

**Research Bank**  
Masters Thesis

**Principals' perceptions of quality teaching**

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# **PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY TEACHING**

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**B Arts/B Education (Secondary)**

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## **Keywords**

Bourdieu, performance-based pay, policy, professional standards, quality teachers, quality teaching, school context, student engagement, student outcomes, teacher evaluation, thematic analysis, three-dimensional space narrative inquiry

# Abstract

A plethora of research exists in the field of education with regards to what constitutes quality teaching. Tensions exist, however, within this body of research between notions of quality teaching as opposed to notions of quality teachers. This research project seeks to unpack this heavily nuanced notion of “quality”, specifically within the context of Queensland state high schools. The concept of quality is of serious concern for both practising teachers and those in leadership positions, particularly given student results are increasingly used to make determinations about the quality of teachers and of teaching.

Hence, while the research points to the need to interpret “quality” with caution, the research has inevitably been drawn into overlapping concerns that touch upon teacher evaluation methods, the role of professional standards for teachers, as well as the impact of socioeconomic factors on school and student success. Through the methodological approach of narrative analysis, the research aimed to elucidate from secondary school principals their perceptions of quality teaching, while also examining the impact of contextual factors within the individual principals’ schools. Data were collected from three Brisbane secondary school principals through face-to-face interviews and various school documents from each site.

This study’s findings show that determinations of quality teaching cannot be shaped without consideration of schools’ site-specific contextual factors. Disparity exists between what principals believe quality teaching to be. However, of greater significance is the revelation that principals rely on evidence of student engagement and teacher/student relationships as evidence of quality teaching.

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# List of Abbreviations

ACARA - Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

AITSL – Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership

APR – Annual Performance Review

APST – Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards)

DoE – Department of Education

DET – Department of Education and Training

HAT – Highly Accomplished Teacher

ICSEA – Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage

PDP – Professional Development Plan

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

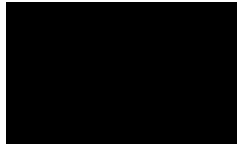
NAPLAN – National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy

QERI – Queensland Education Research Inventory

# Statement of Original Authorship

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees.

Signature:



Date:

03/11/21

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Working within the field of education, we are sporadically encouraged to reconsider those who influenced us to become educators in the first place. While my initial inspirations remain true, Bruce and Jo Lampert have sparked new motivation for me to explore where else my teaching career can go.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

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This chapter outlines the background to this study by focusing attention on my personal experiences that first sparked the idea for this project (section 1.1). It then provides the context of the study (section 1.2), the overarching objectives of the study (section 1.3), and the significance of this research (section 1.4). Finally, this chapter concludes with an outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis (section 1.5).

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

When this project first started, I was in my fifth year of teaching. I had been a member of the first cohort of QUT's National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools program and had started my career teaching in Weipa – a remote mining town in Far North Queensland. As a beginning teacher, I faced many of the typical challenges that graduate teachers face when first entering the profession. However, a range of site-specific factors compounded challenges of lesson planning, marking, classroom management, and parent and community interactions. These factors included: cyclonic weather during the wet season that interfered with the school's internet and intranet; geographical isolation; and cultural discord between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of being. Reflecting these experiences, Scholes et al. (2017) write that a “high-level skill set” is necessary to respond to contextual factors that add challenges to teachers' practice in high poverty schools (p. 8). For me, two of the most important skills in my “set” were flexibility and resilience—with particular reference to behaviour management, and the delivery of lessons. When I reflect on the experiences I had during my first two years of teaching, I see somewhat of a juxtaposition when I consider the contextual factors of my current school.

My personal interest in how principals perceive quality teaching began in earnest when I started teaching in my current school, after transferring back to Brisbane having completed my two-year minimum rural and remote service. The student and staff demographic in my current school are vastly different from the school in Weipa. The behavioural challenges presented by students at my current site differ significantly to those I faced when teaching in Weipa where I was used to high intensity lessons and tightly controlled learning experiences. In Weipa, I planned multiple back up options

for when these lessons and learning experiences did not go to plan. I was used to having “visitors” enter my classroom on a daily basis to examine my practice in line with the school’s pedagogical framework, yet now at my current school, I have barely anyone visit my room unless it is to retrieve a student. While there are a lot of experienced senior teachers at my current school, in Weipa, those representing the largest proportion of staff were beginning or early career teachers. The differences in my practice between these two sites are innumerable.

I have been fortunate to have highly supportive line managers in each of the roles that I have assumed in my teaching career to date. I have been guided through professional and personal development, and have also been encouraged to challenge and extend my pedagogical practice. However, the systems that teachers are bound to follow in order to develop and manage their professional performance do not acknowledge the specificities of each school site. From my experience, now as a mid-career teacher in two schools with significant variance in student and staff demographics, I do not understand why this is the case. The impact of site-specific factors on teachers’ practice is touched upon by Lupton (2005) who asserts that teachers in disadvantaged schools need more complex adjustments for many aspects of their practice. Whilst I have personally experienced the impacts (and challenges) of a school’s contextual factors on pedagogical practice, the following section of this chapter moves beyond my personal story to contextualise ideas of quality teaching and the relationships with teacher evaluation systems.

## **1.2 CONTEXT**

A myriad of research has been conducted in the realm of quality teaching, both nationally and internationally. This research has focused on the role of teacher education programs (Burnett & Lampert, 2016; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005); the implementation of professional standards at state and national levels (Louden, 2000; Mayer et al., 2005); the role of professional standards in producing quality teaching (Bourke, 2011; Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2021; Hudson, 2009); and the relationships between quality teaching, teacher evaluation and the

influence of student achievement on such evaluations (Berliner, 2013; Hattie, 2008; Strong, 2011; Stronge, 2013).

When considering how quality teaching is articulated within Queensland, and how it is linked to professional standards, it is informative to look at the institution responsible for governing teaching in the state's public schools (currently the Department of Education [DoE] – formally the Department of Education and Training [DET]). According to DET (2016), “The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers provide a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. The Standards define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools that result in improved educational outcomes for students” (para. 1). In theory, these standards clearly elucidate what teachers should know and be able to do in order to enact quality teaching.

As stated above, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (herein referred to as simply “the Standards”) “make explicit the elements of high quality teaching” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014a, para. 1). These high-quality teaching elements are revealed across seven Standards that outline the expectations of teachers’ professional practice. The seven Standards are further divided into focus areas which stipulate what teachers should know and be able to do across four career stages. Focusing specifically on Queensland state school teachers, these Standards are used to determine how teachers are appraised, evaluated and judged in terms of their professional performance. The process used to evaluate teachers’ professional performance is the Annual Performance Review (APR) which was introduced in all Queensland state schools from Term 1, 2015; it purports to enhance the quality of teaching and strengthen the focus on teacher performance and development in improving student outcomes (DET, 2016). Justifying the creation of the APR alongside the Standards, DET (2016) writes, “aligning with the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching, the process provides clarity around what constitutes quality teaching” (para. 2).

With recent public discussion focused on how teacher quality is measured, and potentially rewarded (Creagh, 2012; García et al., 2021; Ingvarson, et al., 2007; Preiss, 2014, Scholes et al., 2017), it is now both timely and appropriate to focus specifically on the role played by principals when examining the concept of quality teaching. It is also vital to make clearer the links between policy and practice, as principals are

responsible for “...creating and sustaining the conditions under which quality teaching and learning thrive” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015, p. 2). The inception of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has provided a shared space for key stakeholders in education to have a framework to guide the promotion of excellence so that teachers and school leaders have the maximum impact on student learning (AITSL, 2014a). While there is extensive research in the domain of quality teaching and school leadership, there has been little attention given within the literature to how principals articulate their understandings of quality teaching, and how they perceive it being successfully enacted within their specific schools.

The connection between quality teaching and professional standards is clearly articulated by Allard et al. (2013) who assert that an emphasis on teacher professional standards is a way to guarantee quality and hold teachers accountable (p. 246). Bourke et al. (2016) extend this idea, writing, “most recent attempts to define it are based on statements of professional standards” (p. 4). This is clearly evidenced in the supporting documentation for the APR, as referenced above, which justifies the alignment of the process to the Standards. The Standards aim to present a common understanding and language for professional discussions and reflections on teacher preparation, practice and improvement (AITSL, 2014a). However, not acknowledged are the influences of variables such as a school’s student demographic and socioeconomic status on what constitutes quality teaching. Because of this lack of recognition, the Standards do not provide scope for the specific skill sets, dispositions and knowledge teachers need in individual schools to be considered as indicators of quality teaching.

With further reference to quality teaching, Bourke et al. (2016) state, “the term has also changed its meaning through time and is subject to geographical and cultural differences” (p. 3). In Darling-Hammond’s (2021) recent review of how teaching quality is defined in various jurisdictions around the world, she concludes, “the framework for defining teaching quality has expanded and defines an increasingly evidence-and inquiry-based conception of practice in these high-performing contexts, as well as one that is increasingly child-centred and focused on concerns for equity and multiculturalism” (p. 2). Within these conceptualisations is an acknowledgement of the role professional standards play in shaping pedagogical practice. The emphasis on a child-centred, equitable and multicultural approach is demonstrative of the need



for context to be more greatly considered in terms of its contribution to quality teaching.

If acknowledgement exists around the diversity of the term itself, the question remains as to why there is such little acknowledgement of diversity in terms of its application. Burnett and Lampert (2016) address this concern stressing that “a major component of the evolving discourse related to teacher quality increasingly ignores the social context of the school” (p. 81). Only one of the thirty-seven focus areas from the Standards explicitly acknowledges the diversity of school contexts. A teacher who meets the proficient level of Standard 1.3—this focus area addresses the diversity of student backgrounds—can “design and implement teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds” (AITSL, 2014a).

Having only one focus area that acknowledges the diversity of student backgrounds results in minimal opportunities for teachers to formally discuss and reflect on their practice in terms of the Standards. This means that the contextual intricacies of a teacher’s professional practice are barely acknowledged and are thus barely considered a measure of quality. When teachers are not able to align their context-specific pedagogical practice to the Standards—professional standards that are intended to govern and shape the teaching profession—it is important to consider what is instead measured as evidence of teaching quality.

### **1.3 PURPOSES**

Whilst there exists a vast body of research on the notion of quality teaching, what is problematic is a void in the research as to how these constructs (the Standards and quality teaching) are interpreted and enacted specifically within schools. Importantly, what school leaders understand quality teaching to be, and how they perceive it being enacted in their schools is also lacking. Of additional concern is the limited acknowledgement of school diversity. Hence, the purpose of the proposed research was to identify perceptions of quality teaching held by principals of schools whose ICSEA values vary, within the Brisbane area. This research aimed to identify the factors that lead to the formation of a principal’s perception of quality teaching, while attempting to more deeply understand such perceptions. In addition to this, the project

aimed to illuminate any variations between principals' perceptions that vary according to the sociocultural context of their schools.

The "Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage" (ICSEA) is a value that represents the average level of educational advantage of a school's student population. This index value enables comparisons and contrasts to be made across schools in terms of their values (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2015). In 2013, the formula used to determine ICSEA values was recalculated to improve the statistical reliability of ICSEA and reduce year-to-year variability (ACARA, 2013). ICSEA values are now determined by the following formula (SEA represents socio-educational advantage):

$$\text{ICSEA (student)} = \text{SEA (student)} + \text{student Indigenous status} + \text{SEA (school cohort)} + \text{percent Indigenous student enrolment} + \text{remoteness}$$

The ICSEA for each school is then calculated by averaging each student's ICSEA to produce a school mean (ACARA, 2013). It is important to make clear the relevance of the ICSEA value to this study as an additional aim of the research was to identify potential discrepancies between the notions of quality teaching held by leaders of schools whose ICSEA values vary.

The overarching research question that guided the research project is stipulated below, followed by two research sub-questions:

- What are the perceptions of quality teaching held by principals across three diverse school settings?
  - To what extent does the socioeconomic status of a school impact on a principal's perception of quality teaching?
  - What contextual factors (if any) operate within the school and are these evident within the principals' perceptions?

As demonstrated through the sub-questions, this research examined the key elements that co-exist with a principal's perceptions of quality teaching. These elements include information about each school's pedagogical framework, how each school implements the APR process, and how the Standards are evidenced in each school. What this aspect of the research aimed to determine is the influence on the principals' understandings and articulations of quality teaching, of the formal documents (informed by policy) which purport to support the enactment of quality teaching.

## **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE, SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS**

It has been argued that leadership effects are greater in underperforming schools (Watson, 2005), and therefore any disparity occurring between principals' perceptions of quality teaching needs to be identified to ensure teacher performance is appropriately appraised and evaluated. The focus of this research is therefore significant because many solutions are proposed to address the "problem" of quality teaching. However, those proposing such measures are often disconnected from teaching practice and do not draw on the vast body of research on teaching and learning, with the result being that misconceptions are reinforced, and little guidance is provided to those within the profession (Dinham, 2013, p. 94).

It is therefore timely that principals' views on quality teaching, and how they see "quality" exemplified in their schools are investigated. Quality teaching is a fundamental aspect of student learning, and principals are wanting to "identify, hire, and retain teachers who can help every child learn to high and measurable standards" (Owings et al., 2015, p. 71), therefore giving pragmatic significance to this project. Research has been conducted to highlight the need for school context to be considered when measuring the practice of pre-service and graduate teachers (Allard et al., 2013), and there is far-reaching scope for the need to explore how *all* teachers' practice is impacted by the specificities of the environments in which they teach.

As Chapter 2 will demonstrate, definitions of quality teaching are dependent on many factors, and have been highly contested for decades; there is a disjoint in the discourse between those who view quality residing solely with teachers, and those who perceive it being evidenced through teaching. For the purpose of this research, quality teaching is understood to be "teaching that addresses the academic, social and emotional learning needs of all students and in a diversity of contexts" (Allard et al., 2013, p. 427).

## **1.5 THESIS OUTLINE**

This chapter has detailed my personal interest in principals' perceptions of quality teaching. It has briefly described research which exists in the field of quality teaching and teacher accountability methods, while aligning this existing research against the current political climate with respect to education in Queensland. The

purpose of this research was to identify how principals of three schools, with different ICSEA values, perceive quality teaching. The significance of this research is framed through the literature review. Whilst there is a plethora of research into notions of quality teaching and how it can be measured, there is a void in the literature as to how principals interpret quality teaching and how they see it enacted within their specific schools.

The following chapter will provide an extensive literature review into the themes that characterise this study: quality teachers versus quality teaching (2.1); policy and professional standards (2.2); and finally, teacher evaluation methods (2.3). Chapter 3 will detail the elements of the three-dimensional space narrative methodology which shape this research and Bourdieu's theory of practice as the theoretical lens through which the data are displayed and analysed. Chapter 4 presents the participants' stories, based on data from their interviews. Chapter 5 presents the analysis and discussion of themes that emerged from the participants' cases. The final chapter includes the components of ethics, the study's limitations, and highlights future implications for teacher evaluation methods, how quality practice is measured, and the role of professional standards in shaping and influencing teaching practice.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

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Educational research which focuses on the notion of quality teaching is not a new phenomenon, as ideas about quality in education have been contested in the literature for decades (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 442). Whilst there is a plethora of conflicting research into what constitutes quality teaching, there exists a corresponding dearth of research into school leaders' understandings of quality teaching and how principals perceive it being enacted in their schools.

A recent report from the Australian Government (2016) entitled, *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes* encapsulates the Federal Government's commitment to improving the quality of the teaching profession across all levels, from beginning teachers to principals (p. 3). The work of prominent educational researcher, John Hattie, is heavily referenced in the report along with his core argument for the "need to direct attention to higher quality teaching" (Hattie, 2003, p. 3). Hattie's definitions of quality teachers provide a single lens through which to understand the term, and have been the source of considerable critique (Killan, 2015; Myburgh, 2016). In *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes*, it is interesting to note that the role of the principal is clearly articulated with the assertion, "alongside quality teaching sits effective school leadership" (Australian Government, 2016, p. 4).

This literature review aims to establish and highlight the importance of investigating principals' perceptions of quality teaching, and to better understand the discourses that influence their understandings of the terms "quality teachers" and "quality teaching". To contextualise this research project, this literature review is structured across three key themes. First, it reviews research conducted into ideas connected to quality teaching as opposed to ideas of quality teachers (section 2.1). The second section examines the relationship between professional standards and teaching practice (section 2.2). Third, it presents research focusing on teacher evaluation methods and considers problems associated with accountability measures (section 2.3). The final section of this review also addresses current policy documents concerned with the idea of quality teaching and its impact on student outcomes (section 2.4).

## 2.1 QUALITY TEACHING OR QUALITY TEACHERS?

Notions of teacher quality and quality teaching have been thrust into the foreground of current public, political discussion regarding educational funding (Carey, 2021; Clark, 2019; Singahl, 2019). Statements from a recent Prime Minister's office clearly demonstrate the intensified emphasis on quality teaching at a national level, and were also evidenced in the then Turnbull Government's student achievement plan. This plan required changes to be made to teacher salary progression by moving away from length of service, to demonstrated competency and performance against the Standards (Turnbull, 2016, para. 10). By linking the quality of teaching to student outcomes, the Federal Government continues to follow what Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) call a "preoccupation with outcomes", which has "...captured public sentiment, and politicians have seized on it in election after election" (p. 8). The argument linking a cause-and-effect relationship between teacher quality and student outcomes is similarly raised and questioned by Wiseman and Al-Bakr (2013) who note that, "teacher certification status and student achievement are not consistently associated" (p. 306). Although these researchers speak from the contexts of the United States and Gulf Cooperation Council countries, respectively, their assertions are applicable when examining the state of Australian education.

The two terms, "quality teaching" and "quality teacher(s)" are often used interchangeably. Despite many researchers and policy-makers using the terms interchangeably, it is important to distinguish between the two for they are not synonymous. Differentiation between these two terms is clearly articulated by Nicole Mockler, an Australian researcher, who identifies a change in the past decade from a discourse focused on teaching quality to one focused on teacher quality. She argues that quality teaching embodies "a desire to support and foster teacher professional learning, to encourage pedagogical and curricular innovation and risk taking and to collaboratively determine and pursue good teaching practice" (Mockler, 2013, p. 37).

