the financial situation of the school was good, basically because they had received extra funding from the Department of Education, due to the fact that the school had become a specialist, or a designated, school. If a school receives the special status they got 150,000£ (which was the sum in 2003) as well as extra funding for four years whereby some of this annual funding should be spent outside the schools, for instance in the middle schools in the area. After four years, an inspection shall be made, by the OFSTED, and if the targets have been reached, the school can get another period of four years with extra funding.

Pedagogical profile
In order to become a specialist school, they have to set special targets in one or a few subjects, and it was according to the head a very complicated and time consuming process requiring a substantial amount of paper work before an application is approved. School J was in 2003 a specialist school with sports as their target subject.

8.1.4 School K

Geographical location - general information
School K is also located in the countryside, and according to the head, in a socio-economic catchment area described as average with a few pockets of deprivation. The percentage of ethnic minority pupils was about six percent in 2003, and in contrast to the two former schools, it was possible, at least for some of the pupils to choose another state school in the county due to the distance to the next upper school, even if it was not an option for the majority of the pupils.
The financial situation
The financial situation was problematic, even if it was not described by
the head in terms of large deficits, but the school was hoping to become
a specialist school in order to get the extra funding. To be a specialist
school was further, according to the head, a way to recruit more pupils
since it was popular to attend in this type of school.

Pedagogical profile
School K had several subjects/areas which it focused on: drama,
football, science, and engineering; however, the latter two were the
subjects they highlighted on in their application to become a specialist
school.

8.1.5 School L

Geographical location - general information
School L is located in a town where there are a couple of upper schools
that compete with each other for pupils. It is a mixed socio-economic
population in the town with pockets of large deprivation as well as very
affluent areas. The head described the catchment area of the school as
somewhere between average or a little bit above average. School L has
been a winner in the competition for pupils and was oversubscribed.
According, to the head, house prises have increased in the catchment
area of the school since people move houses to be able to enrol their
children in the school. The number of pupils from ethnic minorities
was low, about three percent in 2003, since the majority of pupils from
the deprived areas in the town belonged to another catchment and
consequently another school, and since school L was oversubscribed,
pupils from outside the catchment did not have the option to attend this
school.

The financial situation
Even if the school was oversubscribed, the finances could improve and
the solution for this school was to apply to be a specialist school. The
head claimed that “the funding system in England was a mess” and that
they used to have better funding, but if they could get the specialist
“status”, the financial situation would be much better.
Pedagogical profile
School L focused on maths and science and aimed to apply to be a specialist school in these subjects.

8.1.6 School M

Geographical location - general information
School M is also located in a town with the same socio-economic characteristics as those of school L. The number of ethnic minority pupils was one to two percent in 2003 and, as for school L, pupils from the deprived areas of the town belonged to another catchment area. School M, according to the head, had an average socio-economic catchment area and had been a popular alternative for the pupils during the last decade. There are a couple of state schools that could be described as competitors, but the school was oversubscribed and had a waiting list for pupils from other catchment areas who wanted to enrol in the school. According to the head, it was possible, if a pupil moved from the school, to offer this place to any of the pupils on the list and normally they picked the pupil with the best study results.

The financial situation
The school had a balanced budget and the financial situation could be described as good, mainly because it was a specialist school and therefore received extra funding.

Pedagogical profile
As mentioned above the school has become a specialist school and the subject they have specialised in is technology. According to the head, there were three reasons why they had applied to become a specialist school: the school gets extra funding, it is easier to recruit teachers, and it is popular among pupils and parents.

8.1.7 School N

Geographical location - general information
School N is located in a larger town with many deprived areas and a substantial part of the population has an immigrant background. In this school the number of pupils from ethnic minorities was about 27%
in 2003 and the socio-economic status of the catchment was below average. Even so, the school was oversubscribed, but the number of pupils that preferred an independent alternative was higher in this part of Villa. According to the head, 10% of the pupils in the town attended independent alternatives, while the average for the county was five percent. The head also claimed that some of the middle and upper class parents were not satisfied with the quality in the state schools in the town, or sometimes the relatively high number of ethnic minority pupils in the schools, and therefore made the choice of an independent school for their children.

There are two other state schools located in the area, but they both had a larger part of ethnic minorities and were not considered as threats to school N to the same extent as the independent alternatives.

The financial situation
The financial situation was rather good since they got extra funding since the status as a specialist school.

Pedagogical profile
The subject the school focused on and used in their marketing was performing arts. According to the head, there were two reasons why they had applied to become a specialist school; firstly, they wanted the extra funding, secondly, they had a strong tradition in arts.

8.1.8 School O

Geographical location - general information
School O is located in a smaller town and the school’s socio-economic catchment area was described by the head as below average. The number of pupils with immigrant background in the school was about 27% in 2003 and the school was not oversubscribed and could receive 40-50 more pupils. School O had lost pupils, about 50-60 during the last years, to another state school in the neighbourhood with a better catchment area because, according to the head, the other school had better results. The other school had even contacted top students in school O and invited them to begin there, which they had sometimes accepted. Even so, school O was growing, but the competition from the school in the neighbourhood was a big problem.
Financial situation
The school had financial problems as it was undersubscribed and because it had not got any extra funding from the state, since it lacked the status as a specialist school.

Pedagogical profile
The school’s strategy to become more attractive and to recruit more pupils, as well as receive extra funding, was to become a specialist school in business and enterprise and they were applying to get this status.

8.1.9 School P

Geographical location - general information
School P is located on the outskirts of a larger town in Villa and in the catchment area of the school immigrants from many different countries live. The number of ethnic minority was 50% and they represent 30 different languages in 2004. The socio-economic status of the area was below average and the school, according to the head, had been a so called sink-school. It had for many years experienced a vicious circle because pupils in the catchment made other choices of schools and consequently the situation had been very problematic, not least financially. The LEA therefore threatened to close the school in the late 1990s. At the beginning of this decade, the school managed to change the trend and the school was oversubscribed from September 2004. The head argued that his strategy to recruit more pupils was to do visible things like shaping up the school uniforms as well as applying to become a specialist school.

Financial situation
The finances had improved and the budget was in balance for 2004, partly due to the number of pupils, but mainly because they had become a specialist school.

Pedagogical profile
The school had become a specialist sports college which, according to the head, had been very popular among pupils and parents in the catchment area.
8.1.10 School Q

Geographical location - general information
School Q is located on the outskirts of a small town and has no competitive state schools in the neighbourhood. The socio-economic status of the catchment area is above average and ethnic minorities constituted about one percent of the population in 2004. The school was oversubscribed and the only way to get a place in the school was to live in the area. The head claimed that families had moved houses in order to belong to the school’s catchment area and this had resulted in higher house prizes in the town.

The school had a good reputation, according to the head, and it was easy to recruit teachers.

Financial situation
The head claimed that the financial situation for all upper schools in Villa was problematic, even if they were oversubscribed and had extra funding related to their specialist status.

Pedagogical profile
School Q is a specialist school with sports as their profile subject. They had become a specialist sports college in order to increase the funding as well as a strategy to recruit both teachers and pupils.

8.1.11 School R

Geographical location - general information
The school is located in a small town with two upper schools and the socio-economic status of the catchment area is above average. The head claimed that the other school in the area was also good, but school R was probably more popular and it did not have any drop outs to independent schools. The number of immigrant pupils was less than one percent in 2004 and despite the school’s popularity it was difficult to recruit teachers, according to the head.

The financial situation
The financial situation of the school was problematic and they had to make personnel reductions, even if they were oversubscribed. Partly because it had an old teaching staff, who had reached the highest step
on the pay scale and partly because it had not received the status as a specialist school and consequently did not get any extra funding.

*Pedagogical profile*

The school wanted to be a specialist school in mathematics and computing, but had not finished the complicated application process, when this study was made.

### 8.1.12 Summary and conclusions of the presentation of the schools

The presentation of the upper schools in Villa shows that the schools’ geographical location is important, when the concept of school choice is discussed. The schools located in small villages/towns in the countryside have no competitors among the other state schools because of the lack of infrastructure and public transport. It is of course possible for parents, if they can afford it, to enrol their children in independent schools or in boarding schools, but this is not a realistic option for most of the parents in Villa. Therefore, the free choice of school does not exist for the majority of parents/pupils that live in these parts of Villa.

On the other hand, families in urban parts of the county also have limited opportunities to make choices outside the catchment, if the schools are oversubscribed, as almost all of the schools in this study were in 2003 and 2004. If the pupils choose a school outside the catchment area they automatically lose their place in their “home school”. Consequently, it means that the choice in reality does not exist for the majority of the pupils/parents, since many of them are not willing to take a chance and make a choice outside the catchment area. If the chosen school was oversubscribed, the pupils in the area have priority; so the pupil has lost the place in his home-school and cannot be enrolled in the school he or she have chosen, due to the oversubscription and will be placed in the nearest school with spare places.

One of the heads said that: “The choice in schooling is a myth here in Villa” and he referred both to the fact that the schools were oversubscribed and the rules for choices outside the catchment. Another school leader claimed that: “The choice is only an option for middle and upper class parents” since they had the financial means to choose private alternatives.

It is also evident that almost every head claimed that it was more or less impossible to maintain a balanced budget, since they did not get
the necessary funding. Even if their schools were oversubscribed this was not enough to get balanced finances; especially if the school had old and experienced teachers, it was difficult, since the schools were responsible for the salaries. The strategy for almost every school in this study was to become a specialist school in order to get extra funding. There were also other motives, however, than just financial to become a specialist school; it was popular among parents/pupils, it was easier to recruit teachers, and so on, but the main argument to apply for this position was to get extra funding.

One of the heads argued, referring to the funding, that “the labour government does things for deprived areas and a lot for the best schools and nothing for the ones in the middle”. The head referred to the system with extra funding for socially deprived areas the EAZ, the Education Act Zones, and the specialist schools. Another head argued that: “Initially the special schools were thought to be very exclusive”, but it was now possible for almost every school to achieve this.