In contrast to this, ideas about what constitutes teacher quality are represented by moves to "narrowly measure and quantify teachers' work (usually represented simply in test scores), to standardise practice and attribute blame to teachers where their students fail to 'measure up'" (Mockler, 2013, p. 37). The complexity of quality teaching, as opposed to narrow definitions of teacher quality, is conceptualised by Croninger et al. (2012) as "a complex, multidimensional phenomenon" (p. 3).

The apparent synonymous nature of the terms is further deconstructed by Strong (2011) at a semantic level, who explains that “quality” is often substituted for words such as “good” and “effective” which may possibly result in narrower definitions (p. 12). In addition, he acknowledges that definitions of teacher quality, and what characterises it, vary in accordance with the perspectives and position of the writer. Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) probe even more deeply into the fundamental nature of quality teaching by asking, “given the elusive and contested nature of quality, is there any sure way to tease out the characteristics and properties of quality teaching?” (p. 186). Fenstermacher and Richardson go on to answer their question by providing individual analyses of “good teaching” and “successful teaching”, before demonstrating how their co-dependency constitutes quality teaching. However, they argue that there are an additional three conditions for learning (willingness and effort, social surround, and opportunity) which must be in place before teaching can be considered as quality teaching (p. 191).

According to Watson (2005), the “problem with the body of research on the quality of teaching is the lack of evidence about what constitutes teacher quality” (p. 4). The position that there is a void in the research as to what characterises teacher quality contrasts with the work of Cochran-Smith and Fries (2005) who identified a minimum of fifteen public policy reports investigating the issue of teacher quality between 2000 and 2005 (as cited in Gere & Berebitsky, 2009, p. 247). Furthermore, Strong (2011) presents extensive research focused on the notion of teacher quality and identifies four groups under which it can be categorised. Summaries of the groups are as follows: first, teacher qualifications, credentials or experience can indicate teacher competence as they are objective and measurable; second, teacher quality can be indicated by psychological or personal attributes which leads to subjectivity; the third group focuses on classroom practice and pedagogical skills; and finally, the fourth group argues that teacher quality can be measured by student outcomes (pp. 12-17). Thus, it is less that there is a void in the research than that there are so many different definitions of quality teaching that its meaning can be confusing and become inconsequential. The binary opposition of objectivity and subjectivity visible within these categories will be briefly revisited in the third section of this literature review.

Goe’s (2007) synthesis of research into teacher impact on student achievement outcomes also suggests four categories of teacher quality indicators based on years of

research that has been conducted into the phenomenon. The categories are classified according to inputs (teacher qualifications and teacher characteristics), processes (teacher practices), and outcomes (teacher effectiveness) (p. 2). In her extensive review, Goe briefly acknowledges the relationship between quality teaching and teacher quality, naming the terms as a “dilemma” which needs to be resolved (p. 8). Goe’s distinction between the two asserts that teacher quality is determined by a set of “inputs” that will indicate a teacher’s success. In contrast to this, teaching quality is indicated, not by what teachers have with regards to qualifications and certifications, but by what they do in classrooms (p. 8). It is not completely clear how these evaluations of teacher practice occur, and to whom the responsibility falls. Similarly, undefined is the distinction between evaluations of processes and outcomes. In addition, the question of how teacher practice evaluations occur without resting on student achievement remains unanswered.

An additional weakness with Goe’s (2007) work is her claim that—for the purpose of the research synthesis—student learning is the focus for both teacher quality and teaching quality (p. 8). Goe uses that purpose as the reason for selecting studies which have focused on standardised tests as an outcome measure (p. 8). There appears to be a contradiction, however, as teacher quality becomes the central focus of the review, and elements which define quality teaching are not considered. Goe’s review concludes with challenges, findings, and other considerations that include the following: the sensitivity of measurement tools; the need for the development of more accurate measurement instruments; differences in subject matter and grade level; teacher experience; and teaching context (pp. 43-45). Perhaps the most relevant consideration to this research project is that of teaching context. Goe questions whether the teaching context should matter when investigating teacher quality: “Should a teacher who is working in a challenging school with at-risk students be measured by the same yardstick as a teacher who is working in a high achieving school in a middle-class suburb?” (p. 45). Not acknowledged in the review is the role played by school principals in sharing understandings of quality teaching and teacher quality. Consequently, the influence of these understandings on principals’ evaluations of teaching quality is also not considered.

In her critique of a 2002 U.S. Government report titled, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge*, Cochran-Smith (2002) defines the limitations of



aligning notions of quality within the individual. The report depends on three assumptions: quality teaching is a college educated person with high verbal ability who transmits knowledge; learning is a compliant student who receives information and demonstrates it on a standardised test; and, education is a set of structural arrangements that make these effective and cost-efficient (p. 380). Cochran-Smith's position is that these assumptions are too simplistic, and she subsequently breaks down the complexity of quality teaching by detailing behaviours enacted within it. Some of these behaviours reflect the subjective and collegial nature of teaching, such as forming relationships with parents, collaborating with other staff, and differentiating for all students with a diverse range of abilities and contexts (p. 380). This view is supported by Croninger et al. (2012) who propose that "understanding high-quality teaching requires not only understanding what teachers know and do, but also understanding the organisational and normative contexts in which they work" (p. 4). When considering the contexts in which teachers work, there are few who are better positioned to understand how these factors influence a teacher's practice and performance than school principals.

Returning to the Australian education environment, Burnett and Lampert (2016) recognise the need to acknowledge factors which rest outside the control of the individual teacher, writing, "it is unfortunate...that much of the current climate frames teacher quality in Australia as independent of social, cultural, and economic factors, such as poverty and remoteness, which affect student achievement" (p. 81). This lack of recognition of a school community's individual demographic factors (particularly the effects of poverty and disadvantage on "learning outcomes") is also addressed by Gere and Berebitsky (2009) who argue that research into teacher quality has relied on an "input model" which focuses on the qualities and preparation of individual teachers (p. 249). Additionally, they present contrasting ideas about the concept of an "input model", claiming that more recent investigations into teacher quality direct increased attention to pedagogical practice, teacher tracking and student outcomes – all factors which are illustrative of an "output model". Although Gere and Berebitsky acknowledge those factors which are more aligned to theories of quality teaching, they conclude that, "it is worth noting that neither input nor output models of teacher quality give much attention to the contexts in which teachers work" (p. 249). In other words, neither "input" (e.g., the kinds of people that become teachers, or their training) nor "output" (e.g., the grades their students achieve on standardised tests) are good

measures of “quality”. The literature cited supports my experiences that how and whether learning takes place is dependent on many more factors than these, including everything from the effects of social class to experiences of racism.

This focus on quality teaching through a social justice lens illuminates the need for it to be recognised as multidimensional, and for its organising principles to change from an economic stance to a humanitarian one (Scholes et al., 2017, p. 27). Allard et al. (2013) support this view defining quality teaching as “teaching that addresses the academic, social and emotional learning needs of all students and in a diversity of contexts” (p. 427). Teaching is never conducted in a vacuum. Yet, the individualised view of quality teaching, which positions the responsibility of quality within the individual, does not consider how the diversity of contextual factors impacts a teacher’s practice, and therefore its level of quality.

Having examined research around the contested notions of quality teaching and teacher quality, this literature review will now consider some of the policies currently shaping ideas about quality teaching. The following section will also examine the relationship between professional standards and conceptualisations of quality teaching.

## **2.2 POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS**

In Queensland, the current policy which informs teacher evaluation is the Annual Performance Review (APR) process. Its goals are to, “grow the capability of the teaching and leadership workforce, strengthen the performance-focused culture in schools, and align professional learning to personal, school and system priorities” (Department of Education [DoE], 2018, para. 1). The connection between this system of teacher evaluation and professional standards can be seen in the Department’s claim that by “aligning with the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching, the process provides clarity around what constitutes quality teaching” (DoE, 2016, para. 2). Furthermore, the Department asserts that the two sets of Standards for teachers and principals both “explicitly inform professional learning, practice and engagement in the APR process” (DoE, 2018, para. 1). Indeed, Bourke et al. (2016) solidify this relationship by writing, “most recent attempts to define teacher quality are based on statements of professional standards” (p. 4). Investing in the development of national

standards for teachers is one example of the federal government's intention to manage and reshape the teaching profession, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching (Allard et al., 2013, p. 426). Despite the progression made to date, considerable contestation remains regarding the Standards and their validity, as well as to whom responsibility falls for ensuring they are implemented in the manner in which they are intended.

In research conducted into the development of professional standards for teachers, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) have identified that, "in contrast to other professions, teachers have traditionally had little control in creating, promulgating and enforcing professional standards" (p. 472). This view is supported by Adams et al. (2015) who present the need for clearer standards because teachers and evaluators do not share common understandings and beliefs about what constitutes quality teaching across the levels of career development (p. 4). Because the APR informs evaluations of teachers' professional practice, it is worthwhile to consider Strong's (2011) distinctions between professionalisation and professionalism. He argues that the term "professionalisation" aims to increase the standards and status of teaching, whereas the term "professionalism" is concerned with the manner in which teachers conduct themselves (p. 9).

Mockler's (2013) work into the operation of professional standards for teaching in Australia, England, and the U.S. extends Strong's (2011) claims as she identifies two purposes for which standards operate. The first is to hold teachers accountable by providing what she calls a "level of quality assurance", and the second is to position teaching to be considered in the same esteem as the medical and legal professions (Mockler, 2013, p. 37). Supporting documentation from AITSL upholds the view of professionalisation being a fundamental purpose for teacher standards. In the *Frequently Asked Questions* section of AITSL's website (accessed in 2017), the following statement was one of the reasons given to answer the question of how the Standards benefit teachers: "The Standards contribute to the professionalisation of teaching and raise the professional status of teachers nationally" (AITSL, 2014b, para. 2). This perspective is present in the work of Mayer et al. (2005), who contend that professional standards enable policymakers to make explicit the elements of quality teaching, which means that they can be used to both regulate the profession and increase its status (p. 160).

Connections to the issue of professionalisation and its relationship with teacher evaluations can be drawn, with those who favour professionalisation framing quality outcomes in terms of quality teaching, high standards for teacher development, and teachers who are able to teach so all students learn to high standards (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, p. 8). Contrary to this is the position held by proponents of value-added measures, as part of the teacher evaluation process, who appear driven by a desire to increase the professional standing of teachers. However, it has been argued by Cochran-Smith (2002) that this perception results in a focus too narrowly defined in accordance with the individualised view of teaching practice, and therefore does not consider the collegial nature of quality teaching.

An additional issue with holding teachers individually accountable is the potential devaluing of collaborative pedagogical practice. Caution is advised by Valli et al. (2012) who further argue that policies such as those which focus on evaluating individual teacher quality, threaten “productive forms of collective teaching for the sake of holding individuals responsible for learning” (p. 9). Further concern with using value-added measures, such as standardised test scores, to assess teacher performance is framed by Ingvarson and Rowe (2008). In their research concerned with conceptualising and evaluating teacher quality, they highlight the idea that the instruments have often not been validated for the purpose of assessing teacher quality, and that the tests are designed to discriminate between students, not teachers (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008, p. 14). Therefore, this further validates the need to investigate principals’ perceptions of quality teaching, and the idea that measures of such cannot simply rely on student outcomes.

From 1985 to 2005, public attention and concern about quality of teaching resulted in an increased focus on the use of professional standards for teachers (Watson, 2005, p. 31). Watson identifies three domains in which standards can be used to promote quality teaching (p. 32). The first focuses on the use of teacher certification and employment processes, while the second domain addresses the potential of standards to be used in a manner that supports professional development. The final domain alludes to the relationship between standards and accountability measures as Watson refers to professional standards being employed as “a useful benchmark for assessing complaints against professional teachers who are accused of failing to uphold the standards of the profession” (p. 32). Apple (2001) presents a powerful

argument against the use of standards as a measurement of performance assessment, with his claim that socio-economically disadvantaged children and their teachers will be negatively labelled as a result (p. 195). Ideas of professionalisation, when viewed in light of the implementation of professional standards to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, present a need to voice principals' perceptions of what constitutes quality teaching.

A more optimistic view of professional standards for teachers is articulated by Ingvarson and Rowe (2008). After referring to research into the conceptualisations of teacher quality that recognise the complexity of effective teaching, the researchers claim that a consequence of this research is the emergence of standards as a "sound basis for defining levels of expertise in teaching and assessing teacher performance" (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008, p. 13). Moreover, Ingvarson and Rowe claim that the purpose of teaching standards is a two-part process for which the aim is to elucidate what is meant by quality teaching and what teachers should know and do, with the outcome being the creation of quality opportunities for student learning (p. 13). It is worthwhile to note that the authors only briefly mention the relevance of context regarding the application of professional standards, stating that "by definition, a professional standard applies to all contexts in which teachers work (which is not to say context does not affect practice)" (p. 18). Although Ingvarson and Rowe acknowledge the influence of context in teachers' performance, it is done so superficially.

Contrasting significantly with the ideas of Ingvarson and Rowe (2008) is Louden's (2000) work. In his paper on the development of Australian professional standards for teaching, he argues that standards should be "brief, transparent, specialised, contextualised, focused on teaching and learning, and matched by strong assessments" (p. 118). Louden argues that the level to which a standard is met is difficult to determine if contextual information is not evident (p. 126). Although his seminal work was published nearly twenty years ago, many of his core arguments can be applied to the current context of standards for Australian teachers. Louden highlights the decontextualised, generic nature of standards for teachers by stating that they are expected to be implemented equally across all areas of the curriculum and to teachers of students in all year levels (p. 125). Indeed, this is the expectation of the Australian Standards as all Australian school teachers are to deliver pedagogical

practice which upholds these standards, regardless of the location and nature of the school in which they work.

According to Mayer et al. (2005), “one key concern in the current Australian policy context is whether and how the standards represent a system for both extending professional learning and/or providing a means of professional accountability and recognition” (p. 163). The authors write of the tension between the two key uses of standards for teachers but argue for them to not be seen as “polar opposites” (Mayer et al., 2005, p. 162). Despite their work being published more than a decade ago, it is pertinent to consider for the current Australian policy context. Mayer et al.’s concerns have seemingly been addressed in the Queensland context as any professional development for teachers in state schools is aligned to specific elements of the Standards. When recording evidence of continuing professional development, teachers are prompted to indicate which of the standards the particular professional development has met. The Standards’ influence on accountability and recognition is evidenced through the rationale and template for the APR process as it “aligns with and embeds the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers” (DET, 2017, para. 5). When examining the seemingly interconnected nature of the relationships between policies, professional standards, and teacher performance, it is important to consider more than just students’ test scores, such as the many important ways in which teachers positively impact on the lives of students, work collegially, and influence the culture of schools (Goe & Stickler, 2008, p. 11).

This section has examined the role of standards for the teaching profession, with specific attention given to the Australian context, and how they are used to determine the quality of teaching. Contrasting perspectives on the use of standards for evaluating teachers’ performance have been considered, as have policies which have been developed in alignment with the Standards. The following section of this literature review will now consider some of the relationships between teacher evaluation methods and conceptualisations of quality teaching.

### **2.3 TEACHER EVALUATION METHODS**

In 2005, Watson expressed concerns associated with the relationship between professional standards and performance pay by stating “there are many barriers to the

use of professional teaching standards for the purpose of career progression and granting financial rewards to teachers” (p. 41). It is disconcerting that more than a decade on from Watson’s research, Australia’s then Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, declared that teachers would have their performance evaluated and remunerated against the professional standards (Turnbull, 2016, para. 11). This declaration was part of his election campaign’s commitment which he described at the time as “the most significant package of education quality reforms in a generation” (2016, para. 1). With the changes in the Federal Government leadership from Malcom Turnbull to Scott Morrison, it is unclear as to whether the current government intends to maintain this plan. Notwithstanding, research regarding teacher remuneration in compliance with the Standards shows this possibility is worrying; according to Strong (2011), “there is little evidence of any direct connection between teacher pay and student outcomes” (p. 10). Furthermore, McArdle (2010) identifies additional issues, such as student equity, which arise when student performance is linked to measures of teacher quality (p. 63). Hence, aligning measures of teacher performance to student results can be problematic as there are many factors, such as poverty, which clearly lie outside the control of individual teachers that impact student outcomes.

At a national level, the interconnected nature of teacher/ing quality, student performance and policy is clearly identified when examining the rhetoric associated with Australia’s performance on student assessments, such as the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Poor PISA results, relative to a number of high-profile countries such as Finland and Singapore, have led to increasing concerns about the quality of initial teacher education and the teaching profession itself (Allard et al., 2013, p. 426). The intensity and far-reaching consequences of this data is highlighted by Lingard and Sellar (2013) who have used the term “catalyst data” to describe data such as that which is derived from students’ results in NAPLAN. Using part of an interview response that appeared during their research, Lingard and Sellar define catalyst data as:

Data that encourage various stakeholders to ask questions about performance in the delivery of government services and, by implication, to make changes based on answers to these questions: ‘We’ll show you what’s happened in terms of the data and it’s a catalyst for you ... people like governments, the

media, the community, academics, to ask the question: Why? Why is this so? What happened?’ (p. 635).

Consequences of this catalyst data for teachers’ professional practice are observable in the structural changes to Queensland education that were made after the state performed poorly on the 2008 NAPLAN tests (Lingard & Sellar, 2012, p. 646). These changes included the implementation of Teaching and Learning Audits in 2010, which emerged as a consequence of a report by the CEO of the Australian Council for Educational Research, Geoff Masters, into primary school students’ performance in literacy, numeracy and science (Lingard & Sellar, 2012, pp. 646-647). What is important to consider for evaluations of teachers’ performance is the role of catalyst data in prompting various stakeholders of education (politicians, policy-makers, the schooling sector, and the general public), to ask questions about school performance and the improvements expected to occur (Lingard & Sellar, 2012, p. 651). This further highlights the need for specific data to emerge about how principals perceive quality teaching, and the significance of contextual factors in shaping evaluations of teacher performance.

One needs to only examine the plethora of research conducted into U.S. systems of teacher accountability measures and links with performance pay, to understand the potential negative impacts on the profession in Australia. The growth of teacher evaluations in the U.S. that are informed by policy is clearly framed by Harris et al. (2014) who posit, “policymakers are increasingly turning to evaluation and accountability for individual teachers as a way to improve school performance and student outcomes” (p. 74). These researchers investigated principals’ evaluations of quality teaching and their findings suggest that teacher evaluation based on student results is likely to have a negative impact on the quality of teaching. This is because basing teacher evaluations on student outcomes has the potential to minimise the effect of the subjective nature of teaching which takes into account teachers’ personal traits and collegial behaviours (Harris et al., 2014, p. 74). This identifies problems with aligning teacher evaluation to the conceptualisation of quality teaching, which is characterised more heavily by collaborative aspects of the profession. Instead, a greater focus on the individual teacher dominates evaluations of teaching practice. Harris et al. (2014) identify pragmatic implications for researching principals’ perceptions of evaluations by writing, “understanding the ways in which they choose,



prioritize, and negotiate the characteristics of effective teachers has important implications on who gets fired and who stays in teaching” (p. 80).

Although extensive research identifies quality teaching as a subjective, collaborative practice that is influenced by various factors outside the control of an individual teacher, teacher evaluation systems—which claim to measure the quality of teaching—concentrate on an individualised approach. This can be seen in the work of Stronge et al. (2012) who claim, “a primary goal of a teacher evaluation system should be to encourage continuous growth and improvement at an individualised level...” (p. 38). Unsurprisingly, this stance also extends into teacher education programs which have been “influenced by a heightened focus on the Standards and a reform agenda that posits teacher quality solely within the individual” (Scholes et al., 2017, p. 29). The disparity between public, political discourse and research is demonstrative of the contested nature of quality teaching and of the evaluations therein. This is clear in Victorian Education Minister James Merlino’s stance against an individualised response to improving the quality of teaching as he contests this approach, claiming “the way to improve the quality of teaching is for our teachers to work collaboratively...” (as cited in Massola et al., 2016, para. 18). Perhaps most important to consider, is the idea that if measures of teacher quality and quality teaching inform decisions that have significant impact on teachers’ lives and careers, it is imperative that these measures are based on valid criteria and defensible foundations (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008, p. 12).

Another issue with teacher evaluation methods that rely specifically on value-added measures is the lack of recognition that teaching is a collective enterprise. In the U.S. context, the majority of teacher accountability policies and methods are based on the individualised view of teaching which sees one teacher having the sole responsibility for students’ learning (Valli et al., 2012, p. 5). This is equally applicable and problematic in the Australian context as both Federal and State Governments purport to be focusing on improving the quality of teaching, yet their language and position suggests their focus is more on improving the quality of teachers. This is of serious concern because, as already noted, those who perceive the quality of teaching as residing solely within the individual ignore the collegial and contextual nature of teaching practice. Furthermore, when student results are used to make determinations about the quality of teachers and teaching, they need to be interpreted with caution.

Goe and Stickler (2008) advise that policymakers should be cognisant of the factors which can impact student achievement that are outside the control of individual teachers, such as “community and school resources, parent involvement, family socioeconomic status, student effort, and the impact of other students in the classroom” (p. 10). Teachers need greater clarity of what is expected and evaluated in terms of their performance. Because principals are ultimately responsible for their teaching staff, it is important to investigate what they perceive quality teaching to be, and whether they focus on an individualised or collective approach.

Evidence of the problems associated with ignoring site-specific factors when viewing teacher quality in terms of student outcomes is apparent in Lupton’s (2005) work. Focusing on the relationships between social justice and quality schooling, Lupton identified four key differences between the contexts of the disadvantaged schools studied and those of schools in higher socioeconomic areas. The major differences identified by Lupton (2005) are as follows: a significant variance in student abilities; evidence of pervasive material poverty; substantial emotional and behavioural issues; and finally, low attendance rates (pp. 594-595). Conceivably, students’ performance on standardised tests—indeed, any test—would be affected by any or all of the four differences in context identified by Lupton. Evaluations of teacher quality that rest solely on students’ results do not reflect the complexity of teaching; these significant contextual factors are not considered as having any impact on teachers’ practice. This further signifies the need to investigate principals’ perceptions of quality teaching. As principals are at the helm of their individual schools, they are well-positioned to understand and acknowledge the site-specific factors that can impact a teacher’s performance.

Also supporting the need to investigate the impact of extrinsic influences on teacher quality is research conducted by Valli et al. (2012). To examine the influence of American policy context on teaching, and the implications of these influences on future research on teaching, they considered the following three questions: first, is teaching an individual or collective enterprise?; second, is teaching practice stable or dynamic?; and third, what constitutes quality teaching? After investigating student results in mathematics and reading over a four-year period, Valli et al. found that there were multiple influences on student learning, including teacher absences, student movement between schools, and students receiving instruction from others than just

their assigned classroom teacher (p. 7). The significance of their findings, in terms of teacher evaluation methods, is framed by their assertion: “If the patterns and degree of multiple influence we found, especially in the higher poverty schools, are at all typical, we suspect that a considerable proportion of school effects could be misattributed, positively or negatively, to individual teachers” (p. 9). While it would be significantly challenging for the Standards to reflect the existence of such influences, the systems in which teacher performance is evaluated must acknowledge these contextual factors and resulting impacts on pedagogical practice.

Problematising the issue of evaluating teacher performance based on student results is the reality that students rarely receive instruction only from their allocated teacher. It should be of no surprise that in their research, as noted above, Valli et al. (2012) found that over two-thirds of students received reading instruction from someone other than their assigned classroom teacher. The influence of other staff, including support teachers, relief teachers, and pre-service teachers, is not considered in the current policy used to evaluate teachers’ performance in Queensland. Disconcertingly, proponents of value-added measures as appropriate means to evaluate teachers’ performance have not elucidated how other factors, such as support staff, can influence student achievement. When considering the broad literature concerned with evaluations of teachers and teaching, in terms of the evaluations of secondary teachers’ practice, additional gaps can be identified. Literacy and numeracy have been identified as general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016) and are therefore the responsibility of all teachers. However, value-added measures of student achievement are limited mostly to primary sector literacy and numeracy, and there are no measures applicable for the secondary curriculum (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008, p. 15). Consequently, remaining unclear is how a teacher’s performance can be measured when the responsibility for these priorities is shared by all of a student’s teachers across the curriculum areas.

In their investigation into how the evaluation of quality teaching should be conducted, Adams et al. (2015) of the Accomplished California Teachers Group identified, “the focus of evaluations is not on improving the quality of teaching...in most cases, the evaluations are conducted for compliance, not improvement” (p. 4). This connects with the view of professional standards, against which such evaluations

are conducted, as regulatory measures instead of standards used to support teacher development (Bourke et al., 2016, p. 4). With further reference to performance pay and its relationship with teacher evaluation, it is important to consider the work of Berliner (2013) who argues that evaluating teacher performance against student outcomes is “impossible to do fairly, reliably, and validly” (p. 235). Berliner identifies many problems with value-added measures for American teachers, and one of the most troublesome is that lack of objectivity argued for by Stronge et al. (2012). Berliner (2013) presents occurrences of students deciding to perform poorly on standardised tests as a means of influencing which teachers are remunerated, as well as opportunities for principals to selectively allocate certain students to certain teachers (p. 237).

Further evidence that teaching and teacher quality cannot be defined simply by students’ results on standardised tests is apparent in Goe and Stickler’s (2008) work. They argue:

Because few teacher qualifications, teacher characteristics, or teacher practices are strongly and consistently related with improved student achievement, it is wise when making decisions about teacher hiring and placement to also consider the ways in which teachers may contribute to outcomes such as student self-esteem, student attendance, teacher collaboration and collegiality, and school culture. (p. 11)

In their review of research into teacher quality and student achievement, Goe and Stickler (2008) argue that there is no evidence in the literature they examined to support the suggestions that teacher quality can be determined by students’ standardised test scores (p. 21). This interpretation differs from the assertion made by Stronge et al. (2007) who maintain that “given the central role that teachers have always played in successful schools, connecting teacher performance and student performance is a natural extension of the educational reform agenda” (p. 181). Stronge et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative, exploratory study to investigate what characterises effective teaching “as defined by measured increases in student learning” (p. 166). The methodology behind their research rested on the narrow, individualised view of quality teaching by attributing responsibility for student learning solely within the individual. Stronge et al. maintain that “effective teachers are those who foster

achievement gains beyond that expected from the student's past achievement" (p. 170).

A more optimistic view of teacher evaluations conducted under performance-pay schemes is held by Lavy (2007) who writes, "eventually, incentives will be developed that motivate the desired teaching behaviors and will be perceived by teachers as fair and accurate" (p. 103). However, he considers constraints and limitations associated with current performance pay programs and admits that although they pose many practical problems, it may be possible to use both subjective and objective evaluative measures. What is problematic, however, is his limited discussion of how this could be possible. Lavy summarises his positive perspective on performance pay programs with a cautious statement writing, "research evidence suggests, though not conclusively, that incentive-based compensation can generate gains in student performance and teacher effectiveness" (p. 102). Adams et al. (2015) encapsulate how teachers want to see evaluations of practice take place:

Indeed, at the most fundamental level what we want is honest evaluation of our work by skilled and knowledgeable evaluators who can help us see the ways to improve practice at every stage of our professional lives and increase our contributions to the learning of our students. An effective evaluation system will be built on that one overarching principle (p. 4).

Work conducted by Gore and Bowe (2015) demonstrates one example of how the nature of evaluations conducted by skilled and knowledgeable assessors can take place. However, their approach aims to avoid the power hierarchy associated with traditional forms of evaluations by encouraging teachers to take ownership of the process. Framed as a system suitable for teachers' professional development, Gore and Bowe's position is that Quality Teaching Rounds have the potential develop teachers' confidence and increase the quality of teaching.

Quality Teaching Rounds, as a system of professional development, aims to position each member of the professional learning community as learners, and remove traditional notions of power relationships. Consequently, this sees responsibility for evaluations distributed equally between the group's members (Gore & Bowe, 2015, p. 78). Although some members of each group attend a two-day training session to prepare and support the processes involved in the rounds, the aim is "to avoid the adoption of a mentor/coach/expert role by any individual" (Gore & Bowe, 2015, p.

79). This appears to be an effective method of examining teacher performance and potentially increasing teacher quality. For the relevance to this study, it is important to note that Gore and Bowe's research was conducted specifically in the New South Wales education environment, as a response to its state government's Quality Teaching Model. Difficult to conceptualise is how methods like this could be implemented in the Queensland context, due to its current preoccupation with the Standards and the structure of the APR process, which adheres to the power hierarchy purportedly avoided by Gore and Bowe's model.

Ingvarson and Rowe (2008) argue for the development of more rigorous methods of assessing teacher quality, however, they do not answer the question of who is to conduct these assessments (p. 11). Additionally, they maintain that strong conceptual foundations are needed to define teacher quality if accurate evaluations of it are to be developed (p. 11). However, it is important to note that throughout their paper, the authors use the terms teacher quality and quality teaching interchangeably; the issues associated with this were addressed in section 2.1. Research which has focused on principals' evaluations of teacher quality confirms the clear importance of having a measure of what principals believe it to be, yet a problem is identified in an over-reliance on traditional forms of evaluations (Harris et al., 2014, p. 76). While researchers endorse the need to consider principals' evaluations, they do not focus on the inherent beliefs held by school leaders as to what characterises quality teaching. It is therefore worth considering the idea that tensions associated with defining and measuring teacher performance can be extrapolated to the influence of leadership on teacher and student performance (Dinham, 2007, p. 264). Difficulties associated with identifying the impact of school leaders on teacher quality can be attributed to the idea postulated by Dinham (2007), that educational leadership is "a far more contentious, complex and dynamic phenomenon than previously thought" (p. 263).

It is of paramount importance to consider research such as that conducted by Adams et al. (2015), as referenced earlier in this section, because too often, decisions are made about teaching practice without considering the views of those within the teaching profession. Similarly, Ingvarson and Rowe (2008) contest that it will be hard to increase the value of teaching in substantive ways unless the capacity of the profession to "define, evaluate and certify high quality teaching" (p. 8) is significantly improved. Ingvarson and Rowe also argue that it will be difficult for the profession to

be held in higher public esteem without better methods for evaluating teaching (p. 26). Further evidence of the need to investigate specific factors which influence the quality of teaching practice can be found by drawing connections to the work of Connelly (2000) who identified that children's experiences (with reference to reading difficulties) were "much more than just their test scores" (p. xxv). With teachers' practice also filled with complexities—similarly not visible in students' results—it is important to consider the inadequacy of evaluating their practice solely on student outcomes. In addition, issues concerning the reliability of student achievement measures—used to evaluate teacher performance—arise when the margins of errors of these measures are considered, or more significantly, are not considered (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008, p. 15).

This section has reviewed the key issues surrounding teacher evaluation. What is apparent is the disparity between research and policy, and how policymakers are interpreting quality teacher/teaching research to inform their decisions. Research into teacher evaluation systems which result in performance pay outcomes focuses primarily on the notion of quality teachers, therefore relying on the individualised view of teaching. This is problematic as current policymakers in the Australian setting are relying on research into quality teaching, yet do not appear to have understood the fundamental difference between the two terms.

## **2.4 SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF QUALITY TEACHING IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT**

At present, public discourse about the future of Australian education is focusing on the impact of quality teaching in terms student outcomes. However, minimal consideration is given to the role of school leaders in determining what constitutes quality teaching. Disparity between research findings and policy are evident when considering the work of Watson (2005) who argues, "it is difficult to demonstrate that leadership makes a difference to the quality of school education, because of the number of variables that influence student learning outcomes" (p. xi). An important question about the future of research into quality teaching is posed by Valli et al. (2012): "How much will funders, especially government agencies, be willing to consider studies of teaching that do not posit student achievement as the main—or sole—criterion of high-quality teaching?" (p. 27). Greater implications are also identified in the work of Valli

et al. who argue that research into teaching is increasingly characterised by measures of high-stakes accountability such as standardised testing (p. 18).

Although the direct relationship between quality teaching and learning outcomes is unclear (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008, p. 14), there is an apparent push in Australian education to evaluate teachers' performance based on their students' outcomes. At a national level, we are seeing a focus on national testing, measurement of teacher and student standards and the publication of school league tables in the media (Mockler, 2011, pp. 524-525). Teacher certification is increasing in Australia, with several states already implementing the certification process of Highly Accomplished (HAT) and Lead teachers, as articulated in the career stages of the Standards. Importantly, the role of a school principal in this process is much more involved than just signing an approval for application. Principals (or their delegates) support the teacher through the application process by making judgements about a teacher's "readiness", appraising the teacher's performance, observing practice, and acting as a referee (AITSL, 2014c). With this process having recently moved into Queensland, it is now increasingly timely to examine what principals perceive quality teaching to be, and the contextual factors which impact views and understandings of quality teaching.

In research focused on teachers' professional identity, Mockler (2011) identifies the need to conduct further research on the differences between teachers working in significantly different school contexts, to increase teachers' understanding and formation of professional identity (p. 526). Mockler's view of the profession is that teacher professional identity is "ongoing, dynamic and shifting; influenced by personal, professional and political dimensions..." (p. 526). The complexity of who teachers "are" is mirrored in what teachers "do" which therefore further highlights the need to identify the ways principals perceive quality teaching in their schools. Of specific interest, is if the complexity of teacher practice is addressed by those who are ultimately responsible for evaluating teacher performance.

The first section of this review offered a snapshot of the competing discourses of teacher quality and quality teaching. Second, research focused on the influence of policy on professional standards, and on the influence of professional standards on teacher evaluations, was considered. Finally, the review presented concerns with evaluations of teacher performance, and issues that can arise when these evaluations occur in alignment to professional standards and student outcomes. Despite extensive



research occurring across these key themes, principals' perceptions have not yet been examined in any depth. The next chapter will detail the theoretical lens and narrative inquiry methodology that guided this research design.

# Chapter 3: Research Design

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While there is extensive research in the domain of quality teaching and school leadership, there has been little attention given within the literature to how principals articulate their understandings of quality teaching, and how they perceive it being successfully enacted within their specific school. Despite a vast body of research on the notion of quality teaching, what is problematic is a void in the research as to how these constructs (i.e., the Standards and quality teaching) are interpreted and enacted specifically within schools. Of additional concern is the lack of acknowledgement of school diversity. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the theoretical lens and methodology that shaped this research project examining principals' perceptions of quality teaching.

This chapter describes the design adopted by this research to achieve the aims and objectives stated in section 1.3 of Chapter 1. These aims seek to illuminate principals' perceptions of quality teaching and to identify if any disparity exists between principals' perceptions across schools with differing ICSEA values. Section 3.1 presents the theoretical lens that shaped this study, and section 3.2 discusses the narrative inquiry methodology that was employed. Section 3.3 details aspects such as the selection and number of participants in the study; section 3.4 lists all the instruments used in the study and justifies their use. Section 3.5 discusses how the data were analysed. Finally, section 3.6 discusses the ethical considerations of the research and its limitations.

## 3.1 THEORETICAL LENS

Issues of credibility and significance continue to plague qualitative researchers. Of the many challenges to the broad educational research paradigm is that it has at times been seen to be unscientific and subjective. This is particularly the case for those who situate themselves towards the qualitative end of the research continuum who have even been called merely journalists or soft scientists (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 7). To combat the inherent tensions that arise between issues of objectivity and subjectivity, I chose to employ Bourdieu's theory of practice as the overarching

theoretical lens through which to develop my project's narratives. While my research into principals' perceptions of quality teaching examined and analysed the experiences of only three individuals, Bourdieu's theory of practice enabled the project to extend the scope of analysis beyond these three schools/individuals. The following section outlines how this topic lent itself to be shaped by Bourdieu's theory of practice, and unpacks how the project aimed to be both objective and transferrable, while at the same time allow for exploration of subjective thought and action at the level of the individuals involved (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 10).

Before examining the key tenets of Bourdieu's theory of practice in detail, it is important to first consider several ideas about culture and education. Indeed, Bourdieu's theory is dependent on a distinct understanding of culture and the way society's organisation creates ideas which, in turn, form and influence the organisation of society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990). Culture in this sense, refers to the world of knowledge, ideas and objects which are the product of human activity, with education and educational research being component parts of this culture (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 10). Bourdieu (1972/1977) sees within culture forms of structure that are both dynamic and dialectical. Hence, culture becomes manifest in links—both structural and structuring—at and between the objective and subjective levels of human contingency (Bourdieu, 1972/1977; Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 13). Connecting more broadly to social science research, a key benefit of the work of Bourdieu in terms of my research project was to “uncover the differing, differential principles on which structures are based” (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 13). Significantly in this research project, such ideas can be applied to and interpreted in part as school structures (the APR, pedagogical frameworks, and evidence of the Standards) which have been deconstructed and analysed to determine the relationships between such structural principles and the principals' own perceptions of quality teaching.