Finally, as can be seen in table 8.1 below, all schools that had not received the position as a specialist schools had problems with their finances. The head teacher in school Q even claimed that the school had a problematic financial situation despite being both a specialist school and oversubscribed. However, this school was an exception, all the other heads from the specialist schools claimed that the funding was sufficient, given the extra funding they received. It seems understandable why all the other intended to apply, or already had applied, to become a specialist school in order to receive the extra funding.
Table 8.1     A presentation of the schools – a summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Geographical location</th>
<th>Type of living area</th>
<th>Finances</th>
<th>Specialist school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
<td>No, but intend to apply for science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Yes, for sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
<td>No, but applied for science and engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Average, or little above</td>
<td>Could be better</td>
<td>No, intends to apply for maths and science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Average, or little above</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Yes, for technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>Rather good</td>
<td>Yes, for arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
<td>Applying for business and enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>A balanced budget</td>
<td>Yes, for sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Rural, small town</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
<td>Yes, for sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Rural, small town</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
<td>No, intends to apply for maths and computing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (The interviews with the head teachers)
8.2 Other Aspects According to the School Leaders

8.2.1 Quality in schooling

There were eight heads arguing that the competition between schools had improved the quality in schooling in Villa. Schools must improve in order to get pupils, was in summary the main argument from these heads. “Competition definitely leads to better quality, we try all the time to improve”, one of them argued. The next group of five school leaders claimed that the quality had increased to some extent, but they had the following remarks: One of them argued that competition had initially been effective in improving the quality, but in the long run it was better to collaborate in order to raise standards. A couple of the others claimed that the quality had improved for the best schools, the most popular ones, but deteriorated for other schools. The former could offer more to their pupils since they had more money, one of the heads said. Another argument from this group of heads was that, together with the inspections and the presentation of the school results in the League Tables, the competition was one factor, which had led to better quality. The third group, five of the leaders, argued that competition was not the best way to improve schooling, it was better to collaborate. The last two heads claimed that the competition has had a negative impact on the quality: “The competition has most of all been damaging”, one of the two argued and continued that “cooperation leads to better quality”.

Comments to the issue of quality

As the presentation above shows, there are roughly three types of opinions among the school leaders: firstly, competition increases the quality in schooling; secondly, quality has increased for some schools, and together with other factors, competition has had some impact on the quality; thirdly, it is better to collaborate with other schools in order to improve schooling. Many of the school leaders in Villa claimed that the local LEA had focused on collaboration between schools and created networks to make sure that no school should become a “sink school” as well as for the purpose of sharing expertise. This group of heads claimed that Villa was very unusual; there was more competition
in other areas of England. “There’s a solidarity between the schools”, one of them claimed. However, a majority of school leaders of this opinion worked in schools in rural areas with no competition with other schools or at least not to any large extent any problem. The heads from urban areas were not as enthusiastic to the collaboration between the schools, as the ones that worked in the countryside. Even if the former group agreed that the collaboration between schools to some extent had improved due to the LEA-strategy, they argued that it was difficult to collaborate with the neighbour school, if they competed for the same pupils.

It is hardly surprising that heads in urban areas argued that it was more difficult to collaborate due to the competition between the community schools in the area. As one of them said: “We have to accept excluded students”, and referred to the fact that since the school was not oversubscribed, they had to receive pupils from other schools. So even if the official strategy was to promote collaboration between schools, the reality for some schools was problematic in this context.

A general opinion among the school leaders was, however, that schooling in general had improved in Villa, but as the discussion above shows, they did not agree on the impact of competition and market forces on this process. It is reasonable to assume that the OFSTED-inspections as well as the presentation of the results in local newspapers are important in this context, but as almost half of them argued, it is likely that the competition between schools has contributed to this development.

8.2.2 The Choice

Even if the opportunity to choose was limited due to the rules of the catchment area and the distances between schools, it was interesting to ask the school leaders about their opinion regarding the parents/pupils preferences, when they made the choice of school; and the question was therefore: “What is most important when the parents/pupils choose a school?”

Below follows a summary of the most frequent answers:

1. The distance to the school
2. Results on tests
The distance to the school was, according to the heads, the most important factor, when the choice was made. The second most important issue for the parents was the results of the school; a common opinion among the leaders was that especially middle class parents focused on the results. The third most important factor was the reputation of the school which, according to some of the heads, was strongly connected to the results. Many of the heads argued that there were several different aspects involved, when the choice was made, but in general many of them claimed that the families’ socio-economic background was important in this matter. The facilities of the schools, for instance the number of computers, were factors more important for lower class families than for other social groups. One of the heads also claimed that the school in the catchment area was more often chosen by the former type of families: “Since there is a lack of places in the schools, they really have no option”.

Comments to what is most important when choosing a school

It seems evident that the school leaders claimed that the distance to the school was most important for the choice of school. The focus on results from middle class parents seemed also plausible, given the standard arguments for and against choice in schooling discussed previously. What perhaps is more surprising in this was the low impact that a special profile had for the choice of school, according to the school leaders. Only one of the heads claimed that a special profile was among the most important issues for the pupils/parents when making the choice of school. So even if some of the heads claimed that one of the reasons to become a specialist school was the popularity among the pupils/parents, it seems that several other aspects were more important for the choice of school.
8.2.3 Break a vicious circle

Even if most of the schools in Villa were oversubscribed, it was interesting to ask the school leaders what could be done, if a school experienced a negative trend and the question was:” What can a school do to break a vicious circle?”

The heads suggested a lot of different measures, but six of them argued that it was very difficult to change a negative trend for a school. One in this group claimed that most important was “to keep the core of middle class parents in the school” and argued that if this group of pupils were to choose other alternatives, the results would consequently go down and the vicious circle would escalate. Several of the others argued that it was difficult, but possible to break a vicious circle even if it could take a long time to achieve this. One of them argued that “The parents are five years behind” and claimed that it takes a long time to build up a good reputation. Even so, all school leaders had suggestions on how to break a vicious circle and the answers can be divided roughly into two different solutions: to market the school and to make changes in the organisation. The former type of answer focuses on both marketing, like involving parents, to “sell” the school to your pupils, so they become ambassadors in the community, to get new school uniforms etc. The latter is perhaps surprising, but one of the heads described how she had changed a negative trend by introducing new school uniforms: “the children looked untidy, I focused on that; it spread all over the community” and she continued: “a small issue that made a large difference.”

The other answers focused mainly on changes among the personnel, with a new head as most important, but even to attract good staff and to get rid of bad teachers was advocated among these heads. A couple of the leaders also claimed that more funding was necessary for these schools in order to break the vicious circle.

Comments to how to break a vicious circle

According to the heads in Villa, it is not an easy task to break a vicious circle for a school but, according to the majority of them, it is possible. The middle class parents seemed to be the key for the schools, both if they wanted to avoid getting a bad reputation or if a vicious circle
should be broken.

The results, according to the heads, were more important for these parents and if the school does not live up to their expectations, they could choose an independent alternative for their children or move to another catchment area which was not an option for parents from poorer social circumstances. Consequently, the solutions given by the school leaders could be seen more or less as strategies to attract the middle class parents/pupils in the area due to the regulations regarding the catchment areas and the oversubscribed schools.

The example above of new school uniforms shows that it could be important to make distinctions between schools that experienced negative trends. If it was enough to introduce new school uniforms to improve the reputation and to change a trend that had become negative, it is likely that the situation for the school could not have been especially problematic. However, a couple of the other heads also claimed that it was important to do visible things like introducing new school uniforms as a symbolic measure to show that this was the beginning of a new period for the school; therefore, they argued, it was important for a school with a negative trend to change uniforms. Schools with bigger problems had to take other measures in order to break the vicious circle using combinations of different solutions. One head described how he had been recruited by the LEA to change the trend for the school, a multi-cultured school (50% of the pupils had an immigrant background in 2004), and how he had worked with this project for a couple of years and finally had managed to change the trend and got the (middle class) parents to choose his school. The strategy he used consisted of a combination of different measures like inviting parents to the school to discuss with them how to improve, marketing, to become a specialist school and to introduce new school uniforms. He also claimed that he had a great passion for multi-cultured schools and that this had also been important in the struggle to change the trend for the school. Even so, the results must be good, if the school is to be attractive: “You can get away with bad results one year or two”, he argued, but after that the school has to improve.

To get a charismatic leader was the solution advocated by some of the heads (even if this aspect was one considered to be one of the ten most important factors when the choice was made), for schools with a negative trend, and the example above shows that the leadership probably had been important in this context. However, if the schools were to be attractive, they had to have good results; as one of the heads said: “The best marketing is to get better results.”
8.2.4 Collaboration between schools

The next issue discussed with the school leaders in Villa was whether the collaboration between schools had declined due to the competition. The question was therefore: “Has the collaboration between schools been affected by the competition?”

The answers from the heads can be divided roughly into two groups. Half of them thought that the climate for collaboration during the late 1980s and 1990s, when market forces and competition were introduced, was strained. It was difficult to collaborate with schools in the neighbourhood due to the competition. The climate however, had improved during the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s and these ten heads claimed that the collaboration had improved and that it was better in Villa than in other parts of England because of the strategy initiated by the LEA. “Schools collaborate more now, it has improved over the years”, one of them argued. Another head in this group claimed that the climate was very hard in the early 1990s, but that it is much better now. He continued, however: “We do not share everything with each other”. Then he said: “We want to be the best school”.

Nine of the remaining heads claimed that there was too little collaboration, since there was competition, between the state schools in Villa. Four of them argued that there should be more collaboration between schools and that the collaboration between schools would improve, if there was no competition. “It’s easier to collaborate with middle schools”, one of them argued.

Three others claimed that schools did not share things with each other for the reason of competition. “There is an aggressive competition”, one of them argued, and continued: “There is no friendship between the schools”. The remaining two claimed that the rhetoric talked about networks and collaboration, but reality was different. “You must collaborate is the official line, but the hidden agenda is that you must compete”, one of them said. The remaining school leader argued that the climate for collaboration had nothing to do with competition between the state schools, but with the decentralisation and the increased work load and claimed that it was lack of time that was the problem, when the issue of cooperation was discussed.

The answers from the school leaders differed depending on the type of schools they worked in; though with some exceptions, heads in rural areas were in general more positive than the others to the collaboration climate.
Comments to collaboration between schools

According to several of the heads, it was evident that the official strategy of the LEA in Villa to create networks and to encourage collaboration between schools has had some impact on the working climate among the state schools. Several of the leaders claimed that Villa was different from other parts of England with much harder competition and the climate for collaboration much tougher.