For Bourdieu, human action is constituted through a dialectical relationship between individual thought and activity, and the objective world (1972/1977, pp. 82-83). Unsurprisingly, narrative researchers consider that experiences of individuals do not occur in a vacuum and always take place in a social milieu (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 2). The applicability and use of this lens to investigate principals' perceptions of quality teaching can therefore be framed by the idea that the province of qualitative

research occurs at the intersection of individual belief and action with culture, and in doing so demystifies the world of lived experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 p. 8). Importantly, my research project identified examinations of context as imperative in understanding the experiences of the selected principals, and how each perceives quality teaching enacted within their specific school context (see Appendix A for a representation of my research's conceptualisation of this process, which demonstrates how individuals and their stories are shaped by the worlds in which they live and work).

Bourdieu's theory of practice at both the subjective and objective levels is important to consider, for he frames this process by using key "thinking tools" such as field and habitus, with minor attention given to practice. Rawolle and Lingard (2013) present practice and habitus as being a couplet, however, for the purpose of this research, habitus was more deeply explored and unpacked in order to illuminate the principals' personal beliefs about quality teaching. For Bourdieu, it is in "the process and carrying out of practice that other aspects of social life, such as the exclusions and exclusivities, classifications and struggles, were located" (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013, p. 123). Focusing, therefore, on the interplay between a school's contextual factors and the principal's perception of quality teaching revealed that it is worthwhile and productive to consider how notions of practice coexist with habitus. Habitus here can be understood as the grouping and organisation of individuals' and groups' dispositions that allow them to meaningfully engage with and contribute to practice (Bourdieu, 1980/1990). The key here, was that to fully understand how quality teaching is perceived by principals, individual dispositions and experiences had to be considered in terms of how they contribute to the production of that practice.

If the tool of habitus is used to frame individual habits, actions, and dispositions, it is imperative to examine its connection to field. The idea of field represents the objective world and can be seen as a structured system in which individuals, institutions, and groupings all exist in some way as structurally related to each other (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 16). Social fields are the locations in which capitalist societies produce practice; they are also spaces of competition (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013, p. 124). Moreover, social activity is metaphorically presented by Bourdieu (1992/1996) as a game, and by extension, education, being a social activity, can also be understood as being a game. Entering the game means individuals implicitly agree

to be governed by the rules of the game and immediately set up personal relations with the game, as well as with other players involved (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 18). As with most games, some players perform better than others. Schools located within lower socio-economic areas often perform more poorly in terms of educational outcomes which are seen through students' results. Following this logic, it is clear how this translates into a loss within the educational game, which is then published for all players to see, historically through various league tables or, more recently, via the MySchool website which overtly compares school achievement based on NAPLAN data. For Mockler (2011), the publication of student outcomes in this form is evidence of the increasing instrumentality of the teaching profession which is proliferated via neo-liberal discourses driving Australian education (pp. 524-525).

Using Bourdieu's theory as the lens through which this project's data are displayed and analysed means that it is important to consider education as a field, made up of identifiable interconnecting factors (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 20). For this project, these factors are defined as experiences that are expected to be evident in each of the principals' schools. These experiences are presented in section 3.3. Because this project aimed to identify disparity between principals' perceptions of quality teaching within a range of school ICSEA values, as well as the reasons for this disparity, it was important to consider concerns with notions of equality of access to the game.

Further using Bourdieu's analogy, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are clearly ill-equipped for the game's principles/rules, even before they enter the playing field. Bourdieu would argue that when these students enter the formal structure of education (i.e., the institution of the school), and experience the structures associated within and outside the classroom, it becomes teachers' responsibility to ensure all players have equal access to the "game". Although there are structures mirrored within the game of each school that one can expect to see no matter the location of the game, there are contextual specificities of each field, or subfield, that impact both student and teacher participation in the game. Hence, this research project aimed to illuminate these contextual specificities to demonstrate that measures of teaching quality must not rest solely on student outcomes and must acknowledge the contextual nature of pedagogical practice.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, student outcomes are one example of cultural capital, which is therefore both the object of education, and the means by which players

are divided. According to Rawolle and Lingard (2013), “this cultural capital was implicit in school curricula and pedagogy, and was aligned with, embodied, assumed and possessed by certain classes” (p. 120). For these authors, the implicit nature of cultural capital, when combined with teaching practices, “helped to reproduce inequalities and led to the misrecognition of these cultural differences as differences in individual ability” (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013, p. 120). To define the significance of capital for this project, it is essential to return briefly to the idea of the field. For Bourdieu, the field is a “configuration of relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon the occupants, agents or institutions” (1996, pp. 72-73). For Grenfell and James, the medium of these relations is capital, with all capital—economic, social and cultural—being symbolic, and the prevailing configurations of it shaping social practice (1998, p. 510).

Bourdieu (1980/1990) uses the word capital to describe the social products of a field or system of connections and behaviours through which individuals carry out social relationships. Grenfell and James (1998) clearly define and articulate the values of capital, maintaining that all products and actions within a field have value, and this value is used to buy other products of the field. It is important to note that in this sense value is capital and it therefore not only has power, but is also a dynamic feature of the field (p. 20). Social products, in this case, include the material and the ideational; thoughts, actions, objects, and product of human activity which are, of course, evidence of habitus. However, capital is not equally accessible for everyone as Bourdieu focuses on three separate forms. Economic capital is comprised of monetary wealth; social capital describes the network of social connections an individual has; and cultural capital is gained through education and the stratified allocation of aspects such as speech, dress and life-style (Grenfell & James, 2013, p. 21).

In a general sense, understanding the structural differences between the different locations in which the game is played, will result in a deeper understanding of what needs to be done to ensure all students have equal opportunity to access equal amounts of capital. Specifically for this research, the focus was directed toward the perceptions of quality teaching and as such, it is important to recognise the varying forms of capital that are presented within schools which therefore impact evaluations of teachers’ performance.

In the schooling game, people behave in ways that are regulated by a logic of practice where some players' interests are dominant, therefore changing the balance is not going to be a simple technical matter (Wadham et al., 2007, p. 337). This applies at a more fundamental level to how teachers are prepared to teach, and how their performance is subsequently measured. How we view the quality of teaching has significant implications for teachers, some of which were addressed in Chapter 2. This section will now present the narrative research methodology that shaped this research project, and outline why it was uniquely suited to an examination into principals' perceptions of quality teaching.

### **3.2 METHODOLOGY**

The development and use of qualitative research across the social sciences is extensive and complex. The purpose of this section is not to delve deeply into its history, but rather establish the validity of using this methodology within this research project. Qualitative researchers focus on reality as being socially constructed, with a close connection between the researcher and researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). Exemplifying this key tenet of qualitative research are the reasons for, and personal interest I (as the researcher) have in, investigating principals' perceptions of quality teaching which were established in the introduction to the thesis (section 1.1).

Traditions of qualitative research encompass a range of fields from sociology, anthropology, communication and education, and as a set of interpretative practices, qualitative research is difficult to define. The issue is simply that there is no single theory or paradigm that is manifestly attached to qualitative methodologies, nor does it value any one methodology over another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pp. 6-8). This vastness and complexity is articulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) who write that it:

Embraces within its own multiple disciplinary histories constant tensions and contradictions over the project itself, including its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take. The field sprawls between and crosscuts all of the human disciplines, even including, in some cases, the physical sciences (p. 7).

Contrasting with the complexity of Denzin and Lincoln's view is the position of Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) who state that qualitative researchers can be separated

from those of the quantitative paradigm, in that they are interested in understanding, and not in prediction and control (p. 4). Furthermore, qualitative research is shaped around “assumptions about interpretation and human action” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4) which are clearly linked to my project’s exploration of principals’ views of what constitutes quality teaching. This project’s research problem centered on a lack of information and understanding into what school principals perceive quality to be, and how they see it enacted within their specific schools. Qualitative research was therefore much better suited for this project, given the nature of the variables impacting these perceptions of quality teaching were not known. Furthermore, there was a need within my research project to explore the impact of a school’s contextual factors (Creswell, 2014, p. 16). Additional support for using qualitative research methodology in this project was my intention for the views of the participating principals to be relied upon more heavily than the ideas identified in the existing literature (Creswell, p. 17). In short, this project sought to identify similarities and differences between the three principals’ perceptions of quality teaching, and as such, adhere to what Bernard and Ryan (2010) define as the “quintessential qualitative act” (p. 3), which is looking for regularities.

Moving specifically to the role of qualitative methodologies in educational research, it is pertinent to consider the following assertion by Connelly and Clandinin (2000): “When one asks what it means to study education, the answer—in its most general sense—is to study experience” (p. xxiv). After an extensive review of possible methodologies, I was drawn to the duality of narrative research design and believed it to be the most suitable qualitative methodology for the project. Having narrative as both the method and phenomenon under investigation (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5) enabled the principals’ perceptions of quality teaching to be considered in conjunction with relevant details from their schools’ contexts. The suitability of this approach can be exemplified through Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) view that “the province of qualitative research...is the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture” (p. 8). Moreover, this adds support for using the seminal work of Bourdieu as an appropriate theoretical lens to apply to the research data for, using the logic outlined by Bourdieu, it is clear that how principals perceive quality teaching, and the factors involved in shaping these perceptions, cannot exist independently. Given the research occurred in the social



milieu of a school, it is clear there exists an interplay between factors which will subsequently be articulated in the following sections of this chapter.

As there is a dearth of research about principals' perceptions of quality teaching, this project employed a narrative inquiry research design, and sought to investigate and generate data within actual school settings and in doing so, gain practical, specific insights (Creswell, 2014, p. 504). Narrative inquiry was selected as it seeks to explore a specific educational research problem by understanding the experiences of specific individuals located within a defined context (Creswell, p. 507). As a methodology, narrative inquiry is concerned with the continuum on which life is experienced, with both people's lives and institutional lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 19). Thus, narrative research design was uniquely suitable for this project given this research aimed to explore both the individual (each school's principal), and the contextual factors that impact these principals' experiences. As previously outlined in Chapter 1, the research question that guided this project is stipulated below, followed by two research sub-questions.

- What are the perceptions of quality teaching held by principals across three diverse school settings?
  - To what extent does the socioeconomic status of a school impact on a principal's perception of quality teaching?
  - What contextual factors (if any) operate within the school and are these evident within the principals' perceptions?

Freebody (2003) asserts that a full documentation of a specific instance of educational experience enables the researcher to gain theoretical and professional insights (p. 81). Consequently, data representing each school's pedagogical framework, its relationship with the Standards and enactment of other policies, was investigated in conjunction with the principals' narratives. The data pertaining specifically to each principal and school are presented as separate cases; displaying the data in this format enabled rich narratives to emerge. Within these narratives, data analysis occurred and was subsequently followed by comparisons and contrasts made between the principals' perceptions.

Narrative design was both appropriate and valid for this research as it encouraged a focus on the micro-analytic picture (Creswell, 2014, p. 504). When considering the broad nature of the Standards and other guiding frameworks—such as the APR—the need for a specific inquiry into principals’ perceptions of quality teaching was apparent. Dupree (2009) writes about the ambiguity principals have faced in terms of historical role ambiguity, in terms of professional expectations, and roles and responsibilities, experienced by principals, and how this ambiguity and uncertainty is evident in how principals discuss their work. In his research, he finds principals often express how they are “torn between their managerial, instructional leadership, and being a role model” (p. 214).

It is pertinent to refer to a policy brief on the role of school principals in strengthening instruction which was released by The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning (California) in 2011. One of the forum’s recommendations was:

That any policy initiatives or new programs targeted at strengthening school leadership recognize the importance of context and equity. They consistently emphasized that the dispositions and skills that make a principal effective in one context may not result in similar effectiveness in another (p. 7).

The notion that a principal’s skills may make her/him more effective in one context than another is a concept that can be applied to teachers and their practice. Importantly, the separate narratives of principals from three different Brisbane schools demonstrate that notions of quality teaching must be inclusive of site-specific factors, such as the socioeconomic status of the school.

Applying traditional narrative design would not have provided sufficient scope to address the complexity of the research context and the participants’ contexts. Fortunately, the fluidity and flexibility of three-dimensional space narrative inquiry provided avenues for deeper investigation of the three principals and their stories. Connelly and Clandinin’s (2000) development of this methodology was heavily shaped by Dewey’s (1925, 1938) seminal ideas described by Huber et al. (2013) as, “...education, life, and experience are one and the same. Education is life and life is education, and to study life, to study education, is to study experience” (p. 220). For Dewey, the principles of interaction and continuity underpin the characteristics of experience and are further developed by the key terms of personal, social, temporal

and situation; it is these elements that shape Connelly and Clandinin’s three-dimensional space narrative inquiry.

The five key experiences examined that were the same for each principal are as follows: (1) the principal’s personal teaching history and career; (2) the pedagogical framework of the school; (3) the ICSEA value of the school; (4) evidence of departmental policies; and (5) the enactment of the APR and the relationship with the Standards at the school level. How these experiences were aligned to the narrative design is represented in the table below.

Table 3.1 *Using three-dimensional space narrative to investigate principals’ perceptions of quality teaching*

<b>Interaction</b>		<b>Continuity</b>			<b>Situation</b>
<b>Personal</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Past</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Future</b>	<b>Place</b>
How the principal feels about quality now.	How the principal’s perceptions connect with how quality is evident within the school.	Personal career (influence of regions, curriculum areas, curriculum changes, etc.)	School’s journey with the APR, its pedagogical framework and the APST.	Where to for the school, and for quality teaching in general.	ICSEA and school specific factors.

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2000) the impact of a narrative inquiry is not found in the way that it “might incrementally add knowledge to the field” (p. 42), but in its ability to create a new sense of meaning and significance regarding the research topic. Hence, the impact of this project is evidenced in the documentation of principals’ perceptions of quality teaching and an analysis of how these ideas are shaped by the contextual factors of schools. Like all qualitative research, narrative inquiry can be used to examine a diverse range of phenomenon in a diverse range of contexts, and it is this diversity of narrative inquiry’s application that made it highly suitable for this project. Mockler (2011), for example, is an Australian researcher whose work concerned with teacher professional identity has been shaped by Connelly and Clandinin’s (1999) idea of “stories to live by” (as cited in Mockler, 2011, p. 519). In addition, research into the role of professional development for teachers has been

conducted by Mesinga-Payard (2007) who used narrative inquiry as a means to convey the “complexity of interactions and demonstrates the highly contextualised nature of individual practice in the teaching field” (p. 54).

Specifically, the data collection of this project’s research design consisted mainly of individual, face-to-face interviews with three state school principals. Participants were selected according to the ICSEA level of their schools, with one from low, mid and high range levels, and this enabled comparisons and contrasts to be drawn across each of the three levels. Each participant is principal of a state high school within the greater Brisbane area. Selection was initially informed by the school’s ICSEA value, and then subsequently determined by the principal’s willingness and availability to participate. Two rounds of one hour-long interviews with each participant were initially planned, however, participant availability and access to mutually suitable times meant the data collection processes required greater flexibility. In the analysis stage of the project, distinct narratives emerged through the case study design, providing a rich framework of thick data against which this research project evolved.

Although this research was shaped by three-dimensional space narrative inquiry, parallels were evident with case study research design. Collection of sufficient data, for example, is a key element of case study research, enabling the researcher to examine significant features of the case and present interpretations of what is observed (Bassegy, 1999, p. 47). Hence, it was acknowledged from the onset of this project that the design would need to allow for a number of contrasting methods of data collection such as policy document analyses, interview transcripts and writings of personal philosophies. I engaged in a range of interconnected interpretative practices that supported the development of my deep understanding of this project’s subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pp. 3-4). Returning, however, specifically to the key aspects of narrative inquiry, it should be stressed that I have at all times considered that it “is grounded in relationships that offer both researcher and participants a narrative space for telling and retelling experiences they have lived, and are living” (Clandinin et al., 2011 p. 34). With this in mind, I engaged in collaborative discussions with participating principals in order to decide which types of field texts should be included and which would provide helpful information for writing the final re-storied rendition of each principal’s experiences.

The influence of context has been acknowledged in research focused on school leadership effects (Dinham, 2007), student performance (Lupton, 2005), and preservice teacher assessments (Allard et al., 2013), to name a few. The significance of investigating the impact of contextual factors on principals' perceptions of quality can be seen as an extension of this existing research, justifying the need for context to be considered when evaluating teacher and teaching quality. To support understanding of the complexity of quality teaching, it is essential to consider Mockler's (2011) position that teachers' professional practice is "constituted across and out of the three key domains of their personal experience, professional context, and the external political environment within and through which significant aspects of their work is constituted" (p. 520). Principals remain a key "player" in the teaching profession, and are perhaps best equipped for the "game". Hence, a cornerstone of this project is my belief that understanding their habitus has resulted in an increased understanding of how they measure the quality of teaching.

### **3.3 PARTICIPANTS**

Three experienced principals from Education Queensland schools were invited to participate in this study on the basis of their schools' individual ICSEA values. Fortunately, my current principal was supportive of this research and assisted in making contact with potential participants. Length of experience in the role was also considered before inviting principals to participate. While I initially hoped length of experience would be a determining factor in assessing a potential participant's suitability for the project, it quickly became apparent that participant willingness and availability were of a higher priority. The complex and continuous demands of the participants' professional role, combined with the secondment logistics presented by one of the participants, added additional complexities to the data collection process. Furthermore, data collection was affected by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remaining steadfast was my commitment to ensuring participants represented the three levels of ICSEA advantage. While "ICSEA values typically range from approximately 500 (representing extremely educationally disadvantaged backgrounds) to about 1300 (representing schools with students with very educationally advantaged

backgrounds)” (ACARA, 2013), the participating principals’ schools are spread across three levels of the value. The first participant is a principal of a school whose value is approximately 950, which represents schools with higher levels of socio-educational disadvantage. The second participant’s school’s ICSEA value sits around the average of 1000. Finally, the third participant is representative of a more socio-educationally advantaged school with a value close to 1100. To protect participant anonymity, the specific ICSEA values of each school are not stipulated in this project. Whilst greater differences between the schools’ ICSEA values could have yielded stronger insights into the impacts of contextual factors on principals’ perceptions of quality teaching, again, participant availability meant the values were closer than I had originally anticipated.