A couple of the heads claimed that the situation was much harder at the beginning of the 1990s and that the working climate had improved strongly since then. Many of the school leaders even expressed that the best way to increase the quality in schooling was to collaborate and to share expertise. This idea or vision was shared by heads in several schools regardless if they worked in rural or urban areas. However, as mentioned above, there was a major difference in how school leaders from different areas looked at the reality in Villa. Though the official strategy was to collaborate, many heads had a different experience with the competition between schools having a major impact on the willingness to cooperate. This is hardly surprising; it seems evident that it is easier to collaborate with the schools in the neighbourhood, if the risk of losing pupils is minimal, since there is a lack of options for the pupils outside the catchment area. Consequently, it is more difficult to cooperate and share expertise, if the result can be that you lose pupils and money to other schools in the area. One of the heads even described the situation as if there was no friendship at all between the schools, which obviously is not a good starting point for collaboration.

However, it seems reasonable to assume that the climate for cooperation between schools had improved since the 1990s partly because of the LEA strategy, but probably also because the heads and the teachers over the years had accepted the rules and got used to the school system in Villa. However, the arguments mentioned above, “We do not share everything with each other” and “We want to be the best school”, from one of the heads claiming that the climate of collaboration had improved and that the situation was good between the schools, reveals the difficulties in collaboration in a system with choice and competition. Finally, it is also important to mention that several of the heads claimed that competition had led to better quality in schooling in Villa while some of the others argued that collaboration would have been a better strategy to improve the schools’ performances.
8.2.5 Pressure on the personnel

The next issue is related to the working climate in the schools and if the system of market forces has had any impact in this context. The next question was therefore: “Has the pressure on the personnel increased due to the competition between schools?”

The answers from the school leaders can be divided roughly into three different categories: eight of the heads answered no, ten of them answered yes, and the remaining two said that it was hard to say if the competition has had any impact on the personnel. Some of the leaders in the first category argued that the pressure in society in general had increased, so the competition between schools was not the reason for the tougher climate. One of them said that the situation with oversubscribed schools in Villa was relevant in this context and argued that: “In an area with surplus places, the situation would have been different”. One leader claimed that the constant changes in the rules increased the pressure. Another one in the same group argued that the competition was not relevant in this context: “The inspections increase the pressure, not the competition”.

The heads of a different opinion argued that the pressure on the personnel had increased in different ways as a result of the competition. A couple of them argued that the pressure on the head definitely had increased due to the competition, especially in schools in deprived areas. Others claimed that even the teachers were affected by the competition: “The self-esteem is lower in schools with bad results”, one of them argued. The same head was also critical to the presentation of the examination results and claimed that since added value was not included in the League Tables “you measure the catchment area” and not school performance. Another leader said that: “The teachers feel the pressure absolutely from the competition”, and argued that it had to do with accountability related to the presentation of results in League Tables and OFSTED-inspections. Finally one of the heads in this group argued that it was especially difficult for young teachers to live up to the expectations to deliver good results in order to raise the standards of the school.

Also to this question the answers from the school leaders showed the same pattern as for the issue of collaboration between schools. Heads in rural areas in general were of the same opinion and argued, with a few exceptions, that the pressure on the personnel had not increased due to the competition while the opposite was the most common opinion of their urban colleagues.
Comments to increased pressure on the personnel

Almost all of the leaders claimed that the pressure had increased in general on the personnel and especially on the head teacher for several different reasons: the decentralised system, increased pressure in general in society, constant changing of the rules, high expectations from parents, the OFSTED-inspections, the League Tables, and the competition between schools. It is likely that all these aspects were relevant in this context, but it is obviously not possible to know to what extent the different aspects, mentioned above, increased the pressure. However, as mentioned above, the trend was clear; heads from urban areas were more convinced that the pressure on the personnel had increased as a result of competition between schools. This is hardly surprising; it seems likely that the pressure increases, if the parents/pupils have other alternatives to choose from. The basic idea behind market forces in education is that schools need incentives to improve and it seems more or less evident that the struggle for pupils increases the pressure in general among the staff and particularly on the heads. It is important to notice that the head, who claimed that the situation in Villa with many oversubscribed schools decreased the pressure, the personnel felt from the competition, was probably right, since many of the schools do not have to compete for pupils. It is evident that a decreasing population and fewer pupils, given the same number of schools, will create tougher competition particularly for the urban schools, which most likely will lead to increased pressure on the personnel, if the system of choice and competition remains the same.

8.2.6 The decentralised system in Villa

The next issue to discuss concerned the issue of decentralisation and what the school leaders thought of the system in the county. The question to the leaders was therefore: “What is your opinion about the decentralised system in Villa?”

The answers can be divided into four categories; firstly, three of them said that it was very good; secondly, 13 of them claimed that decentralisation was either good or preferable to a centralised system; thirdly, three of them were neither for nor against decentralisation; fourthly, the last head argued that they were not decentralised in practice. The heads in the first category argued that they liked the freedom of the
system and that it gave them more control since they had the financial power. One of them claimed that because of the decentralisation “the schools develop in different ways which is positive”. The next category argued that the present education system in Villa was either good or at least better than the previous one. “The old system in which the LEA had the power was terrible”, one of them said and claimed that the LEA interfered too much and that there was too little local management. Another one argued that the LEA tried, but they were too bureaucratic during the 1980s and the 1990s. A third head claimed that “The LEA laid a dead hand over the schools in the 1980s and most of the subsequent decade” and continued: “They focused too much on administration and did not care so much for education”. A fourth school leader in this group argued that “Local management is better than the alternative”. There were, however, some objections against decentralisation in this group having to do with the work load of the heads. “The head has to deal with a lot of other issues; marketing, buildings, strategies etc”, one of them claimed. The opinion that decentralisation led to several other issues than just teaching and learning, which increased the work load, was shared by the other the school leaders in this group.

Two of the school leaders in the third group, who said that they were neither for nor against the system, also used these objections against decentralisation. “You have the control which is good, but the work load has increased.” One head argued that: ”If the funding was better, I would be more positive” and referred to the difficulties in balancing the budget, a tough responsibility in the decentralised system. The last head claimed that “We are not decentralised in practice since rules and regulations come from the central government in London” and then she continued; “There is financial freedom, in the classroom the system is very centralised”.

Comments on the decentralised system

As the presentation above shows, the school leaders in Villa preferred decentralisation to more centralisation. None of the heads argued that decentralisation should be abandoned, even if many of them claimed that the work load had increased too much and some of them said that they would prefer to focus more on teaching and learning instead of all the other issues, they dealt with. Even so, none of them seemed to
be interested in reintroducing the old system of the 1980s with more power for the LEA. The solution to decrease the work load was to employ more staff to deal with the premises, budget work, and so on, not to remove the power from the schools. On the other hand, the finances were a problem for almost every school making it more or less impossible to increase the staff working with administration.

Their arguments for decentralisation were based mainly on the following issues:

- you have the control over the finances
- autonomy is good
- schools develop in different ways
- the old centralised system was not good at all due to much power of the LEA

It is evident that the heads in Villa both liked to have the control of the finances and to have a certain degree of autonomy in order to be able to improve the quality and to develop in different ways. It can certainly be discussed if it is positive or not that schools develop in different ways, but one of the heads claimed that it was good for the pupils to be able to choose a school with a specialist competence according to their preferences. The head arguing that the schools were not decentralised in practice because of all the regulations from the central government in London, focused on an important issue that has been discussed previously: what is decentralisation in a school context? That the state has centralised, which started with the reform in 1988, some important aspects of schooling in the English system seems evident; a national curriculum, the OFSTED-inspections, national tests, the reduction of power to the LEAs, and so on, are examples of this development during the last two decades. On the other hand, schools have more control of their finances as an example of more decentralisation. The LEAs seem to be the losers in this development, assuming that more power and control is something to strive for, since their influence has decreased since the 1980s, according to the heads. However, the head arguing that the schools in Villa were not decentralised in practice, they only had financial freedom, had a point in the centralised aspects of the English school system introduced after 1988.
8.2.7 The Market forces

The answers
The final issue concerned the school leaders’ opinions on choice and competition in the education system. The question was therefore: “What do you think about market forces in schooling?”

Nine of the heads argued that they did not like market forces in schooling. All in this group claimed that choice and competition would lead to more segregation both between schools and ethnic groups in society. “It is wrong for the government to accept that some schools are winners and some are losers”, one of them said: “A and B schools will emerge, another head claimed and continued by saying that increased polarisation will occur. Deprived areas do not have the same opportunities, was another argument from a leader in this group and he also argued that “It will lead to better education for some pupils”, and claimed that teachers wanted to work in better schools and consequently it was easier for these schools to recruit good teachers. “It is a poison challenge” one head claimed and continued “It is inevitable, but I don’t like it”. Another leader said that “The League Tables and the OFSTED have a lot to answer for”, and argued that the inspections were too important for all schools. “I can’t see any advantages in market forces”, was a further argument in this matter from a head in a school with problems from the competition and had lost pupils to a competing school in the neighbourhood.

Six of the school leaders claimed that it was difficult to say if market forces in schooling were good or bad. One in this group said that “market forces get the school on their toes, but the business climate is not good for education”. Another one argued that the competition had been good for the quality in schooling, but “we need to collaborate and balance the market forces” and continued that it would lead otherwise to more sink-schools and a more class divided society in urban and city areas. These answers are typical examples of the reasoning by these six leaders; they could see some advantages, but the market impact had to be balanced.

Two heads claimed that they liked market forces since they led to better quality in schooling. They also said that choice and competition would not lead to increased segregation in society. “The British society is a class society with independent schools”, one of the heads claimed and argued that market solutions would not lead to more segregation. He went on to claim that white middle class parents move houses to
areas with good schools in order to get a place in the “right” catchment area leading to higher house prices in these areas. This was a bigger problem for the segregation in society than the option to make choices, according to this head.

Two of the remaining leaders claimed that choice was basically good, but not competition, while the remaining head argued that market forces was a myth in the education system in Villa. She referred to the rules of the catchment areas, the oversubscribed schools and the lack of alternatives for many of the pupils in the community.

**Comments on market forces in schooling**

Compared to the opinion on decentralisation, the opinion on market forces was much more negative. Only two of the heads liked market forces, while six of them saw some benefits, but they argued that the risk of segregation was evident. Segregation, as can be seen above, was the most common argument from those against market forces, which hardly is surprising given the discussion of advantages and disadvantages of choice and competition that have previously been discussed in this thesis. A question that seems relevant in this context is: what impact did the market forces have on the educational system of Villa, when this study was made? The strictly defined catchment areas together with the oversubscription of many of the schools, created a situation with choice of other schools as no option for the majority of pupils/parents in the county. Even if it was not correct to describe the market forces as a myth in Villa, as one of the heads did, the impact of choice and competition seemed limited for the majority of the schools in this study. The arguments from the head in favour of market forces could therefore be relevant to some extent; the middle and upper class parents have the options to choose private alternatives as well as to buy a house in a catchment area with better schools. He argued that regardless of the system, these kinds of parents could make choices from their financial situation; the segregation in the British society was already a fact and had nothing to do with choice in schooling. Consequently, he argued, the system of choice made it possible for pupils from deprived areas to break the social segregation, if they attended a school in a “better” living area. The latter is an argument used by advocates of choice in schooling when discussing the issue of segregation and it has some relevancy in this context; if the alternative
for pupils is enrolment in the nearest school, the social situation of the housing areas would likely maintain the segregation between both pupils and schools.

It is interesting to see that the leaders’ opinions about market forces seemed not to be based on the popularity or financial situation of the school. There were, however, two exceptions; the head most negative to market forces worked in a school with negative experiences of the competition, while the head most positive to market solutions came from one of the most popular schools in Villa. Otherwise there were no differences between school leaders from urban or rural areas; their attitudes to market forces seemed not to be related to the situation of their own school.

8.3 Summary and Conclusions of the Interviews

As the presentation of the school leader’s opinions show, there were major differences in their opinions whether competition and choice having increased the quality in schooling in Villa or not. The arguments varied from one head, who claimed that market solutions had only positive effects on quality in schooling, to the head, who argued that there were only disadvantages of the system. Regarding many other issues there were also big differences among the school leaders’ answers as totally different opinions could be found about collaboration, pressure on the personnel, choice of school, and so on.

There were, however, some similarities between school leaders in the same type of schools. For instance, the school’s location seemed to have been important both for the attitude to how easy it was to collaborate with other schools and to the degree of pressure the personnel felt due to the competition.

Heads from rural schools had, not surprisingly, other opinions than their urban colleagues. However, the schools’ location and the degree of competition were not the only explanations to the school leaders’ opinions regarding these issues, since there were differences even among school leaders from the same type of school, or even from leaders in the same school, but the degree of competition seems to have been important especially, when collaboration and pressure on the personnel were discussed.
Regarding two other issues, however, the majority of the heads had similar opinions: the importance of recruiting middle class pupils and the attitude to decentralisation. The former seemed to be the key to success for almost all schools in Villa, since these kinds of pupils performed well in general in school a very important fact especially, when the League Tables presented the results of the schools. The latter was considered the best steering system for schooling although the degree of autonomy was questioned in this context and one of the heads claimed that the schools only had financial freedom.
Chapter Nine

A Comparison between Torp and Villa

The purpose of this chapter is to compare and analyse educational issues in Torp and Villa. The comparison will follow the same pattern as the interviews and start with the issue of quality in schooling. In order to make the results easier to compare, discuss, and analyse, the answers from the school leaders will be classified into categories of opinions.

It is obviously difficult to make generalisations based on the results, since there are rather large differences between the two communities in this study, differences that have probably had an impact on the leaders’ opinions; Torp has, for instance, no rural areas, the cultural and society context differs in the two countries, and so on. However, taken these factors into consideration, comparisons will be made as far as possible of the leaders’ opinions regarding the impact of market forces and decentralisation.

9.1 Quality in Schooling

As previously described, the heads in Torp were to a large extent convinced that the quality in schooling had improved due to the market forces in their educational system, see table 9.1.

Table 9.1 Summary of the question if quality in schooling had been affected by competition and market forces in Torp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, it has improved</th>
<th>It has probably improved</th>
<th>Difficult to say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is also clear that the opinions of the leaders in Torp corresponded to a higher degree compared to the answers from their English colleagues.

Table 9.2 Summary of the question if quality in schooling had been affected by competition and market forces in Villa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes, it has improved</th>
<th>Yes, it has improved in some extent</th>
<th>It is better to collaborate</th>
<th>Competition has been damaging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>villa</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of the heads in Torp argued that collaboration was a better strategy to improve schooling or that competition was damaging for schools, which several of the leaders in Villa did. There could of course be a number of explanations to the latter groups’ opinion in this case; like for instance the geographical location of the school, which has been discussed previously, or the LEA strategy for collaboration. The plan for learning networks could have generated a more positive attitude among the heads to collaboration and perhaps a more negative opinion about market forces. The LEA could also have recruited school leaders who advocated collaboration instead of competition, which could have been reflected in the answers.

So why were the school leaders in Torp more convinced about the positive impacts of market forces for the quality in schooling? Could it be related to the fact that all schools in the municipality had to improve in order to get pupils? Unlike the situation in Villa, where some of the schools were located in rural areas with no competition, all schools in Torp could lose pupils to many of the other schools in the municipality. As has already been described, even school A, located in the most affluent part of Torp lost pupils to other schools in the municipality for a couple of years because the parents preferred other alternatives. Consequently school A, had to improve in order to change the negative trend to be competitive on the market.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the stronger competition between the schools in Torp had resulted in better quality, since the schools had to work hard to be competitive on the market. This could explain the differences between the leaders’ opinions of the impact of market forces on quality in schooling. Furthermore, the rules of the clearly defined catchment areas and the fact that almost every school in
Villa was oversubscribed could also have had an impact on the school leaders’ attitude in this case. In Torp there existed no defined catchment areas, and consequently the schools had to convince the pupils/parents, even those in the neighbourhood, every year to choose their school. In Villa, the catchment areas and the rules concerning choice outside these areas making it impossible for the majority of parents/pupils to make other choices than the school in the neighbourhood, led to a situation where the schools had a guaranteed number of pupils every year. The fact that most of the schools were oversubscribed, made the choice of school more or less a formality in many cases and consequently the competition was not as strong as in Torp, even if some of the schools in Villa had experienced tough competition from schools in the neighbourhood.

Another important issue in this context is the role and the rules of the independent schools. In Torp, the number of independent alternatives has escalated during the 2000s and about 15% of the pupils in lower secondary attended this type of school in 2004. The trend is also that more independent schools will be established in the municipality by the ambitions of the political majority. As described previously, in Sweden you are not allowed to charge parents fees resulting in every family having the opportunity to choose an independent school in Torp. In Villa, the number of pupils attending independent alternatives was about five per cent year after year, since the parents had to pay a substantial amount in fees every year for their children, making it impossible for the majority of the parents to choose an independent alternative.

Consequently, the schools in Torp had to work even harder to meet the competition from both the growing number of independent alternatives, a very attractive alternative for many parents, as well as from the other community schools. The conclusion is therefore that the competition in general had been much harder in Torp and the schools’ incentives to improve had been stronger, for the reasons mentioned above.

9.2 The Choice

The next issue to compare is the leaders’ opinions of what they thought was most important, when the parents/pupils made a choice of school. Even if the options in reality were limited in Villa, it is interesting
to see what similarities and differences there were according to the leaders.

As we have seen before, the factors seen by the school leaders as affecting parents’ choice were the following ones:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Torp</th>
<th>Villa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. the distance to the school</td>
<td>1. the distance to the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. the reputation of the school</td>
<td>2. results on tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. profile classes</td>
<td>3. reputation of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. the school’s socio-economic status</td>
<td>4. the ethos of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. the size of the classes</td>
<td>5. children’s opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. the standard of buildings/classrooms</td>
<td>6. discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. grades and results on national tests</td>
<td>6. children should be happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. calm and safe environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. school uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. the facilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That the distance to the school was the most important factor in both communities is evident. The quality would be extremely poor, if the school in the housing area did not attract the majority of the pupils in the neighbourhood.

The reputation of the school was considered the second most important in Torp and took the third position in Villa. The leaders argued in similar ways in both communities and claimed that it was a very long process that took years to build up a good reputation, but the reputation could be deteriorated in months; and as the results show: it was considered very important for the schools in both Torp and Villa to maintain a good reputation of the school in order to attract pupils. There were no general explanations given to the characteristics of a school with a good reputation, since parents focused on different aspects, but many of the Villa answers, for instance, could be relevant in this context like the results, the ethos of the school, and that the children were happy.

When it comes to the results it is obvious that the opinions differ; while the heads in Torp considered the results as the least important reason they gave to this question, their colleagues in Villa claimed that the results was the second most important factor, when the choice was made. So why were the results not considered to be as important for the parents in Torp as they were in Villa? There could be several more
or less plausible interpretations and the following ones can be relevant in this case. Firstly, Sweden has a long political tradition with the focus on equality in all sectors of society with probably a large impact on schooling. For instance, the pupils do not get any grades until they reach the 8th grade, since the socialistic political majority up to 2006 has argued that it is not good for the pupil’s development to compare the results, when the pupils are younger. In fact there are many politicians on the left wing arguing that there should be no grading system at all in compulsory schooling.

However, the new government, who won the election in September 2006, has declared that they will introduce more grades in schooling. Suggestions have been made that the grading system should be introduced at least in the 6th grade with the motivation that parents and pupils need to have this information earlier in order to know what to focus on in schooling. So far, in August 2007, the new government has not introduced any changes in the grading system, but they will probably come prior to the next election in 2010.

Secondly, there are no examinations at all in the Swedish school system until the pupils/students reach university level; consequently, the results cannot be compared in the same way as for the schools in Villa/England. Even if the results i.e. the grades in year nine, for every school are presented once a year in both the local and national newspapers, the attention given to this cannot be compared to the School Performance Tables in England, which according to the heads in Villa, are very important for the schools. However, during the last few years there has been an increased focus on results in Torp and the school catalogue distributed to the parents each year includes more and more statistical information about grades, SALSA, as well as evaluations among parents and pupils on how satisfied they are with the schools in the municipality. So even if the results so far have not been so important in Torp for the school choice, an assumption is that the importance of the results will increase as a result of this measure.