### **3.4 INSTRUMENTS**

Data collection for this research project was divided between semistructured interviews and document analysis. This section will first address the use of semistructured interview. Second, the processes implemented to investigate the supporting, contextual documents will be examined.

#### **3.4.1 Semistructured interviews**

The interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed against a carefully sequenced, pre-determined set of interview questions. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the assumption that the participants would not be hesitant to speak, are articulate, and could share ideas comfortably (Creswell, 2014, p. 217). This assumption was based on a certain understanding of principals’ roles, and prior experience of working with principals in a range of contexts. As I mentioned in the introduction to this research, this project began when I was in my fifth year of teaching. I have worked within two different state high schools, and upon returning to Brisbane, worked as an ambassador for the Teach Queensland team to support recruitment for rural and remote schools. Working within these different sites permitted me certain researcher insider advantages in that my professional connections and experiences bridged potential gaps between researcher and researched.

The flexibility of semistructured interviews, which allows the order of the questions to be modified, helped support the validity of responses. Although a certain level of inequality often exists in research interviews—with the direction managed by interviewer (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 110)—the principals’ responses determined the sequencing of the questions, thus ceding some control to the principals (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 29). Structuring the interviews this way enabled comparisons to be drawn between the principals’ responses. Data collection was initially strengthened by refining the interview questions. This occurred after I conducted a trial with a colleague and was able to adapt the questions while still meeting my original intentions. Open-ended narrative style, led by “can you tell me about your career journey?” was followed with questions focused on collecting data specific to the school, and the relationship between the principals’ initial assertions about quality teaching. Collecting the data this way helped construct each school as a “case” led by the narratives of the principals.

The suitability of the semistructured interview for this particular research project is further evident when considering the work of Connelly and Clandinin (2000). Following Dewey’s (1938) notion of interaction, they have identified four directions that occur in any narrative inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward. The four directions can be summarised as follows: the inward direction moves toward internal conditions such as feelings, hopes and moral dispositions whereas outward refers to the environment; backward and forward refer to temporality—past, present and future (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 50). This project investigated principals’ perceptions of quality teaching, and analysed these perceptions in relation to the schools’ site specific factors (ICSEA value, implementation of the APR process, pedagogical framework, and engagement with the Standards), therefore, it was important to frame the questions in accordance with these directions because “research into an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 50). A chronological representation of the interview questions is attached as an appendix (Appendix B). Additionally, the interview questions were also grouped according to their direction and are presented in Appendix C. This grouping also helped inform the structures of the narratives presented in Chapter 4.

### **3.4.2 Document analysis**

It was imperative that each school's documents—pertaining to its engagement with the APR, the Standards and its pedagogical framework—be analysed because the use of multiple data sources assisted in securing an in-depth understanding of principals' perceptions of quality teaching (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). Furthermore, documents are recognised to provide valuable information to help the researcher understand the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014, pp. 221-222). An additional advantage of using documents to support understandings of principals' perceptions of quality teaching is the notion that they are created in the language of the participants, usually with careful attention given to their creation (Creswell, 2014, p. 222).

The specific documents analysed for this research varied due to what each principal was able to share at the time of data collection. Initially intended to be investigated were each school's documentation of the APR process, any school-level policy that made reference to the Standards, and information pertaining to the school's implementation of its pedagogical framework. However, I received a range of different documents from each principal as data representing the structuring elements of each field. I had hoped for consistency but different issues prevented this from happening; these are explained in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5. Across these documents, themes emerged against which comparisons were made to the themes that were determined from the principals' interviews. The connection between the school's supporting documents and its principal's perception of quality teaching were extrapolated through the idea of understanding practice through habitus, by noticing differences and being cognisant of the subtleties apparent in each principal's experiences (Rawolle & Lingard, 2003, p. 123).

## **3.5 REPRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

The data are presented in the following order. First, principals' responses to the interview questions are presented as three separate stories, organised according to the structures associated with three-dimensional space narrative and shaped through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of practice. Presenting this data this way specifically



responded to the main research question — What are the perceptions of quality teaching held by principals across three diverse school settings? Second, more detailed analysis is represented through the thematic, inductive coding that was applied to the interview transcripts and schools' documents. This process focused on elements of the pedagogical framework, the school's implementation of the APR process, and the school's ICSEA value. Information about each principal's current professional context is presented first because the principals cannot only be understood as individuals for, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 2) remind us, an individual's experiences are always relative, and always in a social context. The third step of the data analysis and representation identified relationships between the school's contextual factors and the principal's perceptions of quality. The analysis identified consistencies and differences between the personal and the place. With the principals' stories analysed alongside data from their schools, three emergent narratives were formed from the complete cases that were then compared to answer the remaining research sub-questions

A denaturalised approach was used to transcribe the interviews because the scope of this research did not provide sufficient space for additional analysis methods such as discourse or conversational analysis. I acknowledge that these methods could yield further insight into principals' perceptions of quality teaching, however, a (mostly) denaturalised approach enabled a smoother re-storying of the participants' narratives. Although Oliver et al. (2005) posit that it is a naturalised approach of transcription that offers a representation of the real world, I argue that the principals' realities clearly emerged as a result of the interviews' structure and patterns, more than what could have been conveyed through the inclusion in the coding process of incomprehensible speech or utterances (p. 1274).

Interview transcriptions were analysed using thematic, inductive coding to identify themes. Subsequently, the interview data were considered alongside document analyses of policy statements from both Federal and State Governments (such as documentation surrounding the Standards and the APR process). All documents, including raw data, were collated into a document archive and then refined into a case record once transcriptions were complete and the coding process began. When coding and identifying themes, member checking occurred to determine if issues arose or key elements were unclear. Furthermore, themes were layered and interrelated to increase the study's rigor and provide as much insight as possible.

The theoretical lens that shaped investigations into principals' perceptions of quality teaching was also applied to the data analysis. Identified themes were analysed with an alignment to Bourdieu's theory of practice, with specific attention paid to his concepts of habitus, capital, and field. Given a central aim of the research was to highlight the potentially different views principals hold regarding quality teaching, my analysis focused strongly on the contextual factors of the three schools, and the interplay between these elements and the principals' perceptions. Bourdieu's examination of the unequal privilege that exists within the institution of education, made his theoretical standpoint highly pertinent for this stage of the research project.

The document analyses coded and looked for themes that were similar to and/or contrasted with the themes identified in the interview transcripts. According to Creswell (2014), "in qualitative studies in which you both describe individuals and identify themes, a rich complex picture emerges" (p. 18). Thick descriptions of the principals' perceptions of quality teaching resulted in the emergence of themes that were both similar and different between the three principals. The themes which emerged were considered in alignment with the key concepts identified in the literature review. This includes the separation of quality teachers from quality teaching and the ideas inherent therein (for example, collaborative practice versus individualised practice); the role of professional standards in making determinations about teaching quality; and the role of student achievement in evaluating teacher performance. Importantly, the biases, values, and assumptions brought to this research were considered and presented throughout all stages of the data collection, data analysis, and the final presentation of the research's findings (Creswell, 2014, p. 18). After both data sets for each school were identified, they were then compared. The analysis looked for themes that were consistent between the principals' articulations of quality teaching, while at the same time identifying what makes their perceptions different. The level of congruence between each principal's stance and her/his school's policy documents was also examined.

The completed project's narrative form was shaped in alignment with the organising structures of three-dimensional space narrative. Analytical statements were generated from the coding process and relied upon to test the trustworthiness of the data. Because of the iterative nature of analysis and data testing, the process was continued until trustworthiness was apparent (Bassegy, 1999, p. 71). Multiple

narratives—and therefore the cases in which they emerged—were under investigation in order to add weight to the results, and therefore increase confidence in the robustness of the results (Freebody, 2003, p. 84). Because this project had elements of case study design, and case studies do not always examine cause and effect relationships, concepts of reliability and validity were problematic (Bassey, 1999, p. 75). This research instead applied processes involved with trustworthiness to approach these concerns. Prolonged engagement with both the data generated from the interviews, and the data produced from document analyses occurred. During and after the interview process, member checking of the raw data ensured that data were accurately recorded and reflect participants' views without ambiguity. The study's credibility was increased via triangulation and this was evident through examining the data sets from different methods of inquiry. Monitoring my progressive subjectivity also ensured credibility. This took the form of a separate diary in which I recorded my personal ideas during the data collection and analysis processes. Evidence of my progressive subjectivity is also referenced throughout the participants' stories in Chapter 4.

### **3.6 ETHICS**

Ethical concerns were inherently present due to the pre-existing professional roles enacted by the researcher (classroom teacher) and participants (principals), specifically regarding common power relationships between teacher and principal. Initial ethical concerns about the relationships between researcher and participants were addressed with reference to the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who posit that a way of understanding the process of entry into the research field as an ethical matter, is to see it as a negotiation of a shared narrative unity (p. 3). The authors extend this idea of collaboration, writing, “when both researchers and practitioners tells stories of the research relationship, they have the possibility of being stories of empowerment” (p. 4). Collaboration was evidenced due to the flexible parameters of semistructured interviews; I was able to share anecdotes about my experiences working within the two schools at contextually appropriate moments in the conversations and ask for elaboration when information was provided that I was not familiar with. This project sought ethical approval from the university ethics committee as well as separate Department of Education ethics approval before any data collection processes began.

The concern around potential power imbalances was addressed by conducting the data collection in a location removed from each school site. It was anticipated that accurate data sets may have been unable to be generated due to the participants withholding certain information about their values and beliefs. However, ethical considerations such as the de-identification of participants, and exclusion of specific data that could enable identification of the participants' schools, were made. Participants were referred to under pseudonyms at all stages of the research process and any audio-recordings of interviews were heard by only my supervisors and me. Moreover, I obtained informed consent with a cover letter that outlined the purpose of this study. I also sought written permission to publish the results under the strict condition of guaranteed participant confidentiality.

This chapter has detailed how narrative research design drove this study's research into principals' perceptions of quality teaching. An outline of the instruments provided the scope and sequence of this research. Thematic analysis via inductive coding was the primary mode of data analysis. This was applied to both professional documents and participants' interview transcripts. Ethics approval was granted from the university and DoE, and participants' wellbeing was ensured via de-identification processes.

# Chapter 4: Results – Stories from the ‘Field’

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2 (see section 2.1), I identified the issues that arise when the terms “teacher quality” and “quality teaching” are used interchangeably. There are clear distinctions that can be made between the two terms, most of which exist as binary oppositions between objectivity and subjectivity, and individuality and collegiality. I argued that it is less an absence of research into this phenomenon that is problematic; rather, it is that the many definitions of quality teaching are resulting in opaque understandings that increasingly permeate schools and impact on the day-to-day routine practices of teachers and administrators within these schools. Proponents of the quality teacher framework posit levels of quality can be indicated by measurable skills, qualifications, and achievements of individual teachers, prioritising student achievement as a reliable indicator of quality practice (Strong, 2011). Contrasting this are perspectives of quality teaching—similar to that which underpins my research stance—which acknowledge the impact of contextual factors on teachers’ pedagogy and prioritise the collegial aspects of the profession (Cochran-Smith, 2002, 2021; Croninger et al., 2012).

Despite extensive research within this realm of education, there remains disparity between key stakeholders’, and a notable absence of school principals’, perspectives of what constitutes quality teaching. This problem underpins the project’s research question and sub-questions:

- What are the perceptions of quality teaching held by principals across three diverse school settings?
  - To what extent does the socioeconomic status of a school impact on a principal’s perception of quality teaching?
  - What contextual factors (if any) operate within the school and are these evident within the principals’ perceptions?

Using narrative methodology for this project was most appropriate due its consideration of the impact of context, as context is necessary for making sense of any

person, event or thing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This chapter will outline the data that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with each principal, and data from the analysis of their school's documents concerned with the Annual Performance Review (APR) process, their pedagogical framework, and any evidence of their school's engagement with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards). The data will first be presented as detailed descriptions of the participants' stories and locate each within the specific field of their schools. With an understanding of Bourdieu's theory of practice, identified in section 3.2, and how it influenced my analysis of the data, the stories are initially presented with an emphasis on habitus and field. Including verbatim excerpts of the principals' responses to the semi-structured interview questions establishes the participants' individual voices and thus helps shape their stories. Presenting the data this way adheres to the province of narrative inquiry, in that the research problem is explored by examining individuals' experiences (Creswell, 2014, p. 507).

Divided into three sections, this chapter presents each principal's story and the case of her/his school separately. Each story is presented first with a focus on the inner direction of the narrative. Second, the stories address the outer direction. Finally, each story concludes with a return to the inner direction of each principal's narrative that clearly conveys what they perceive quality teaching to be. Detailed analysis and comparison of the data will occur in the following chapter, titled, 'Analysis and Discussion', where I unpack key findings from the project and highlight the educational implications for teachers and schools.

Because three-dimensional space narrative is the methodology underpinning the structure of this project, Bourdieu's theoretical framework was especially pertinent in the re-storying stage of this research. A clear alignment between Bourdieu's theory and the methodology's elements of interaction, continuity, and situation will emerge as the stories are revealed. This alignment was vital in ensuring the research aims were met, as I aimed to explore what principals perceive quality teaching to be, and how these perceptions are formed and influenced by the contexts in which principals are situated. In section 3.2, I examined how Bourdieu's theory of practice identifies that an individual's habitus cannot exist independently of the fields in which an individual is located. Therefore, three-dimensional space narrative, with its interconnected

elements of situation and interaction, provides a highly suitable framework within which the participants' stories are shaped.

## 4.2 MARIE'S STORY

### 4.2.1 A focus on the inner direction of Marie's narrative

Marie has had a diverse career in education, characterised by experiences in a range of roles within a range of contexts. She is principal of a secondary high school within the greater Brisbane area and her school's current ICSEA value sits below the mean of 1000 at approximately 970. Data from the My School website (ACARA, 2020) indicates that close to half her student population is within the bottom quarter of the distribution of socio-educational advantage. These numbers are reflected in Marie's description of her school context:

*Really diverse population from million dollar houses to housing commission, lots of children in care in the school. We have our special education cohort running at about 8.5% and our Indigenous cohort is running at about 7.5-8% of our population. Our ICSEA has just gone up, I think we're now 970 or thereabouts now...*

Marie began her teaching career by completing her country service in what she refers to as a "high-top" (a prep to Year 10 school) and she reflects on the impact that context had on her introduction to the profession:

*So, I did my country service straight up. Um, and actually did it in a high-top, so that was really interesting because I had the primary aspect as well. I quite enjoyed that and enjoyed having a bit of influence in that space just a little bit as well, but it taught me a lot as well. It taught me that I thought that I was really good with literacy and things like that but I had absolutely no idea how to teach kids to read. So that was really enjoyable, then went from there to [rural town], spent a couple of years there, and then down here to Brisbane.*

In the remainder of her response to Question 1, *can you tell me a little bit about your teaching career and how you've ended up principal of the school you work in?*,

Marie provided details on the range of roles she has held beyond the classroom. Upon her return to greater Brisbane, Marie spent a further seven years as a classroom teacher, before transferring to a different state secondary school as a Head of Department. That school's ICSEA classifies it as a disadvantaged setting, and she spent eighteen months in that role before she was invited to take an acting deputy principal position in the same school. From there, she moved to another low socio-economic school as deputy principal. It was within this site that she expanded her practice beyond the school grounds and established a connection with initial teacher education programs:

*...during that time I had pre-service teachers scattered from universities all over the state, and working with them in that space and we'd bring them together a few times a year and do intensive weeks and things like that with them. That also allowed me to travel the state and go in and out of schools and learn. It was just so good.*

The suitability of three-dimensional space narrative methodology and its organising elements of interaction, continuity and situation were evident early in the interview. Although I asked Marie to begin with a chronological description of her career, leading to her current site in order to invite discussion of context, she inherently exemplified the four directions that occur in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000 p. 50). Her statement, "it was just so good", when discussing her ability to travel to other locations and learn from other schools, is evidence of the internal conditions that characterise the inward movement. Additionally, the outward movement is obvious through her reference to other environments. The next excerpt is further evidence of the temporality that influences how individuals tell their stories, and also of the contextual factors that shape principals' perceptions of quality teaching.

In this excerpt from the interview transcript, Marie touches on not only the diversity of her geographic experience, but also exemplifies the commitment to life-long learning that educators are expected to adopt. With an interplay of interaction and continuity evident, Marie explicitly identifies the feelings and dispositions she experienced in a twelve-month period during which she worked closely in the context of policy and professional standards. During this stage of the interview, her passion for teacher development and growth was obvious:



*From there, I went into an administration role for twelve months and I hated that, with a vengeance. But that also allowed me, what I did for the most part, because I was also doing some work with AITSL at the same time. What that allowed me to do was actually take that whole concept of the APR process in its infancy and actually work in schools saying, 'let's focus on growth and development of our teachers'. I was using a lot of the AITSL resources to work with leadership teams in schools, and then some of the schools got me working with specific teaching groups or whole staff groups; some schools I'd go back to repeatedly, a number of times, within the twelve months I was in there. Some schools I'd go to just once...but just really working in that space of 'we need to grow our teachers', we need to work on the development of our teachers.*

Marie then took another deputy principal role at a different low socio-economic school before moving into her current principal role. It is interesting to note that, without prompting, Marie reflects clearly on the roles of AITSL and the Annual Performance Review (APR) process within the profession. The next chapter of the thesis includes analysis that will demonstrate the clear links Marie sees between policy and practice, and how this is evidenced within her specific school. Earlier in this section I acknowledged some of the factors that shape Marie's school's context, however, it is important to now present a more detailed picture of what Marie believes quality teaching to be and how she sees it being enacted within her school. Importantly, the temporality aspect of narrative inquiry has been applied in the presentation of this data. These will be the final pieces of the inward direction of her story before I move to a representation of the outward direction and its influences on her perspectives. The re-storying representation of the data will conclude with Marie's explicit statements about what she perceives quality teaching to be.