Thirdly, although it is difficult to compare how important educational issues are in the political debate in Sweden and England, an assumption is that Tony Blair and his government have focused more on the importance of schooling compared to the Swedish equivalent. Given that this is true, perhaps the interest in school performance has been higher in England leading to more focus on results. The lack of national inspections could also support this assumption; until 2003, The National Agency for Education had not performed any school inspections at all.
in Sweden and the schools in Torp so far have not been assessed in any national evaluation besides the national tests described above.

Fourthly, in the discussion of the importance of the results for the choice of school, a comparison between Torp and Villa shows that none of the leaders in the former community said that parents had moved houses in order to get a place in a certain school, while several of the heads in Villa claimed that parents had moved houses to be able to enrol their children in a school with good results. This fact supports the answers from the heads that parents in this English community considered the results to be very important, when the choice of school was made, but it is also an indication of other issues being more important for the parents in Torp. There can of course be other explanations to the leaders’ opinions like, cultural differences, the rules for the catchment areas, smaller differences between social groups in Torp compared to Villa, and so on.

Another major difference between the answers from the leaders concerns the importance of profile classes; while it was considered as the third most important aspect for the choice of school in Torp, it was not even given as one of the ten most important factors, when the pupils/parents in Villa made their choice. It is difficult to present an explanation to this fact, other than that they did not consider this aspect to be especially important for the choice of school. But it seems rather strange, given that almost all of the schools had applied to be a specialist school with the focus on one or a few subjects, that this pedagogical status had so little impact on the choice of school.

9.3 To Break a Vicious Circle

Another aspect of the free choice arrangement is that some schools can be losers in this competition and experience a vicious circle with too few pupils consequently leading to poor finances. In both Torp and Villa, many of the heads argued that it was very difficult to break a vicious circle for a school, especially if the school was located in a deprived area with many immigrants. However, the solutions given by the leaders differed roughly in the following aspects; while the heads in Torp argued for offensive strategies like new profile classes and involving the parents in the school improvement process, the leaders in Villa claimed that improving the results, in order to be attractive to the
middle class parents, and get a new charismatic head were the answers to the problem. Another difference was related to the opportunity for schools with many immigrants to break a vicious circle. Many of the heads in Torp argued that it was more or less impossible for schools, with the large majority of the pupils of an immigrant background, to be an attractive alternative for Swedish middle class parents. Their colleagues in Villa said that it was difficult, but possible, for a school with many ethnic minorities to be an alternative even for middle class parents and to break the vicious circle.

So how can the different opinions be explained? Profile classes have been popular among the parents and hence it is not surprising that this strategy was advocated by the heads in Torp. Moreover it is reasonable that improving the results was seen as a way, by the leaders in Villa, to recruit pupils from the middle class in order to break a vicious circle. However, the issue of the charismatic leader, claimed to be a strategy to get a positive trend by many of the heads in Villa, is perhaps more difficult to explain. Since only one of the school leaders in Torp suggested that the leadership could be important in this context, it is evident that there was a major difference regarding this aspect. So how do we explain the different opinions on this issue? There could be several more or less plausible interpretations: firstly, the cultural/societal aspect; Swedish society is egalitarian and non-hierarchical also reflected in the leadership in the school world. The head teacher in a Swedish school is not automatically an authority because of the title and the importance of the leadership for a school’s development gets little attention in the media debate. The “salary gap” between heads and teachers is also much smaller in Torp compared to Villa, another aspect of the more equal Swedish society.

Secondly, the Swedish “mentality”; this is closely related to the former issue and reflects attitudes to individuals versus the collective, with the latter many times considered more important and individual achievements should not be stressed, at least not by the leaders regarding their own competence. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the leaders in Torp do not focus on a charismatic head as a strategy for school improvement. Thirdly, the organisation of the schools; the schools in Torp have a very “slim” organisation with a limited number of people working with administration. The head and the deputy head had to deal with several tasks, handled by other personnel categories in Villa. Even if the schools in the English community enrolled more pupils, the administration staff was much bigger in the schools in Villa, indicating
that the head teacher could have more scope to be a pedagogical leader. The “leader hierarchy” in Villa was more evident; in addition to the head and the deputy head, some schools had assisting heads and all schools had heads of department, in for instance mathematics, and heads of years, in for instance year nine, which does not exist at all in Torp.

So why were the leaders in Villa more optimistic about the possibilities to break a vicious circle for a school with many immigrants? There could even in this context be several interpretations and the following seem to be most plausible. Firstly, the number of immigrants in the schools; as has been described previously, it has been possible for the schools in Torp to break a vicious circle, but the only lower secondary school in the municipality, school F, with an overwhelming majority, more than 90% of the pupils, of an immigrant background has experienced a long financial vicious circle.

An explanation to this situation was that the number of pupils with a Swedish background has decreased year by year. One of the heads in school F claimed that it was more or less impossible to get Swedish middle class pupils to choose the school since the decreasing number of pupils had Swedish as their mother tongue. In a comparison to Villa, none of the schools had a number of ethnic minorities of more than 50% which seems like an advantage in this context.

Secondly, once again the rules of the catchment area versus the free choice; in Villa the free choice of school was not an option for the majority, since the pupils lost their place in their “own” school, if they made a choice outside the catchment area. LEA also decided when the schools were oversubscribed as well as the size of the catchment area, which meant that every state school in Villa had a more or less guaranteed number of enrolments.

Thirdly, the oversubscribed schools; many of the schools in Villa were oversubscribed, when this study was made, making it even more difficult to choose a school outside the neighbourhood.

Fourthly; the lack of private or independent alternatives; the number of pupils that attended private schools in Villa was about five per cent year after year, since it was very expensive to enrol children in these types of schools as they did not get any funding from the government.

Finally, given the discussion above, it seems evident that the heads in Torp were more negative to the possibility of changing a vicious circle for a school with a large majority of the pupils of an immigrant background. The fierce competition from both community and
independent schools is one explanation; another is the fact that there existed no “guaranteed enrolments” in Torp, like the ones the LEA provided in Villa.

9.4 Collaboration between Schools

This question has been partly discussed above, in section 9.1, since collaboration between schools was considered a better strategy by many of the heads in Villa, to improve schooling than competition. Therefore the following discussion will include issues that have already been analysed as well as a few new aspects.

On this issue there were both similarities and differences in the answers from the leaders. Heads working in areas of Villa with competition had roughly the same experiences; it was more difficult to collaborate with a school in the neighbourhood, as the schools competed for the same pupils. Leaders in both Torp and Villa argued also that the situation was worse at the beginning of the 1990s possibly an indication that the schools had adapted to the system and learned to live with the competition. However, none of the heads in either Torp or Villa said that they collaborated and shared expertise with the nearest school, if they were competitors, the reality for all the schools in Torp and for some of the schools in Villa. The only heads in the latter community claiming that there were no problems in collaborating with other schools, worked in rural areas with no competition for pupils as a result of the distance to the next school. Neither of these similarities is surprising; it seems evident that it was more difficult to collaborate with a competitor in the neighbourhood than a school located in another part of the municipality or outside the community. It is also reasonable to assume that heads and schools learned to live with the system and adapted to the rules finding ways to collaborate with others even if competition hardly is the best strategy, if the goal is to increase the collaboration between schools.

When it comes to the differences, the opinions regarding the importance of collaboration between schools for school improvement differed between the two communities. Several of the heads in Villa, regardless of whether they worked in a rural or urban area, argued for more collaboration. These leaders also claimed that collaboration was the best way to improve the quality in schooling, and hence
much better than competition and market forces. In Torp, none of the leaders claimed that collaboration was a better strategy for school improvement; in fact, even if the majority of the heads argued that collaboration had declined due to the competition, none of the twenty leaders even mentioned collaboration as a way to raise the quality in schooling. There was none of the leaders in Torp who argued for more collaboration between schools.

So how can this major difference be interpreted? There could of course be several plausible interpretations like; firstly, the official strategy of the LEA of learning networks. Many of the heads in Villa argued that the climate of collaboration was much better in this community than in other parts of England and referred to the strategy of the LEA as the explanation. However, although the schools in Torp belonged to the same organisation/concern and the heads participated and met each other in different kinds of meetings during the period 1992 to 2003, there existed no learning networks of the same type as in Villa.

Secondly, it might be the case that Villa had recruited other kinds of leaders, more focused on collaboration.

Thirdly, as three of the school leaders in Torp argued, the organisation of working-teams in the schools reduced the need for collaboration between schools since the teachers collaborated to a much larger extent than previously, hence it was not as necessary as before to co-operate with teachers in other schools for pedagogical reasons. In Villa, the teachers were not organised in the same way, a fact that could have been important in this case, and could have increased the demand for more collaboration between schools.

Fourthly, the schools in Torp had more autonomy and were more decentralised, a fact that could have had an impact on the willingness to collaborate given the organisation with working-teams as well as fiercer competition. Anyway, the leaders in Torp did not consider collaboration as a way to improve schooling. Even if they did, they did not say anything about this in the interviews.

Fifthly, the school leaders in Torp were more positive in general to the impact of competition on school improvement than their English colleagues, which also could have affected both the willingness to co-operate and the attitude to collaboration.
9.5 Pressure on the Personnel

The fourth issue to compare concerns the school leaders’ opinion on the question whether the market forces in schooling had increased the pressure on the personnel. More or less all school leaders in both communities claimed that the pressure had increased in general in schooling, but they had different opinions about the impact of market forces in this context. Heads working in rural areas in Villa argued that competition had little impact on the increased pressure, while their colleagues in urban areas in the English community as well as the majority of the leaders in Torp claimed that the competition had contributed to the increased pressure. Many of the heads in both communities argued that the pressure on the heads in the schools had increased to a larger extent than on the teachers. Neither of the opinions above is surprising; it is evident that leaders from schools in rural areas did not feel the pressure from the competition to the same degree as their colleagues in urban areas. It seems also clear that the pressure on the heads was much stronger compared to the teachers in the schools. There were, however, similarities as well as some differences in Torp and Villa in regard to the reasons for increased pressure.