When responding to Question 3, *when do you remember first thinking about teaching in terms of quality? Can you describe the situation?*, Marie first sought clarification, asking whether she was being asked to define quality teaching at this point. To support her response, I added that I was looking for when she first remembers the term becoming part of the dialogue. The example she provides is from 2007/2008, while she was deputy principal at a low SES school and a concern arose when it became apparent that delivery was more important than curriculum because, in Marie's

words, "...unless these people can deliver curriculum there's no point in focusing on curriculum." I followed this initial response by asking if there had been a specific incident with a student or classes, and Marie's elaboration clearly articulates her perspective of her role within the larger field of education:

*I think it had been my fundamental belief for a very long time. But I guess it was, I got more involved with universities, like I actually really sought out getting more involved. I became quite critical of teacher education at the university level and I thought, you know what, I can't just sit back and critique, I've actually got to do something about it. So I started getting more involved with the pre-service teachers that came through my school and I made that a priority to spend time with them and I made it a priority to do things a bit differently to what I had been doing in the past, and create proper programs for pre-service teachers.*

In a temporal sense, Marie's perspective of quality teaching has changed and she aligns this to personal growth and development, but also situates it within the broader context of society, "Look, I think as I've grown and developed, I think it absolutely has changed. I think as our society has changed, we have to change with our society...". At this point of Marie's story, the question arises as to whether there is a greater impetus for teachers and leaders of disadvantaged schools to prepare their students for life beyond school to increase their access to all amounts of capital. With reference to Bourdieu's theory of practice, it is obvious that successful participation in society is dependent on how well students are trained for the "game"; the correlation between educational success and quality of life is indisputable.

When asked how she would know that quality teaching is occurring in a classroom setting, and what she would expect to see as evidence, Marie's response immediately aligned her perception to student behaviours, "I would look immediately at the engagement levels of the kids so that's the first thing that I would look for. And so, like, obviously, if the kids were slouched, their posture, their facial expressions..." For Marie, quality teaching can first be identified from what the students are doing, rather than what the teachers are doing. It is worthwhile noting that consideration of student results did not arise as a determining factor of quality practice. This is in stark contrast with the perceptions held by proponents of the quality teacher model in which student results are examples of output factors that determine a teacher's level of

quality. Furthermore, the idea of student engagement, something which is measured qualitatively through principal observations (in this case), will be returned to and examined in greater detail in the analysis chapter of this project.

After Marie's initial response to the question, I interjected and suggested that she uses affect to determine how quality teaching is unfolding within the classrooms of her school; she continued with this description of how she measures quality practice:

*...the buzz in the room. Um, but there's a time when we need to do didactic teaching and there's a place for that but if it's all day every day...I look for a learning goal to be really clear, I actually go and have conversations with the kids and that's how I know what's going on, 'so what are you learning today, why are you learning it? How are you going with that?' You know, like, they can either tell me or they can't, you know. So that's probably how I look at the quality of the teaching. I look at where the teacher is and what they're doing, so if the teacher is actually distanced from the kids or actually engaged with the kids. I look at the posture, at the facial expressions, at the demeanour of the teacher, to know how engaged they are with the lesson.*

While her immediate response identified students' actions as being representative of the quality of the teaching, Marie quickly moved to the teacher's role. Again, the emphasis was placed on engagement and what a teacher may be doing to involve students in the classroom's learning experiences. Additionally, Marie considered the change in broader societal attitudes towards education that she began seeing in her students:

*...we started to really realise that our kids were disengaging from education. So we started to say, 'oh you know what, it's not enough anymore to do just, you've got to go to school and you've got to learn'. Kids were starting to say, 'you know what, no I don't, I'm not going to', and so that was becoming more prevalent across our society I suppose as well. So it was more about...how are we engaging kids in learning?' And so, that's about, to me, that's about the teacher.*

Early in the interview, the theme of 'engagement' became apparent with Marie establishing a clear relationship between quality teaching and student engagement that she consistently referred to throughout the conversation. This idea will be examined

more closely in the following chapter, with specific attention given to the differences that arose in terms of the participants' onus on the importance of teacher-led student engagement. Following this, it is important to now present the temporal aspect of Marie's perspective of quality teaching. I asked what has influenced her perceptions and if she feels that her thoughts of what constitutes quality teaching have changed over time:

*Look, I think as I've grown and developed, I think it absolutely has changed. I think as our society has changed, we have to change with our society and so I think that has changed how we engage kids, how kids learn, you know the neural pathways...I just don't know we spend enough time talking about the brain and how the brain functions...I don't believe that we do enough in the science area and the function of the brain and how the brain really operates, and what is happening for our kids when they're sitting in our classrooms.*

Marie's response once more clearly conveys a connection between an individual's habitus and their field, although in this circumstance, broader society is again represented as being a significant influence on pedagogical practice. Whilst this may not be surprising, this idea lends further support to Bourdieu's framework being the most applicable theoretical lens to examine and display this data. The relationship between societal demands and teaching practice is reflected in Bourdieu's view that, together, culture and the structure of society generate ideas which subsequently influence the organisation of a society (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 10). Identified in section 3.1 of this project, education and educational research are component parts of culture because, for Bourdieu, culture refers to the world of knowledge, ideas and objects which are the product of human activity (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 10). At this point of re-storying Marie's perspective, it is important to move the focus to the outward direction of three-dimensional space narrative, with the temporal aspect remaining a key consideration in the representation of this data.

#### 4.2.2 A focus on the outer direction of Marie's narrative

A more detailed representation of the specific relationship between field and habitus emerged when I asked Marie if her ideas of quality teaching have ever been challenged:

*Yeah, definitely, some of the work I did with AITSL, one of things we were working on was the classroom practice continuum and I actually love it as a resource but, I don't know. I worked with people from every state in Australia and they brought us in and people were from a whole range of different backgrounds and you know, it was really interesting because one of the ladies was from a really remote area of Western Australia and so what she brought to the table and what needed to be considered in her context was really different from the girl who came from a private school in the middle of Canberra. You know, so working in that environment, like I learned a lot and I think it did change some of my perceptions. Some of things I think I was quite dogged in, I think I did go, okay Marie, back it up a bit, think things through because it is about that context again...*

In the introduction to this project, I argued that it is difficult to measure the quality of teaching when context is not considered; only one out of thirty-seven focus areas of the Standards explicitly identifies the influence of context on teaching practice. Of particular interest in the above excerpt from the interview is Marie's reference to AITSL and its resources. Reflecting on two distinctly different examples of contexts in terms of geographic diversity, she implicitly identifies the impact of those specific fields on teaching practice. What this reflection reveals is continued alignment to Bourdieu's standpoint that an individual's habitus cannot exist independently of the field(s) in which it is located. From Marie's words, it is clear that teaching practice, and thus teaching quality, is heavily influenced by context. This idea is certainly not new, and is supported by Lee and Smith who as far back as 1996 commented that, "the conditions within which teachers work certainly influence the work they actually do. That work instruction affects how and what their students learn" (Lee & Smith, 1996, p. 103).

The influence of her time working with AITSL is clearly evident throughout Marie's responses to the questions, but what is not as evident through the transcript's representation is her hesitation regarding the use of the Classroom Practice Continuum as a tool to measure teacher practice. The continuum "brings the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to life by building out the Professional Practice Domain and articulating what teachers at increasing levels of expertise do in the classroom" (AITSL, 2017b). For Marie, this resource is problematic in a semantic sense:

*And one of the things that I don't like—and I take the headings off rightly or wrongly—is that 'graduate' you know I don't think that's headed very well because some graduates come out and they're proficient in areas and that's fine, that's completely fine. And some people who've been teaching for a while are learner, or beginner, or early in some areas.*

We briefly discussed the importance of the terminology and our shared concern regarding the continuum's labels and descriptions of practice, before considering the issue of 'expertise' versus 'experienced'. In the following statement, Marie highlights the issue of equating length of service to teaching quality:

*It isn't it about expertise or experienced. Teachers are bad, a lot of teachers are bad at thinking they're experienced then therefore they are an expert and teachers have that mental block around that so experience doesn't mean expertise.*

Although Marie uses the continuum as a tool within her school to support teacher development, she believes more work needs to be done in terms of how schools engage with the Standards.

To continue the discussion of the structural elements that operate within her school and influence her perceptions of quality teaching, I asked how Marie's ideas of quality teaching align with her school's pedagogical framework:

*Um, so my school, just a short time after I got there we had a priority review because there was a lot not happening, so it's been fantastic. I have got a coalition of the willing. I am truly blessed by the staff I have at my school so I'm really passionate about teacher growth and development, and so right from the*

*get-go I started going into their classrooms and I started doing observations and I was doing it on an invitational basis and I had that many people asking me to come I couldn't keep up.*

At the time of the interview, the school had just moved away from using Marzano's Art and Science of Teaching (ASOT) as its pedagogical framework. Sitting neatly within the continuity aspect of three-dimensional space narrative design, Marie led me to this change in pedagogical framework after explaining that she had been unable to see evidence of it, "They said that they were an ASOT school, which I went yeah, fantastic, but I couldn't see it anywhere. So we had to go right back to basics and really work towards that again." Marie's lengthy response to this question returned to elements previously included in the inner direction stage of her narrative. She again stressed the importance of student engagement for her staff and touched on the importance of making learning relevant for students' contexts:

*We spend a lot of time talking about knowing our kids and making things real for our kids because engagement is a major issue for us. So you know, if you go into a room and they're doing something like Science and they're doing volcanoes or something like that, how is that relevant for a 13 year old [name of school] boy, like what's he getting out of that? So we, you know, we spend a lot of time talking about that. I've always been banging on back since [name of school], we need to teach the thinking skills and I'm so glad now our focus is the cognitions so I say to my staff all the time, you need to engage the kids, you get to know your kids really, really well. You need to engage them, you need to find a way to make this relevant for them and all of the research tells us that when kids, when young people make an emotional connection to learning, that's when they actually really learn so we talk a lot about that at my place.*

Furthering the present sense of continuity, I asked how Marie sees the Standards influencing ideas about quality teaching. Instantly, Marie drew a connection between the Standards and how her school enacts the APR process. She explained that they use the Standards "a bit" and will "break them down at times as well", picking different aspects on which to focus their attention, depending where gaps or challenges arise. With reference to the four career stages identified by AITSL, Marie explained that they look at what teachers and students would be doing at Graduate, Proficient, Lead or

Highly Accomplished. For teachers at Marie's school, they initially reflect against the Standards in Stage 1 and share evidence of this with their mentor. APR mentors are members of the school's leadership team and teachers have the ability to choose who their mentor is, rather than be committed to their faculty Head of Department. However, Marie identified an issue with this process in that the success of the APR process is dependent on consistent, shared understandings of the Standards by the mentors, yet this is not always the case.

The next interview question enabled an extrapolation to occur from the issues identified within the specific subfield of Marie's school regarding application of the Standards to the broader field of the Queensland education system. When I asked what relationship Marie sees between the Department's ideas about quality teaching and the Standards, this was her response;

*I think that initially there wasn't but over time we've managed to bring it together. I think that now we are part of the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher process that has made the Standards more real for people, so I think that that's helped immensely. The fact that we have to – this worries me a bit, can I just say – the fact that we have to do prac reports against the Standards is a really important step but I still worry that our teachers don't understand the Standards enough to be doing the ratings at a level that we would want them to be doing the ratings.*

We then briefly discussed the causes for this issue and considered a lack of communication and scaffolding before the Standards were expected to be implemented as being responsible for teachers' insufficient understandings. According to AITSL, the Standards were introduced to publicly define teacher quality and make clear the elements that exemplify "high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools" (AITSL, 2017b, para 1). However, there remains opaque understandings within the profession, notwithstanding the problem of professional standards for teachers being implemented as regulatory measures instead of supporting teacher development (Bourke et al., 2016, p. 4).

Through Bourdieu's element of field, the final question pertaining to the outer direction of Marie's narrative identified a significant issue I addressed in the literature review of this project in section 2.4. After reviewing research concerned with teacher evaluation methods, I argued that while many researchers have found principals'



evaluations important to consider when examining quality teaching, they do not focus on the inherent beliefs held by school leaders as to what characterises quality teaching. When I asked Marie if she thinks quality teaching is the same in each school she answered by stipulating it should be, but is not convinced that it is. Her elaboration clearly positions school principals as significant “players in the game” whose individual experiences most certainly shape their perceptions of quality teaching:

*I think that principals all come from very different backgrounds and whether you like it or not, your principals and your deputies, they lead this space and if they don't put a focus on it, and if they don't, it depends on what quality is to them.*

Unprompted, Marie then extended her emphasis on principals' roles in identifying and developing teaching quality by asking the following rhetorical question:

*Like what standard are you prepared to accept and how are you gathering evidence to know where your staff need help?...I think that's the critical thing, so you know, we, I'm at my people all the time. I've worked relentlessly in my time at the school to get everyone [HoDs and Deputy Principals] out of their offices and to get everyone into classrooms.*

#### **4.2.3 Concluding Marie's story with a return to the inner direction**

To conclude the re-storying of Marie's narrative, I move now to her responses to the final two interview questions. Before seeking her definition of quality teaching, I asked her to consider what she thinks of the definition provided by Allard et al. (2013) that shapes my research stance in this project. I have included it again to best orient readers to Marie's response: “Quality teaching is teaching that addresses the academic, social and emotional learning needs of all students and in a diversity of contexts” (Allard et al., 2013, p. 427). The following is Marie's verbatim response to the question, in which the interview's prevalent theme of student engagement is evident:

*Yeah, yep, quality teaching is also reflection though, and that definition hits on some of those things. It is certainly about the diversity, it's certainly about the social/emotional as well as the academic, it's all of those things. It's just about really knowing your learner, really, really knowing your learner and being able to make that emotional connection between the learner and the learning. And*

*it's about the focus on learning as opposed to the focus on teaching, it shouldn't be a focus on teaching.*

I then asked Marie if she felt the necessity of an emotional connection was greater in a lower socioeconomic school and she stated that it likely is. This was followed with a brief explanation about the staff in her site not making assumptions that maybe those in “leafy greens” do in terms of students’ abilities and the influential factors. The notion of a “leafy green” will be unpacked in Teresa’s story.

Culminating Marie’s story is her definition of quality teaching. She first addressed the difficulty in defining the term but then quickly returned to the idea of engagement; “I think it’s about an ability to engage kids in learning, it’s about, you know, there’s a certain amount of acting in teaching.” Furthering her perception of what characterises quality teaching, Marie asserted:

*It's, you've got to know your content, it's not okay to not know your content, but you've got to know what strategy to use and when to use it to actually link the learner into the learning. So it is about the pedagogy and then you've got to be able to reflect, how did that go? How did I meet the needs of my learners? What could I have done differently, you know? I think it's all those things in that definition but I think that the reflection is a really important part of it.*

In this section of the project, I have re/presented and re/told Marie’s story framed by the elements of interaction, continuity, and situation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These elements have been analysed via thematic, inductive coding and will be examined through Bourdieu’s theory of practice in the following chapter. The same structure will be applied to the following two stories. However, before moving to examine Teresa’s data, I conclude Marie’s story with her statement regarding the moves made to quantify many aspects of the teaching profession:

*They're trying to make it clinical, and you can't make it clinical, it's a human industry, you can't make it clinical.*

### 4.3 TERESA'S STORY

#### 4.3.1 A focus on the inner direction of Teresa's narrative

Teresa has had a similarly diverse career in education over a number of decades, and like Marie, has worked within a range of roles across varying contexts. Teresa is principal of a secondary high school within the greater Brisbane area. Despite being included in this project as the representative for an average level ICSEA value, her school is sometimes referred to as a “leafy green”. This Australian education colloquialism is used to denote schools which sit in demographic areas with residents from the middle to upper middle class socio-economic groups. Supporting this description is the school's current ICSEA value of just above 1000 and its breakdown of socio-educational advantage which sees more than half of the school's student population within the top two quarters (ACARA, 2020). What follows is Teresa's initial representation of her school context:

*Currently we have about 1400 students, next year we'll have about 1500 students. Its ICSEA has gone up a little bit, it goes up and down. Parents, they're, mostly middle class, a good percentage of Defence, public servants, teachers, police...So the parents value education; there's a fair number of stay at home mothers which is different from what I'm used to as well, and that can be really good, or it can present some challenges there.*

It is important to foreground that before Teresa became principal at her current school, she was principal of a low SES school for a number of years. Her reflections on some of the differences that she has observed between staff behaviours and attitudes from the two schools will be addressed later in her story as evidence of how field shapes an individual's habitus. Characterising the individualistic nature of the data that can emerge within narrative methodology is the immediate difference in tone and subject matter Teresa used to tell her story compared Marie. Where Marie adopted subjective language to “flesh out” her career progression, Teresa briefly detailed each of her roles and locations without reflecting on how these different jobs and contexts have shaped her current position as a secondary school principal. Teresa's description of her career follows:

*I was a trained commercial teacher it was, a business teacher, and I worked at a coastal school. Then I worked in a mining town, then came back to a metropolitan school. From there, I got a job with the, at the time it was the board of 4 Ss – Board of Senior Secondary School Studies – as a review officer for [name of subjects], and so did a lot of travel around, training panels, moderation, verification, that sort of thing. Then I went back to a metropolitan school, Head of Department Teaching and Learning. Then I got promoted to deputy principal at that same school and as deputy principal – I spent eight years – I had rotated through pedagogy, the timetable and HR, and I had done, you know, the behaviour management side of things, and I was there for eight years and then I was promoted to a low SES school as a principal. Then I relocated to a leafy green school in greater Brisbane.*

Before moving to an examination of Teresa’s perceptions of quality teaching, and how her views have been shaped over time, it is pertinent to reconsider her current school context. I have briefly identified differences between Marie and Teresa’s narrative style in terms of their descriptions of their career progression, but similar differences are apparent when looking at how they speak about their school contexts. Where Marie identified challenges faced by school staff early in the interview, Teresa focused on the students’ backgrounds. In addition to the student demographics, Teresa spoke of the workforce action plan that sees beginning teachers employed alongside transfers of teachers who have completed their country service (the process of Queensland’s DoE whereby teachers return to metropolitan schools after having taught in rural and remote locations, just as I did). She explained that the focus is on building the capacity of teachers with four to eight years’ experience, and inferred that underpinning this approach is the number of staff nearing retirement age, “The staff has been a fairly stable staff over a long period of time but, they are an aging staff...”.

The final difference to highlight between the first two school contexts of this project is the manner in which the principals identified challenges their respective sites face. As I stated above, Marie volunteered this information early on in the interview when describing her school context. With Teresa’s story, it was only when I specifically asked about difficulties teachers and/or the school faces that she included the following description:

*I think the parents certainly question what's being done, and how things are being taught, and how things are being assessed and if their kids aren't getting the results that they want they challenge staff. I think some staff find that a challenge in itself. We also have an enrolment management plan and we can't take from outside the district as we're at capacity. So over the last few years that's been a good thing in terms of people knowing it's a good school and it's got a good name in the community, but also then we don't have the opportunity to grow those programs.*

Parents' influence on teaching practice will be explored further in Teresa's story, but the next section of the data presented addresses the temporal aspect of three-dimensional space narrative. It continues to explore the inner elements of Teresa's habitus that shape her perspective of quality teaching. I asked if she remembers when she first thought about pedagogical practice in terms of "quality teaching" and to respond, she referenced a program that was introduced in her second year of teaching:

*Well, I can remember in my second year of teaching, there was the old ET, Excellence in Teaching Program, [it] was rolled out and only just recently we pulled it out at school because, I think, one of the staff, pulled out from thirty years ago the book that she had gone through. We used a lot of the stuff there for our induction of new staff um because it's quality stuff, you know, it was the old anticipatory sets...*

It is interesting to highlight that an approximately thirty-year-old program was being used to induct beginning teachers in 2019. What this reveals about the nature of quality teaching and the frameworks within which teachers operate will be explored in the next chapter. Returning to Teresa's response, she then explained the program in more detail and referenced her teaching areas to evidence its implementation in classrooms. However, she finished her response by summarising the program as being about engaging and challenging students so they could see the relevance of what they were doing with what they would be doing as a job. Notably, these personal reflections are data located within the inner direction of this narrative, but they establish a clear connection to the outer direction, with Teresa's consideration of preparing students for

the world beyond school. This reflects the interconnected nature of this narrative methodology's organising principles.

Teresa's inner direction was further revealed in response to the question about how she would know quality teaching is occurring within her school. Parallels between Marie and Teresa's stories can be drawn at this point as Teresa, too, identified student engagement as being a key indicator of quality teaching. However, it is here that Teresa's story shifts in focus as she continued her answer by asserting:

*I'd look around the room, so I can walk into a room and there's learning goals and success criteria written up, there's vocabulary lists hanging around the classroom, there's students' books and you can see that they've got different activities that target different types of learning.*

Teresa's reference to specific classroom artefacts is an acknowledgment of structural elements of the field in which teaching is located, and is more closely aligned with the quality teacher model that sees evidence of quality as being quantifiably measured. Additional reference to the specific structural elements of schools was also found in Teresa's answer when I asked if she believes quality teaching is the same in each school. She instantly responded with a "no", explaining:

*It's your context, it's your community, it's not even the same in my school in two different subject areas or two different classes because it's, you know, you've got to be responsive to kids' needs and you've got to be responsive to what the school demands are. There are different priorities in schools, there's different stuff going on so it's going to look, different from classroom to classroom.*

Although this section is concerned with the aspects that characterise the inner direction of Teresa's narrative, with an emphasis on how her habitus shapes her perceptions of quality teaching, it is important to now refer to the Standards. This is because they are a key structuring element that inform teaching practice within Australia, and were designed after extensive research and stakeholder consultations, before being tested across school types, sectors and geographic locations (AITSL, 2017b). Clearly, AITSL believes the Standards address and support the specific contextual needs of schools, but I wanted to ascertain Teresa's opinion about the

Standards' transferability in terms of the different sites in which teaching practice takes place. I asked if she felt the Standards reflect this diversity and she stated that they provide a framework that supports differentiation of teacher practice and needs depending on individuals' career stages. However, she also stipulated, "...people can interpret that how they want to." This statement illuminates the issue with applying objective, formal structures to a subjective profession where much of the work is influenced by factors that reside outside an individual's control.

This section has revealed the inner direction of Teresa's story regarding her perceptions of quality teaching. I move now to a representation of the outer direction that influences her beliefs, with specific reference made to the Standards, her school's pedagogical framework, and Departmental ideas about quality teaching.

#### **4.3.2 A focus on the outer direction of Teresa's narrative**

When I asked Teresa if she views quality differently now, and if her perceptions have ever been challenged, she immediately identified that she believes "the kids are different". After identifying the changing nature of students, she followed with an elaboration of some of the different factors that influence teaching, such as technology, student behaviours, and parental expectations:

*We have to do what's best for the kids, and so what you're doing, when I started teaching, you know manual typewriters...now they've got an iPad, and that sort of thing. They've got multiple devices going when they're learning and the kids' attention span, the way that kids learn, you know, from an early age, they're given a device to keep them quiet or they're watching television, we never used to watch you know, I grew up with a black and white television for God's sake.*

Engagement as vital evidence of quality teaching is a theme that emerged early within each of the three interviews, and its role within shaping principals' perceptions of quality teaching will be analysed in detail in the following chapter. However, at this point of Teresa's story it is worth focusing on her view that the principles of quality teaching have not changed over time, rather it is how teachers are expected to engage students that has. In a sentiment now echoed within staffrooms around Australia, Teresa concluded her answer by acknowledging the influence of a significant group of

players within this field, parents; they “...question teachers’ authority whereas previously parents trusted that teachers knew best.”

After Teresa referred to the influence of parents on teaching practice, I asked her to consider whether she believed there is now greater accountability placed on teachers from parents than the profession has previously seen. Teresa believes there are greater expectations from parents on both what teachers do and how they do it which is resulting in more challenges for staff. At the start of this section, I acknowledged Teresa’s experience as principal of a low SES school before she moved to her current school. During this stage of the interview she embodied the temporality of three-dimensional space narrative design by drawing interesting comparisons between the role of parents/carers between the two schools. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that schools are but one of the influential inputs that contribute to students’ forms and amounts of capital, it is similarly worthwhile to consider how familial influences impact students’ success.

While representing the first two participants’ stories, I have thus far touched on elements of Bourdieu’s theory of practice as the theoretical framework shaping this investigation into what principals believe quality teaching to be. It is now important to re-consider certain points more explicitly. In Chapter 3, Section 2, I argued that Bourdieu’s analogy of social activity being a game could be extended to the institution of education. I contended that just as with any game, some players (in this case, students) are better equipped than others. Furthermore, I stated that although there are structures that are mirrored in each school, contextual specificities exist within each site that impact both teachers and students. The influence of parents/carers on both teachers and students is one of these contextual particulars.

Parent/carer influence on student outcomes has been extensively investigated (Garbacz et al., 2018; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2010; Mereoiu et al., 2016), but what existing research has failed to address more deeply, is the impact of parents/carers on teaching practice. When engaging with the structures associated both within and outside the classroom, students bring with them behaviours, values, attitudes, and beliefs that have been developed within their homes. At one point, Teresa identified relationships between a classroom teacher and students, as well as between students, as being evidence of quality teaching. In this response, she also identified gaps that appeared as a result of parent behaviours and attitudes in her previous school.



I then asked her to consider if she had noticed any differences in the significance of relationships now that she is in a “leafy green” compared to when she worked within a low SES school. Her response follows:

*So, ok, yeah, so in the low SES school, there was a focus on bringing kids up to national minimum standards and all that to a base level, and you know we had, when I was there, we had 80% of kids starting high school with a reading age of year 3 or lower, so there was urgency around bringing them up, and so there was a, you know the focus on, if I think about ASOT, you know, D.Q 6 around classroom practices and behaviours, and routines and procedures that was really important because the kids did not have routines at home. They didn't have parents that were supportive about education.*

*In my current setting, you know, I think there's a lot more emphasis from our staff in terms of you know how you're interacting with knowledge and how you're practising and deepening, it's more about that learning, the curriculum delivery, rather than...I think there's less emphasis on the relationships. The relationships in a low SES school are so important because the kids will not engage if they don't like you.*

The lengthy excerpt above is an important part of Teresa's story. It is another clear example of how one's habitus cannot exist independently of the field(s) in which it is located. Similarly important, is acknowledging that the generalisation presented above in terms of parent/carer support is not representative of all parents/carers of students in low SES schools. This revelation by Teresa opens yet another avenue for further exploration not feasible within the scope of this research. Furthermore, the temporality and continuity of three-dimensional space narrative here provides appropriate scope to explore other factors that shape principals' perspectives of quality teaching. When Teresa first described her current school context, she touched on the increased number of stay-at-home parents resulting in both benefits and challenges for her. The difference between parents'/carers' attitudes at Teresa's current site sees students receive more support at home with regards to their education:

*In this place, you know, parents value education so they're getting it from home that they've got to engage, so kids will do what they need to do and be done with it. It's not that, that emphasis on relationships.*

With students receiving more support at home in terms of parental attitudes towards education, there is a difference in teaching practice within learning environments. An example of this is the referencing of the dispositions and behaviours of teachers in disadvantaged settings with Marie and Teresa both having compared teaching in low SES schools to acting. For Teresa, she stated:

*Certainly the teaching team was really tight because they were like actors, they had to entertain kids for seventy minutes to keep them engaged and they had to be so well-prepared. They had to be prepared in case things went horribly wrong in the classroom, if a kid punched another kid, or whatever, they had to be able to keep going. They had to be able to keep going.*

Despite her assertions that students in her current school receive more support from parents/carers than she saw in her previous school, Teresa highlighted a different aspect of parental influence on students' schooling participation. In order to emphasise another site-specific factor that affects students' participation in the game of schooling, Teresa returned to her earlier idea of the changing nature of students influencing what she believes quality teaching to be:

*Can I say that we have got a lot more challenging behaviours coming in and they're not about – and this is where I talk about changing kids – the pressures that our parents are putting on the kids are leading to certain behaviours that we haven't seen, and that's presenting our staff with some challenge because they haven't had to deal with these things before.*

The challenges Teresa referred to include drug and alcohol use, serious mental health issues, and pressure stemming from social media use. She also drew attention to an important point about school funding and its impact on students' participation that may not be often considered; “Our I4S money was triple what I get now, and we

had a lot of other resources in the community that we used to pull in. So I found I was better resourced as a low SES school.” Note, I4S, is the acronym used for the Queensland Department of Education’s “Investing for Success” program that sees schools allocated funding to support increased student outcomes. Schools are required to track student performance throughout the year and share with local communities how the money is helping students succeed (State of Queensland, Department of Education, 2021). It is encouraging to consider that equity driven policies such as this at least in some way provide students in disadvantaged schools with access to greatly needed levels of support.

When I asked Teresa how she saw her ideas about quality teaching aligning with her school’s pedagogical framework, she stressed the importance of consistency. This question required Teresa to draw an explicit connection between her habitus and the specific site in which she carries out her practice. According to Teresa, it does not matter which framework is used, as long as it is delivered consistently across the school. Within her school, staff follow the ASOT pedagogical framework, introduced briefly in Marie’s story. Teresa stated:

*So our pedagogical framework is ASOT, so Art and Science of Teaching, and at my previous school we were an ASOT school as well. I think that you can use—there’s lots of different models—and it doesn’t matter which one you use as long as you’re consistent. And I think the consistency across the school is what’s important and I think that you’ve got to be explicit in what you’re doing. I think ASOT’s a good framework and I think it’s looking at all elements, it’s all about your routines and how you’re setting up the learning for kids. Kids do need routines, I think, but we also look at how you introduce new knowledge, how you practise and deepen, how you hypothesise and test, so we’re going from that surface level learning to that deep learning. It gives teachers a framework to teach it but it gives kids a framework to learn it in multidisciplines so they’re learning the same way...*

Missing from the above description of her school’s pedagogical framework is the subjective connection between the structures of ASOT and what she believes quality teaching to be. This gap will be further unpacked in the Analysis and Discussion chapter, but I move now to a representation of Teresa’s ideas about how

she sees the Standards influencing ideas about quality teaching. Interestingly, Teresa grounded her answer within the specific field of her school. Where Marie responded by addressing the role of the Standards within a broader sense of the profession, Teresa referenced how her school structures teacher engagement with the Standards:

*We look at our school priorities and we make sure people align their APRs to our priorities, so for example, next year, we have a focus on writing, so if they can align the Standards with that then we'll guarantee that they get professional development. We have narrowed; so we've taken the Standards every year and narrowed it to ten or so that absolutely align with our priorities and so staff can choose from those ten and we guarantee we will absolutely have PD about that all year. If they want to go outside that and do something else, they can, but they have to have a conversation with me.*

Because teachers are encouraged to evaluate their pedagogical practice, and subsequently determine their professional development needs, (through the APR process) in accordance with the school's annual priorities, it is clear how the Standards influence ideas about quality teaching within Teresa's school at a structural level. However, when I asked how often she thinks teachers engage with the Standards, she said, "I don't think they really do. I think they do when they're doing their APR." Teresa then elaborated this opinion by referencing the Queensland teacher salary classification levels of Senior Teacher and Experienced Senior Teacher (staff are eligible to apply for these classifications after a specified period of service, and demonstrated ability to meet certain criteria):

*I think now that because senior teachers and experienced senior teachers have to do theirs [application] online, and that's part of that process to get your senior teacher pay, then they'll engage with them but I think a lot of times they look at it as compliance. I think our structures, where we have gone through a process where they have to meet with their mentors puts a bit more emphasis on it. But I still think, I don't think teachers see that as their priority because they're struggling with a lot of curriculum change, and there's so much else going on that they don't see that that's a need. And so that's why I think it's important that you can align the Standards to your priorities so at least you know you're building capability and building areas where there's need.*

The final question concerned with the outer direction of Teresa's narrative asked her to comment on the relationship she sees between the Department's ideas about quality teaching and the Standards. Initially, Teresa struggled to answer so I prompted her with reference to the APR process being a clear example. From there, she highlighted that it has only been within the last seven or so years that schools have been mandated to implement a school-wide pedagogy. In Teresa's view, it is this mandate that is evidence of the Department's recognition of the importance of pedagogical frameworks and an alignment to the Standards.

### **4.3.3 Concluding Teresa's story with a return to the inner direction**

To conclude Teresa's story regarding her perceptions of quality teaching, I turn to the final two questions of the semi-structured interview that shaped the majority of the data collection for this project. Teresa joked that she would repeat Allard et al.'s (2013) definition of quality teaching when it was time to define her own. She first responded simply by stating, "I like it." What followed was a lengthy response that elaborated on each of the elements in the provided definition. I have synthesised her response below:

*Gone are the days where you can teach to the middle. You've got to look at kids, and in your class you will have a range of kids with a range of different learning needs and we're looking at every kid improving. You know so you're just looking for improvement in every kid, you're not looking for all As, you're looking for every kid to be improving so you've got to address their academic needs of course. There's a whole lot of stuff around differentiating for different kids and that's not just kids with disabilities or learning difficulties, it's about stretching kids at the top end. I think for a long time teachers did teach to the middle and we didn't do justice to either end. The social needs at the moment I think are really important and I think that's what is presenting teachers with the most challenge.*

Our conversation ended with how Teresa defines quality teaching and some similarities with Marie's definition are immediately evident. For Teresa, quality teaching is defined as follows:

*I think that people know their kids, know what they need to do to improve and know what strategies to put in place to help them do that. You know, and that's about relationships, it's about pedagogy. It's about caring what they're doing.*

A focus on pedagogy is evident within the first two definitions of quality teaching provided by the participating principals of this project. Similarities are also visible between the terms of engagement and relationships, suggested by Marie and Teresa, respectively. Where initial difference is apparent is with the inclusion of reflection by Marie. As I have stated earlier, these ideas will be analysed in the following chapter.

Before presenting the final story of this research, I end the re-storying of Teresa's narrative with the quote below. It arose when I suggested that teachers in Teresa's current school have greater opportunities to engage with the Standards because there is less of a need to focus on behaviour management and student engagement. She refuted my suggestion:

*Teachers have so much work to do that they can't do it all.*

## **4.4 JOHN'S STORY**

### **4.4.1 A focus on the inner direction of John's narrative**

John's story begins similarly to the other two. Like Marie and Teresa, he is now principal of a metropolitan school within greater Brisbane after having worked in varying geographical areas. Thirty years ago, John started his career in North Queensland, with experience teaching in a range of curriculum areas. After taking up his first Head of Department position, John then moved throughout the North Queensland region in different leadership roles, including that of principal. Since being in the Brisbane region, John has worked as principal of a few different schools. During the description of the various roles he has assumed throughout his career, John stipulated that he has "done a lot of low SES schools". This is an interesting point to highlight as it is a shared experience of the project's three participants which will be explored in the following chapter.

John's school can also be described as a "leafy green". Its current ICSEA value sits close to 1070, with more than half its students located within the top half of socio-

educational advantage distribution (ACARA, 2020). When I asked him to describe the school context, John immediately described it as an “interesting place” before explaining the student demographic:

*...for a very long time, it had a what's called an ESL unit, which don't really exist anymore. Change around funding and allocations and things like that, and the changing nature of the demographic, and the cost of living in those areas, just really meant that, you know, they went west, the refugee programs and things. So our numbers steadily declined. Still have large numbers of EAL/D, we still do have large numbers of EAL/D students more than what people would imagine...And, you know, so you've got that mix of students, very focused on education, very highly committed families, very supportive of school and education and, you know, just beautiful kids, or random beautiful families.*

The description of the school’s context in terms of students and their families was continued, with John further reinforcing the commitment and valuing of education that he sees from the school community. Despite the school being located in an area where there are “quite wealthy families”, there are also “pockets of some Housing Commission”. Overall, “it’s a community that really values education”. Similar to the commitment John identified by students’ families, he also described his teaching team as being very committed to the school. In terms of staff demographics, parallels can be drawn with Teresa’s story in that many of the staff have been at the school long-term. Another similarity between the two school schools is evident with both principals making a concerted effort to hire younger teachers. John explained that he has many long-term staff and has seen a lot of retirements in the last few years; consequently, they have been “very deliberate in trying to get younger teachers in.” The final element of his staffing demographic to be acknowledged is his school’s leadership team. With retirements and other reasons for vacancies in leadership roles, John’s school has seen renewal in this space, resulting in a “relatively new and really quite dynamic leadership team”. Overall, John described his staff perspective as being very committed to the community and school culture.

At the beginning of this story, I drew attention to the principals’ shared experiences of working—somewhat extensively—in low SES schools. Before I asked Questions 3 and 4, John’s interview moved in a different direction than the other two.