The heads gave the following reasons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Torp</th>
<th>In Villa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- the decentralised system</td>
<td>- the decentralised system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- demands from parents</td>
<td>- the OFSTED-inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- increased pressure in society</td>
<td>- increased pressure in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- constant changing of the rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- the School Performance Tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- high expectations from parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the presentation above shows, they had similar opinions on two aspects, the increased work load from the decentralised system and the increased pressure in society. The third reason given by the heads in Torp, that the demands from the parents had increased substantially, correlated with the argument in Villa that the parents’ expectations had increased. But even if these aspects seemed to be the same, it is important to make a distinction between demands and expectations.
In Torp, many of the leaders claimed that parents threatened to move their children to other schools, if their demands/requests were not met. In Villa, since the schools in general were oversubscribed and/or were located in rural areas, the threat to enrol children in other schools was not an alternative for the majority of the parents. Nevertheless, the expectations from the parents were high on the schools to get good results and increased the pressure.

When it comes to the differences it is obvious that the OFSTED-inspections as well as the School Performance Tables increased the pressure on the personnel in Villa. It also seems reasonable to assume that constant changes of rules increased the pressure on the personnel. The final conclusion is therefore, that on this issue the heads’ opinions appeared to be more or less the same; the differences can be explained in the light of different steering systems and rules. If there had been inspections conducted in the same way in Torp, the pressure would most certainly have increased on the personnel.

9.6 The Decentralised System

The fifth issue to compare was the school leaders’ opinions on the decentralised education system in their communities. The heads in Torp, as the table below shows, were in general much more positive to the decentralised system than their English colleagues. It is also clear that even regarding this issue the answers from the leaders in Torp corresponded to a higher extent compared to the opinions of the heads in Villa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good or at least better than centralisation</th>
<th>Neither for or against</th>
<th>Not decentralised in practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the table above shows, the number of heads in Villa who thought that the system was very good was much smaller compared to the number in Torp. Those who argued that the system was good, or at least better than more centralisation, used roughly the same arguments: that the work load had increased, but school based management with more autonomy and local power was better than the alternative.

So how can the differences be interpreted? Why were the leaders in Torp much more positive regarding this issue? There could of course be several explanations like cultural differences, different types of recruitment and so on, that could have contributed to the opinions to the other issues as well as to decentralisation. However, there is one aspect that seems to be more relevant here and that is the differences between the decentralised systems in Torp and Villa. The table below, 8.5, shows that the differences between both the communities/ countries’ educational systems were substantial at the time of this study and the examples illustrate the difficulties in using the concept of decentralisation to describe a system of education.
Table 9.5  The decentralised system in Torp and Villa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Torp</th>
<th>Villa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The national curriculum</td>
<td>Centrally, loosely defined goals, local interpretations</td>
<td>Detailed directives centralisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent national school inspections</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local school boards</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National pay scales for teachers</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for the borders of the catchment</td>
<td>The head</td>
<td>The LEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision of oversubscription of the school</td>
<td>The head</td>
<td>The LEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for employing teachers</td>
<td>The head</td>
<td>The LEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local financial control</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: (The interviews with the school leaders; Sammons et al, 2003; Slenning, 1999)

These examples show that the two educational systems that could be described as decentralised are very different. Hence, it seems reasonable that their opinions differ, but why are the leaders in Torp more positive? An assumption is that school leaders like to make their own decisions and have more control of the school, salaries, recruitment and so on. Perhaps, the head from Villa was right, when she concluded that the educational system of Villa was not decentralised in practice, since the local responsibility only concerned the financial control and not what
happened in the classroom for instance. So even if the competition between schools in Torp was fiercer, the heads had much lower salaries, the responsibility for almost everything in the daily running of the school and increased the pressure to a larger extent, the leaders in the Swedish municipality were more pleased with the decentralised system. These facts support the idea that more autonomy/decentralisation increases the job satisfaction. That local decision making leads to increased job satisfaction among heads has also been claimed by others (Abu-Duhou, 1999; Daun et al., 2003; Levacic (1995), which is another indication that heads like to have more influence over their schools.

9.7 The Market Forces

The final issue to compare was the leaders’ opinions of market forces in schooling and even on this aspect the opinions from the heads in Torp were more homogeneous as well as more positive in general to market solutions. In the comparison in the table below this pattern was evident.

Table 9.6 The leaders’ opinions of market forces in schooling – Torp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Probably good</th>
<th>Difficult to say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.7 The leaders’ opinions of market forces in schooling – Villa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Difficult to say</th>
<th>Choice is good – but not competition</th>
<th>Do not like</th>
<th>It is a myth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were only two heads in Villa who argued that competition and market forces were positive for the quality in schooling. In Torp, twelve of the leaders had the same opinion and six of the other heads
also supported the idea that market forces were good for the quality, but claimed that the risk for segregation was evident. The two remaining leaders could also see advantages of market forces, but were more sceptical, since they argued that it would lead to more segregation. In Villa, the heads were much more critical to market forces and almost half of them argued that they could see no benefits at all with competition and choices in schooling.

So how can the differences be explained? Firstly, as the head who claimed that market forces in Villa were a myth, the rules for the catchment areas, the oversubscribed schools and hence the lack of alternatives for the majority of pupils/parents leads to a situation of no real choice. Even if the market forces were perhaps not a myth in Villa, they had a limited impact on schooling in a comparison with Torp, and this could have explained the heads’ opinions of market forces in Villa. Secondly, the official LEA strategy of collaboration between schools could even in this case have been relevant for the heads. Thirdly, the financial rules could also be relevant for the leaders’ opinion. In Torp, the rules changed in 2001, and the schools could not automatically use their surpluses the subsequent year and schools with large deficits were not forced to start the next budget year with the impossible task of making substantial cuts. Hence the new rules balanced one of the negative aspects of market forces in schooling, the development towards A- and B-schools, and made it possible for schools that experienced a vicious circle to maintain reasonable class sizes and so on; these schools got a chance to change the negative development and to be an alternative for the parents/pupils. Furthermore, none of the lower secondary schools in Torp has been closed down even if the deficits have been substantial for more than a decade. Consequently, the attitude to market forces among the heads in Torp has probably been affected by these rules which have avoided, to a certain extent, large financial differences between the schools.

An interesting aspect is certainly, if these rules could be described as market oriented, since the purpose of them was to balance the negative impact of market forces. It was also obvious that the leaders’ opinions in Torp of market forces could not be related to their school having experienced financial difficulties or not, there was not even the slightest indication that heads in these schools were more negative to market forces than their colleagues in more “successful” schools. If the municipality had maintained the same rules that were initiated at the beginning of the 1990s regarding the financial outcomes, the attitudes
among the heads in Torp to market forces would most likely have been different, since the schools’ financial situation would have been totally different.

Fourthly, perhaps the positive attitude towards decentralisation, given by the leaders in Torp, even reflects the answers regarding market forces. Some of them claimed that local decision making and a high degree of decentralisation were strongly connected to choice and vouchers and claimed that it would not be possible to have the freedom without the market solutions. Finally, it has been possible for the schools in Torp to break vicious circles indicating that the system has been effective to a certain extent. This fact could also have had an impact on the leaders’ attitudes to market forces in the educational system of Torp.

9.8 Summary

The comparison above shows that two educational systems, which both can be described as decentralised, differed from each other in several aspects. The system in Torp/Sweden gave, and still gives, the schools a great deal of autonomy, while the system in Villa/England was, and still is, more centralised and provided less local influence over the daily running of the schools.

It is further evident that the school leaders in Villa were more satisfied with both the decentralised steering system and market forces in schooling than their English colleagues and it is reasonable to assume that this fact is related to the degree of decentralisation. Other studies have showed that job satisfaction among leaders, increases with large local decision-making and this study seems to support this idea.
Chapter Ten

Summary of Main Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this final chapter is to make a summary and to discuss the findings of this study as well as to provide some recommendations to policy makers and future research. The focus in this study has been to describe and analyse some of the consequences market forces and decentralisation have had on schooling in one community in Sweden and one in England, as seen by school leaders in these two communities, and the key concepts will once again be stressed and analysed in order to reach some conclusions. References will also be made to other studies in order to detect similarities and differences.

10.1 The Choice – Good or Bad?

Discussion

The importance for the schools of the free choice can hardly be underestimated in a decentralised educational system with market forces and competition. There are many arguments for and against choice in a market oriented school system and advocates mainly claim that:

- it leads to better quality, since schools improve, if they have to compete for pupils (Levin, 1995)
- it tends to contribute to more parental involvement, since schools will tailor make their offers to become more client-oriented (ibid.)
- it tends to lead to more motivated pupils
- it is basically good for people to have the opportunity to choose a school of their preference (Arsen et al, 2000)
- it provides a chance for pupils from social deprived area to attend a school in another socio-economic area (Rock Kane & Luricella, 2001)
- it allows school development in different ways with, for instance,
different profiles and parents can choose a profile that best serve their needs (Miron, 1993)

Arsen et al. (2000) argued that the rules regarding the choice were an important aspect, since different rules create different outcomes. The political ambition, besides the ideological reasons, with the choice system in Torp in addition has been to create diversity in schooling with many pedagogical alternatives to choose among for the pupils/parents in the municipality.

The arguments against choice are basically four:

- a choice system is more beneficial for upper and middle class parents, since they have the opportunity to find the relevant information about the alternatives and therefore can make the right decision for their children (Fiske & Ladd, 2003; Skolverket, 2003)
- choice will lead to more segregation in society, both between schools and social groups (Skolverket, 2003)
- even if choice is good for the family, for example to let pupils attend religious schools, it is not certain that it is the best option from the society perspective; since one aim for schooling is to create civil values and understanding between different groups (Levin, 1994b)
- in a choice system like the one in Torp, it is impossible for the schools to make plans for more than one year.

In this study, the general opinion among the school leaders was that the choice basically was good. None of the heads in Torp or in Villa argued that a system with enrolment according to the catchment area was to prefer. Even if the rules of admission made it difficult for the majority of pupils in Villa to choose another school than the one in the neighbourhood, the leaders considered it to be an important option for the pupils/parents. All leaders in Torp were also positive to the customers’ opportunities in this aspect and agreed on the benefits mentioned above like more parental involvement and more motivated pupils.
Conclusions

The arguments for choice in schooling, given by the leaders, seem both valid and reasonable; the quality aspect will be discussed in the next paragraph, but other outcomes in Torp, like more parental involvement and more motivated pupils, are obviously positive for schooling in general. The argument that the choice can provide opportunities for pupils from socially deprived areas also seems relevant in this context at least in Torp. In Villa this opportunity was limited for pupils from this type of socio-economic areas due to the rules of admission as well as the situation with oversubscription of most of the schools.

Has the choice in Torp increased the pedagogical diversity? Compared to the old centralised system the options for the customers have increased substantially with the choice system. Pupils can choose among community schools with different profiles, different class sizes, or independent alternatives, schools outside the municipality can also be chosen, and so on, and the answer is therefore: yes, the pedagogical diversity has increased due to the choice. Even if, for instance, many of the profiles are the same in the community schools, six of the schools offered a sport profile in 2003, and there are tendencies to “imitate” popular profiles from other schools, since these profiles are not organised in exactly the same way.

Some of the arguments against choice in schooling also seem reasonable; as table 7.5 and 7.6 have shown, it has been almost impossible for the lower secondary schools in Torp to predict the result of the choice of school making the financial planning difficult for the head teachers. Levin’s (1995) argument that what is good for the family is not necessarily the best for society seems also relevant, although it is impossible to say to what extent. The argument that choice is most beneficial for the middle and upper class families, at least for Torp, can be questioned; about 95% of the pupils in Torp made their choices within the stipulated time in 2003, which is an indication that it is not just the middle and upper class families that are active in this process. Even if it is reasonable to assume that these types of families find it easier to get the “right” information, have networks with their peers, like those Schneider (2001) describes, and so on, does not automatically lead to the conclusion that other types of families cannot make a good choice for their children and that the choice is not beneficial for the latter type of families. Furthermore, would not middle and upper class families be even more advantaged in a system without choice? Most likely, since the alternative seems to be enrolment based on the
catchment area. Perhaps the situation in Villa would emerge in Torp, with families moving houses in order to get a place in the school of their preferences. This would definitely be an option mainly for middle and upper class families, if it was not a realistic option to make choices outside the catchment area. No, as I see it, the major problem with the free choice is the risk of segregation based on ethnicity. The head in Torp, who argued that the system works for nine out of ten schools, but not in socially deprived areas, had a point. Financial segregation can also be a problem, but this is easier to handle in a community because of the way the rules are constructed (which will be discussed further in 10.3) than the ethnic segregation that school F has experienced as an example. It is obvious that ethnic segregation has been easier to deal with in Villa, by for instance, the limitations in the free choice, than in Torp and other Swedish municipalities, but even the English county has experienced problems with schools with large groups of ethnic minorities. However, there can, be other factors that are relevant in this case, when the issue of difficulties of ethnic segregation is discussed. One example is that since many immigrants already speak English, when they come to England the integration will most likely be easier.

However, it can be very difficult for a school that in a vicious circle to break this trend despite showing good results of which school F is an example. The school has performed very well and some years they have had the best results of all the lower secondary schools in Torp, when the aspect of SALSA (value added) is measured. In spite of the good performance, the school has obviously not been an attractive alternative for the minority of the pupils with a Swedish background living in the area.

There is one further aspect of the free choice that needs to be mentioned in this context and that is the limitations of the choice opportunities for pupils, when schools are oversubscribed. In Villa, oversubscription had contributed to the situation with no free choice as an option for the majority of the pupils, at the time of this study.

In Torp, the political majority claim that the free choice is very important and that the schools must do what they can to receive all the applying pupils, even when it means that one school has to expand and another has to make reductions. But the system cannot deal with a situation, when a school gets too many applications, since normally it is not possible to expand to a necessary level. There are several bottle necks like the number of classrooms, places in the canteen, the social environment and so on, making it very difficult to make fast changes in the schools.
Furthermore, even if it is possible for the schools to expand, they have to pay for these possible investments and it is far from certain that the revenues exceed the costs for the first years, obviously a strong argument for the heads to avoid this risk; given how difficult it has been to predict future enrolments as well as how difficult it can be to reduce the costs rapidly when necessary. A reasonable conclusion is therefore that the market forces do not work in this case; many of the pupils do not get their first choice of school due to both the difficulties for the schools to expand their premises as well as the rules regulating the investments.

Anyway, the answer to the question in the headline is, in my opinion, that the advantages of the choice have exceeded the disadvantages in Torp, and the conclusion is therefore that choice in schooling basically has been good for the pupils/parents in the municipality. Even if the ethnic segregation sometimes occurring in a system with a free choice of school is a major problem.

10.2 Competition – a Way to Improve the Quality?

Discussion
One of the main purposes of using market forces in schooling is that schools need incentives to improve (Levin, 1994a). Competition among schools is, therefore, a way that will lead to better quality and in the opinion of the majority of the school leaders in Torp, increased competition has generated better results and more satisfied customers in the lower secondary schools. There were, however, negative aspects of the competition like increased pressure on the personnel, deteriorated collaboration climate as well as a risk of segregation between schools as a result of the competition.

The leaders in Villa were not as convinced as their Swedish colleagues of the positive impact competition has had on schooling and some of them argued that collaboration was a better way to increase the quality in schooling, while others claimed that competition was necessary to “keep the school on its toes”. Even so, it is difficult to compare the competition in Villa with that in Torp, since it does not exist for many schools in the former community.
Conclusions

It seems reasonable to assume that the quality in schooling in Torp has improved from the competition between the schools. Given that competition leads to better quality in other sectors of society, it seems likely that schooling is also affected by incentives and threats in a competitive system. The answer to the question in the headline above is therefore: yes, competition improves the quality in schooling in the cases studied here. Even if the concept of quality can be discussed and mean different things to pupils and parents, like good results or small classes, schools have to work hard in order to be attractive on the market. This study has shown that the financial outcomes in Torp have differed to a large extent from one year to another due to the choice and that successful schools can loose pupils easily, if the customers are not satisfied with the education provided. The schools have to find ways of changing the trend, if they are in a situation where they are beginning to loose pupils to other schools. They cannot just wait and see if the pupils/parents change their minds, hence there are no other alternatives than to work hard, make improvements and become more attractive in the eyes of the pupils/parents.

10.3 Do the Rules Matter?

Discussion

That the rules regarding, for instance, the choice arrangements in schooling are important for the consequences has been discussed previously in this study. Arsen et al. (2000) compared the rules regarding charter schools in two American states and came to the conclusion that the outcome differed a lot as a result of the rules; social segregation was for instance the result if these schools were allowed to charge fees.

That the rules have been important for schooling in Villa and Torp is also evident, and the following is just a few examples. In Villa the rules of the admission to the schools have been regulated by the LEA and the limitations of the options for the majority of the pupils have been discussed previously, like the difficulties in making choices outside the catchment area as well as the situation with oversubscribed schools. National rules regarding the independent schools in England have limited furthermore the options to choose private alternatives, since
these schools do not get any subsidies from the state and consequently have to finance their schooling by charging the parents substantial fees.

On the other hand, the LEA has most likely limited the ethnic segregation, since their rules both stipulated which living areas the different schools had as their catchment and decided when the school was oversubscribed. So even if there were schools in Villa with large ethnic minorities, for instance in school P 50% of the pupils had an immigrant background in 2004, it is far from the 80% of the pupils in year nine, in school F.

In Torp the rules regarding the choice have given the pupils a wider range of options: it has been possible to choose a school outside the catchment area without the risk of losing the place in the “home school” if the former school would be oversubscribed. It has also been an option for all families to choose independent alternatives, since they are not allowed to charge any fees.

When market forces were introduced in Torp in 1992, the initial rules looked quite different and were more market oriented; schools could be forced to close, if they were not able to keep their budgets and surpluses and deficits were transferred automatically to the next budget year. However, to close down schools has never been easy for politicians, and if that rule had been followed, three of the lower secondary schools, C, D and F, would have been forced to close already in the middle of the 1990s. This had obviously not been possible, either from a political point of view or for logistical reasons.

The change of the financial rules in 2001 regarding the surpluses and deficits was also necessary, but from a financial point of view. It was too expensive for the municipality to let schools with surpluses use them automatically during the next year, while it was more or less impossible for the schools with large deficits to start the budget year by making cuts of these magnitudes. For example school C had accumulated deficits of 11.4 million SEK during the period 1994 to 2000 (see tables 7.5 and 7.6) and if they made annual cuts, it would not have been possible both to get a budget in balance and pay back old debts to the municipality. So, from 2001 all community schools in Torp belong to the same group financially. Schools can only use their surpluses, if the total financial outcome for the group is positive. At the same time, old deficits are written off, financed by the group fund that all schools contribute to annually, given that a “deficit school” shows a positive budget result for two consecutive years.
A financial system has therefore been created to balance to a certain extent the negative consequences of choice and competition. For the educational sector in Torp, this has probably been a wise strategy, since it has given schools a chance to break a financial vicious circle, but the initial market concept of the 1990s has been changed substantially. However, it is important to notice two things: firstly, that the competition still works in the same way as before and there are no indications at all that the schools do not try as hard as before, due to the changed financial rules, to be an attractive alternative for the pupils. Secondly, it is normally possible for the schools in Torp to use all their revenues during the budget year as long as they keep their budgets. They do not have to generate surpluses to the group even if on some occasion, for instance in 1996, the schools were urged to generate surpluses in order to help the municipality, when the financial situation had been problematic in Torp. Finally, a reasonable question in this context is: “Why did successful schools generate surpluses at all, why didn’t they spend the resources they had?” The answer is that is difficult to predict the financial outcome for a number of reasons. For instance, the negotiations between employers and unions take time, and on many occasions the outcome is not known until the autumn, pupils move in or out from the school during the summer, and therefore schools do not really know until September or October, what the result will be, even if the financial outcome was assessed, and still is, every month.

Since the organisation for the subsequent school year is already planned during the spring, the financial outcome can be much better than predicted. So, even if “surplus schools” can make large purchases during the autumn, there is a tendency among these schools, or their head teachers, not to take any financial risks in case something extraordinary should happen, because it is still considered very important that the schools have their budgets in balance. To mention one example, to keep the budget is one criterion, when the individual salaries for the school leaders are set by the Chief Education Officer in Torp.

Conclusions
The examples above show clearly that the answer to the question in the headline of this paragraph is yes: the rules matter and different rules generate different outcomes. What, for instance, would have happened in Torp, if the initial financial rules had been maintained? It is obviously difficult to speculate, but the inequalities between the
lower secondary schools would most likely have been bigger. It would have been a much tougher, or perhaps impossible, for school C, for example, when they finally managed to change the negative financial trend in 2001, to start paying back old deficits according to the old rules. The conclusion is therefore evident: the rules matter.

10.4 Decentralisation – Better Than Centralisation?

Discussion
This study has presented, discussed and analysed two educational systems that both could be described as decentralised. That the concept of decentralisation can mean different things was discussed in chapter 2 and the two examples in this study have demonstrated how differently two educational systems can be organised even if they are “labelled” in the same way. While the English school system has many more elements of centralisation, the Swedish system is decentralised to a substantially higher degree, with the head teachers responsible for almost everything in the daily running of the school. Even so, the interviews have shown that the school leaders in Torp were more satisfied than their English colleagues with the steering system in their respective community. Moreover, none of the 40 heads in this study claimed that a centralised steering system was better than a decentralised, although three of the English leaders argued that they were not sure which steering system that was the best.

There was basically one argument against decentralisation that some of the leaders stressed both in Torp and in Villa, the increased work load forcing them to focus on other aspects of schooling than teaching and learning. It is important to notice that some of the negative aspects discussed in relation to choice and competition are also connected and valid for the issue of decentralisation, like the difficulties to predict the choice of school and the increased pressure from parents. The former argument has also been used by advocates of centralisation: that the financial resources are used more efficiently under central planning; the budget outcome is easier to predict, all schools receive a sufficient number of pupils, and so on.

The advantages of a decentralised system, according to several of the school leaders, can be summarised as follows:
- it is good to have the control over the finances, since the local leaders know what is best for the pupils (Murphy, 1991; Chapman et al, 2002, in Ruiz de Forsberg, 2003)
- schools get the opportunity to develop in different ways and the pupils get more pedagogical options (Miron, 1993)
- it increases the quality
- it is more efficient from a financial point of view
- it increases the job satisfaction among the leaders (Abu-Duhou, 1991; Levacic, 1995)

Conclusions
The general arguments for centralisation seem to a certain extent both reasonable and valid; with a centralised system financial differences could be avoided between schools and it would definitely be easier to make plans for more than one year at a time. It is also obvious that the work load increases in a decentralised system as well as the pressure on the personnel in general and the school leaders in particular. If choices were not allowed and school admission was decided at a central level, it would definitely ease the pressure on the local leaders in, for instance Torp. That the financial resources are used more efficiently in a centralised system can however be questioned and the following examples from Torp seem to contradict this argument.

Firstly, during the 1990s the deep recession in the Swedish economy led to demands for substantial cuts in all public expenditures and Torp was no exception. A 30 to 35% reduction in the costs had to be made in the educational sector and since the financial responsibility was decentralised to the schools, it was a matter for the school leaders to deal with the situation. The schools found different strategies and solutions to the problem and managed to organise schooling, despite the severe cuts that had to be made. According to the heads in the previous study (Söderqvist, 1999), it would not have been possible to solve these problems in a centralised system, where the cuts would have been decided at a central level since the local leaders, in collaboration with the personnel and sometimes with the parents, knew what reductions were possible to make.

Secondly, the heads have found new strategies over the years to improve the finances for their schools like using the same premises for different activities; the primary school section in school G, for
instance, has used the same classrooms for schooling and leisure-time centres in order to reduce the costs. It would most likely have been much more difficult to get parental acceptance for the cuts, mentioned above, if these decisions had been taken at a central level. It could have delayed the development towards more efficiently used premises or even stopped it. Collaboration with private companies has also been developed at the local school level in order to use the resources more efficiently such as purchasing IT-services as one evident example and schools have managed to get better quality and reduced the costs.

Thirdly, in order to increase the revenues school leaders are very active in the process of enrolling new pupils, definitely not the case in the old system from the lack of incentives. The lower secondary section of school G increased the number of pupils from 350 in 1995 to about 580 pupils in 2003, partly due to the increasing number of pupils in the area, but mainly as a measure to improve the school’s finances. If the incentive of getting more vouchers had not existed, why would schools have the ambition to enrol more pupils? As previously discussed, more pupils also generate problems for a school so this expansion, within the same premises, would have been very difficult to carry out in the old centralised system, with every new pupil more or less considered as a problem by both the schools and the parents. Even if some of these pupils could have attended school B, if the admission had been centralised, investments in new premises to meet the increasing number of pupils in the area would probably have been the outcome. However, even if the latter cannot be proved, since it is obviously impossible to draw conclusions as to what would have happened with another steering system, there is no doubt that the financial incentives in the decentralised system have led to other behaviour among the schools in Torp with heads working hard both to reduce the costs and to increase the revenues.

When it comes to the other arguments for decentralisation mentioned above, the first of these give further support to the idea that a decentralised system is more efficient from both a financial perspective as well as in a wider perspective; local control provides the school leaders with the opportunity to use the resources in an optimal way, since local managers know what is best for the school and its pupils. It seems to be a reasonable argument that corresponds to findings from other studies (Chapman et al, 2002, in Ruiz de Forsberg, 2003).

The opinion that schools develop in different ways also seem relevant in this context; the decentralised system of Torp has generated
several pedagogical options that at least were not provided in the old centralised system. It is, however, difficult to separate decentralisation from the other aspects, choice and competition, in this context since all have contributed to the school development in, for instance, Torp. Compared to the old centralised system, according to the heads, the quality in the lower secondary schools had improved substantially, despite the cuts during the 1990s and it seems reasonable to assume that the decentralised system had contributed to this development. Further, the argument for job satisfaction among the heads increasing in a decentralised system has been concluded in other studies (Abu-Duhou, 1999; Levacic, 1995), and seems to be relevant even in this study. It was evident that the school leaders in Torp were more satisfied with decentralisation in schooling than their English colleagues and the most reasonable explanation seems to be the difference in the degree of decentralisation provided by the different educational systems.

Finally, despite the increase in the work load for the school leaders in a highly decentralised system like the one in Torp, it also provides the schools with several opportunities: to develop in different ways, to find new challenges, to use their resources for IT-investments, smaller classes, or what they prefer, in order to improve the quality.

Nevertheless, the answer to the question in the headline is yes: decentralisation is better than centralisation for schooling, according to the heads; and in a comparison between Torp and Villa, the more devolution of decisions to school level, the more decentralisation, the better.

10.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

This study has presented a picture of two educational systems where 40 school leaders have been interviewed in order to find out how they have experienced decentralisation and market forces in their respective community. It would be interesting to widen the perspective and ask other stakeholders about their opinions regarding the same issues. What do the teachers in the lower secondary schools in Torp and Villa respectively think about their educational systems? An English study (Sinclair et al, 1993, in Whitty 1997) shows that teachers and head teachers sometimes have different opinions on local management. The latter often claim that the teaching staff is more involved in decision
making in a decentralised system, while the former argue that the gap
between the head teachers and the personnel has increased at the school
in the educational process, because the head teachers have become
more like businessmen with the focus on financial issues.

It would also be interesting to investigate the parents’ opinions on
these issues in general and the choice in particular; why have they
chosen a certain school? What were the most important factors? How
did they get the information? Would the parents’ opinions correlate to
the school leaders’ answers in this study about what is most important,
when the choice is made? The questions are many in this context, but
the parental opinion on the choice appears to be an important issue to
study.

Further, the argument given by some of the leaders in Villa, that
collaboration was a better strategy for school improvement than
competition, would be interesting to investigate further. How have the
results developed in the county compared to the rest of England?

Finally, to return to Torp in 2013 and evaluate what has happened
with the lower secondary schools during a 10-yeas period would be
very interesting. Will the system be the same? Has school F been able
to break the ethnic segregation? Are the financial rules the same? Has
the number of independent alternatives increased? The answer to the
latter question will most likely be yes, since the number of independent
schools in the Stockholm area has increased rapidly during the last few
years (2004 to 2007).

Even if it has been possible for community schools to become
independent, the trend in the area is evident; many schools, normally
popular schools with good finances, have applied to the National Agency
for Education in order to get the permission to start an independent
school. Then the municipality decides, if the school will be allowed
to be independent and owned by for instance the head teacher, or the
personnel and the head teacher, or even, in some cases, a company or a
person not involved in the local schools. The election in 2006 resulted
in a conservative/liberal majority in many of the municipalities in the
Stockholm area which has been crucial to this process, since many of
these politicians favour increased private alternatives. The arguments
against privatisation of community schools have been many and
sometimes both the personnel and parents have said no to making an
independent school of a community school.

In Torp at least one of the lower secondary schools has applied to
become an independent school and perhaps some of the others will
send in applications too. Even so, it would be interesting to follow the development regarding both the issues mentioned above as well as the trend of the privatisation of community schools.
Appendix 1

Frågor:

Kvalitet i skolan:
1. Har kvaliteten i skolan påverkats av konkurrensen och marknadskrafterna?

Skolvalet:
1. Vilka faktorer tror du är viktigast när föräldrarna/eleverna väljer skola?
2. Vad kan en skola göra för att bryta en negativ trend?

Arbetsmiljö:
1. Har samarbetet mellan skolorna påverkats av konkurrensen?
2. Har pressen på personalen ökat till följd av konkurrensen mellan skolorna?

Systemet:
1. Vad tycker du om det decentraliserade systemet i Torp
2. Vad tycker du om marknadskrafter inom skolan?
Appendix 2

Questions:

Quality in schooling:  
1. Has the quality in your school been affected by competition and market forces?

Choice of school:  
1. What is most important when parents/pupils choose a school?  
2. What can a school do in order to change a vicious circle?

Working environment:  
1. Has the collaboration between schools been affected by the competition?  
2. Has the pressure on the personnel increased due to the competition between schools?

The system:  
1. What is your opinion about the decentralised system in Villa?  
2. What do you think about market forces in schooling?
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* Torp is a fictitious name. The real name and the consulted documents can be obtained from the author under the ethical conditions established by the Swedish Research Council.


Studies in Comparative and International Education


51. - Canceled -