At the end of his description of staff demographics, John lamented the difficulties he had recently faced regarding the transfer process which saw him unable to hire any of the teachers the school had been interested in. After a brief discussion of how the transfer system works, John returned to his current staff context and explained that change is not quick at the school. He shared an anecdote regarding the first time he suggested peer observation:

*...the first time that I mentioned, peer observation, I had a delegation at my door within an hour. Sort of saying, you know, we can't do that. So it took a while. And yeah, you know, the moment we started talking about, you know, collegial feedback or, you know, everything was slow. Everything was a slow process.*

I informed John that a similar sentiment had been shared in the other two interviews and we briefly commented on the increased sense of open practice that seems apparent in smaller, regional and/or remote schools. This exchange exemplified the suitability of narrative inquiry for this project as it allowed “both researcher and participants a narrative space for telling and retelling experiences they have lived, and are living” (Clandinin et al., 2011, p. 34). To further develop this space, I shared a personal theory with John regarding the impact of school context on collegiality. The idea that I proposed to John follows:

*I have somewhat of a theory, I don't know how well it would hold out. But in those schools, the lower socio-economic schools, there are tougher kids, you've got more challenges, smaller schools, colleagues seem to have difficult classes in their timetables, no matter how long they've been teaching, or what subjects they teach. So there's a stronger sense of 'you're all in it together'.*

John supported this idea, touching on two significant—yet vastly different—contextual factors that impact teaching practice, students’ behaviour, and collegiality:

*I would agree. My experience has told me that, you're very much, you know, at times in places like [name of school] and [name of school], it felt like backs to the wall. You know, we were in it together. And so that for me, I would, my experiences were more collegial in those smaller, more difficult schools than they are at other places. Not that they're not collegial but it's, you know, you can*



*literally at [name of school], you could teach all year and possibly not have a behaviour incident, seriously.*

Whilst I had expected to encounter the theme of collegiality in a deductive sense, due to its inclusion within definitions and understandings of the quality teaching model examined within the literature review of Chapter 2 (see Cochran-Smith, 2002; Croninger et al., 2012; Mockler, 2013) I had not anticipated such emphasis to appear so explicitly from the participant of the high ICSEA level school. At this point of John's narrative, it is important for me to address the inherent researcher bias I inevitably experienced. Although I had attempted to avoid pre-conceptualising ideas about John's perceptions, I was not completely successful as I had not expected to uncover such frequent similarities between the participants' ideas. I argue in the following chapter that this reveals the inability to separate an individual's habitus from the temporality of their experiences, and from the fields in which these experiences have taken/take place.

The interview then moved to the backward/forward movement of narrative inquiry when I asked John to recall when he first thought about teaching in terms of quality, and if his thinking has changed over time. Revealing both temporal and situational influences that have shaped his perspective, John stated:

*My thinking has changed over time, there's no doubt about that. I think the first time I really started thinking about it is when I became a HoD. And I would observe teachers, both formally and informally, and could see differences in practice, and this was at [name of school], a tough place. So I could see differences in practice between different teachers, and it was obvious some teachers had a range of strategies. And this wasn't just behaviour, this was also around the underpinning of knowledge, and how to actually prepare students for success and things like that.*

In summary, John's first considerations of quality teaching were informed by teachers' strategies regarding behaviour management, content delivery, and preparing students for success. However, he identified an explicit shift in his thinking that has occurred since his first role in leadership:

*I think, at the time, because of again the nature of the school, I gravitated towards the behaviour management more than the pedagogy. So when I looked at, when I thought about quality teaching back then, I thought about the person who could manage the behaviour in a classroom so they could get on with their teaching. It wasn't so much about, possibly, the quality of their pedagogy.*

John explained that, back then, he did not so much consider teachers' pedagogy in terms of students' clarity around learning intentions and expectations, strong scaffolding, or the process of gradual release; rather, the concept of quality teaching stemmed from those who could control a class and those who could not. This explanation continued with a focus on the idea of engagement as a means of developing teachers' capacity. Repeating ideas shared by both Marie and Teresa that have characterised their experiences in low SES schools, John stated:

*...it wasn't about control, it was about engaging the kids. So really my focus was around, you won't be able to teach unless you can get them on board and you only get them on board if you build trust relationships with them...*

After emphasising the importance of relationships, John returned to the question of how his thinking has changed over time:

*Now I guess I see it as two parts, I still think there is a clear role around student engagement and being able to create an environment for learning but the second part is, there are plenty of teachers out there who can keep a class quiet but they're not really teaching, they're just keeping a class quiet. So my thinking has shifted to it's not just about keeping them quiet or in control, you know, it's actually what are they actually doing? You know, what, what sort of strategy do they have in terms of learning? Which is really, you know, I suppose that's been the biggest shift for me over time. I think that's that context stuff again.*

The next question that sought to represent the inner direction of John's narrative asked what he would look for in a classroom to know that quality teaching was occurring. Addressing the social form of interaction within three-dimensional space narrative, this question aimed to elucidate from John how his perceptions of quality teaching connect with how he perceives quality teaching enacted within his school.

Because this was one of the longest answers he gave, I have decided to paraphrase much of his response rather than include lengthy verbatim excerpts.

The first thing John looks for is engagement. If he walks into a space and sees students with their backs turned, eyes on laptops, with only a few students actually looking at the teacher, there is an obvious disconnect in the room. Next is evidence of the lesson's learning intention and success criteria on the board. John referred to many discussions he has had with staff about the placement of these structural elements, either on the board displayed all lesson (as he prefers), or on the first slide of a PowerPoint that then disappears as the lesson progresses. However, he admitted that despite believing it is more beneficial for them to be displayed all lesson, he concedes a "give and take" attitude is important as these are "really high quality teachers". The final element John identified as evidence of quality teaching within his school is teacher behaviour and teacher interaction:

*So, you know, is it just someone just talking for the period of time I'm there? Or is there that stopping and checking for understanding? You know, is there movement? I mean, I know, these are old fashioned things, but is there movement around the classroom? Those sorts of key elements, they're sort of my go to's, in terms of initial [observations], but if I was doing a longer observation, I'd be really interested in how they're structuring and breaking up the lesson.*

John continued describing pedagogical strategies he would expect to see in longer observations but returned to a focus on the classroom environment and tone when he stressed that he is not looking for silence as evidence of quality teaching, "I'm not looking for silence. In fact, silence sometimes worries me. I love a bit of noise in a classroom. I love a bit of engagement. I love a bit of banter. I love a bit of liveliness." This response is the final representation of his narrative's inner direction for this stage of the story. Overall, John's response identified a number of themes including, teaching strategies, aspects of pedagogical frameworks, and student engagement. Interestingly, he prioritised student dispositions and affect as being indicators of teaching quality, just as Marie and Teresa did. When evaluations of teaching quality are determined by student behaviours, we must question how this can be measured in transferrable ways.

With reference here to Bourdieu's consideration of the impact of field on an individual's habitus, the inner-direction of the three principals' stories would suggest that no matter the location in which teachers and students participate in the game of education, student behaviours and actions are significant determiners of teaching quality. Furthermore, it is significant to note that student outcomes in the form of test results or assessment results did not appear in any of this project's data. Again, this is problematic for proponents of the quality teacher model because it remains unclear how student engagement can be measured in the quantifiable ways our policy makers seem so insistent on using in order to evaluate teachers' performance. The re-storying of John's narrative now moves to a consideration of the outer direction, with specific attention paid to the structuring elements of his school's pedagogical framework, its engagement with the Standards and APR process.

#### **4.4.2 A focus on the outer direction of John's narrative**

Before I was able to reorient the interview to how John sees his ideas about quality teaching in alignment with his school's pedagogical framework, he himself steered the conversation in this direction. His opinion regarding pedagogical frameworks surprised me to an extent because so much of what drives teaching practice within my school (thus influencing my interpretations), and a thread that had appeared in the other two interviews, is an almost unquestioning commitment to the integrity of the schools' pedagogical framework. What follows is John's initial representation of how he views the role(s) played by pedagogical frameworks;

*I like the notion of pedagogical frameworks, but I think they're sort of the cart pulling the horse a little bit, at times. And so I think people get a bit bogged down in the framework and just forget about the fundamentals of good teaching at times.*

These statements led me to then ask John to go into more detail about how he sees his ideas about quality teaching aligning with the structural elements of ASOT. For John, ASOT involves fundamentals of good, quality instruction such as connection, engagement and structure. Throughout this stage of the interview, John used variations of context, content, connection, engagement, and feedback as a tricolon

to evidence how he connects his beliefs with the structure provided by AOST. His first description follows:

*I like those three elements [context, content and feedback]. Because it's recognising that every class is a bit different, that how you approach teaching in class A could and probably should be a bit different from class B. But there is no formulaic, one size fits all. So that context stuff is really important. And that's the context, also around, you know, the, the connection and the engagement and the relationship side of it, which I'm a big, big believer in...There's no doubt about that, there's no denying that. So you've got to be able to create a connection.*

A focus on pedagogy then followed with John addressing how teachers deliver content:

*...how are they structuring their lesson to be able to share information and have students actually be sort of co-constructors, I suppose, of learning...what sort of strategies do they have to be able to work through content that actually engages kids?*

Once again, an emphasis on engagement appears as an underpinning factor of what teachers do to ensure students are accessing the curriculum in ways that are likely to ensure success. John continued using the tricolon to characterise the relationship between his views of quality teaching and his school's framework, this time focusing on the role of feedback:

*The feedback part is really, you know, that context/content/feedback, which is a big part of ASOT as well, which I think is really around checking in on learning. You know, where's the understanding? And if the understanding isn't there, you know, whether it's through proficiency scales or whatever mechanisms you might use, you know, how do you circle back on learning? And how do you connect learning and things like that? So that feedback stuff is really important as well.*

Out of the three principals, John focused most heavily on the role of feedback as an indicator of quality teaching. It did not register as an influence in Marie's

perceptions, and Teresa referred to it—only fleetingly—when she referenced teacher feedback as an artefact she looks for as evidence that quality teaching is occurring in classrooms in her school. This difference will be further explored in the following chapter as the principals’ data are presented as three separate cases, allowing for clearer comparisons and contrasts to be drawn.

The next aspect of the outer direction of John’s narrative asked him to consider how he sees the Standards influencing ideas about quality teaching. Again, despite significant variations in the participants’ school contexts, they shared nearly identical responses. I will display John’s response below, but first I foreground that it reveals a disconnect between teachers’ professional practice and the Standards. While re-storying John’s narrative, I was forced to consider what I had been finding problematic with the responses generated by this question. Considering their different contexts and experiences, I had anticipated some variation in their answers, however, I had also believed that each principal would identify much stronger connections between the Standards and ideas about quality teaching. There are two reasons for this. First, the Standards are an influential structure in the wider field of Queensland secondary schools as they underpin the rationale for the APR process; teachers must align their professional goals and development to these standards, and teacher certification measures resulting in increased salary classification levels (HAT and Lead) are dependent upon teachers’ abilities to align their pedagogical practice to them. Second, because I had perceived principals as the players best equipped for the “game”, I had envisaged strong connections with the game’s structuring principles, such as the Standards. Like Marie and Teresa, John rejected this assumption; “I don't think teachers engage with the Standards in a way that they influence what we do. I just don't see it at the moment, that it's a really meaningful engagement.”

As with his response regarding how he would know quality teaching is occurring within his school, this question prompted an answer that wove its way through different themes. After addressing the issue of a lack of meaningful engagement, John highlighted the sheer number of the Standards and their elaborations as problematic; “As we said, 37 points, how do you apply all that, you know? You're not meant to, I know, but you know, how do teachers engage in that in a meaningful way?” I interjected at this point, sharing a perspective derived from the literature review that sees professional standards for teachers as being more regulatory measures for teacher

accountability, rather than as measures for professional development and support (see Bourke, 2011; Bourke et al., 2016). John's response follows:

*Well if you watch the space around HAT and Lead, I think that makes me nervous. Because it's more about how you write, it's more about how you annotate. It's more about how you, sadly to say, some people work deliberately to manufacture evidence. And I'm not saying the work they're doing isn't valuable. But it's almost become this, it's almost become a game a little bit around who can work the system—which worries me because I don't know if that's actually picking up our best teachers out there.*

For the second time in quick succession, I was reminded of another salient point from my literature review. With John, I shared my assertion that it will be difficult to ensure fairness and equity in a certification or reward system that rests on the determinations of individuals, especially if there remains an absence in the body of knowledge concerning the influences that shape principals' perceptions of quality teaching. Agreeing with this concern, John stated:

*There were meant to be mechanisms in place around dealing with that, but they seem to have gone by, though, they seem to have disappeared. Those quality assurance mechanisms when we first heard about them, I thought 'oh ok' but I don't think any of them are happening anymore, that I know of anyway.*

John then shared his opinion that it is a shame we are seeing teachers attempt to work the system in manufacturing evidence to meet the classification levels because “the idea behind keeping good teachers in the classroom is a good idea, but the mechanism, I think, got too hard for them or something.” To further this discussion of teacher evaluation methods, I referenced evidence that has emerged from the United States in terms of students deliberately performing poorly in order to jeopardise teachers' chances for remuneration (see Berliner, 2013). John's reaction perfectly encapsulates the need for the structures that govern and inform teaching to be more inclusive of contextual influences:

*...once we started narrowing in on the teacher like you said within a context, it's very difficult you know. I don't, I'm not sure how the opportunities, I suppose,*

*depending on your context, we need to be able to do that work. Like if you're in a place where you're just doing, because of the nature of it, you know, behaviour is predominantly your world. I don't know how you demonstrate other aspects.*

To finalise the outer direction of John's narrative, I move now to a representation of how his school engages with the Standards in alignment with its pedagogical framework. First, John explained that they use the Standards as a mechanism for feedback. This occurs as a key element of the APR process for his staff. Although this is another lengthy answer, I have chosen to include it verbatim as to avoid adversely affecting the integrity of this data:

*In terms of the Standards, do I think we do that well? I don't think we do, to be honest. So the standards certainly form a part of the APR process. And you know, and so they're part of those conversations. And they're part of the collegial, we call it collegial engagement feedback, which is the more formal observational feedback of line managers. So that that feeds into there. But you know, if you were to say to me, is there a really clear alignment between the standards and our framework? I think there's an alignment, but I wouldn't say it's explicit. I think one of the problems for me with the Standards, I think it's the quantum, it's like a lot of stuff. I don't know, we just have this thing that you know, more is better.*

This section of John's story has presented a detailed picture of the outer direction of his narrative that shapes his perceptions of quality teaching. His story will conclude by returning to the inner direction of his narrative that is characterised by the personal element of interaction.

#### **4.4.3 Concluding John's story with a return to the inner direction**

In the preceding section of John's narrative, I acknowledged that a particular answer had woven its way through many different themes. As I now move to finalise his story, it is important that I acknowledge the sense of fluidity that emerged through his interview. Using a semi-structured data collection tool provided the space to return



to various ideas as the conversation progressed. Here, the following excerpt exemplifies the temporality of an individual's experiences that impact their habitus:

*So I mean going back to your question, quality teaching, when I'm walking around [name of school] it's around, for me, it's around student engagement and that excitement in learning rather than dead silence, kids looking at laptops or kids with their backs half turned, so that is the quality teaching space that I'm looking at. Whereas if I go back to my previous schools, it would be a different sort of space because it would be around, more around the relationships stuff and the connections with kids and being able to keep the lesson moving in a really challenging space.*

John's story ends with his responses to Questions 10 and 11. First, I asked him to comment on the definition of quality teaching by Allard et al. (2013). In doing this, he simultaneously began shaping his definition of the term:

*Yeah, I can relate to that. I do believe that quality teaching is more than just the academics, so tick for me on that one. I do believe it's got to meet context, and I think it's got to be for all students, obviously. If I start defining it in my head, quality teaching for me is instruction or teaching that provides the opportunity for all students to succeed based on their context and their needs more than anything else.*

We jointly commented that what success looks like for one is not what success look like for another, with John referencing an anecdote I had shared earlier in the interview. In discussing issues associated with relying solely on quantitative measures of student outcomes, I had lamented the lack of a space to acknowledge a student's increased willingness to attend school as an example of success. The student I referred to was a Year 7 boy with a prep-level reading age from my first school, who had started wanting to increase his attendance after years of disengagement. John referred to this example when emphasising the importance of context:

*So I think that's that context stuff and their needs stuff has got to be in there. If you've got that young person who's writing at prep, sitting in your Grade 9 classroom then their success is going to be vastly different, so the quality of*

*teaching for that young person is very different from someone sitting in [name of school].*

John concluded his definition of quality teaching by returning to the theme that dominated each of the three interviews:

*The other part of that for me is really that engagement stuff, so it's that quality teaching is for me when the young people are engaged in the learning. It's meeting their needs, they're engaged in the learning, it's in context, so they'd be the elements that I say really define quality teaching as.*

This chapter has presented the narratives that emerged from the principals' responses to the semistructured interview questions. Additional data from each school will be presented in the following chapter to further develop rich descriptions of each school context. Before I move to a more detailed analysis and discussion of the data, I finish the re-storying of John's narrative with his statement:

*So, you know, the, the old saying that a kid won't learn from someone they don't like, is just fundamentally true.*

## Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion

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This project sought to illuminate principals' perceptions of quality teaching and to identify if any disparity exists between the perceptions of principals from three schools in Brisbane with differing ICSEA values. Examining the contextual specificities of the schools demonstrated the varying factors that influence pedagogy and in part shape what principals perceive quality teaching to be. These contextual specificities were presented in the principals' stories in the preceding chapter. The standpoint from which I have shaped this research recognises that measures of teaching quality that rely solely on student outcomes are fallible. What this research has determined is that the construct of quality teaching cannot be determined without consideration of the context(s) in which it takes place. This chapter analyses the data that emerged from each principal and her/his school, and unpacks the major themes that emerged in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 4 presented data from the semistructured interviews in order to shape principals' stories about their perceptions of quality teaching, following the structures of three-dimensional space narrative. This chapter moves now to a greater synthesis of the principals' stories, with data derived from their schools' documents pertaining to the APR process, the Standards, and pedagogical framework. Considering the interview data alongside these documents presents a more detailed picture of each participant's case. With reference to Bourdieu's theory of practice, presenting each principal's data as separate cases has revealed the inability to separate an individual's habitus from the temporality of their experiences, and from the fields in which these experiences have taken/take place.

This chapter first presents each principal's case (section 5.1), identifying consistencies and differences between the personal and the place. Next, the approaches used to analyse the data are described (section 5.2). The chapter then moves to a discussion of the major themes that emerged from the data, with connections made to the existing literature (section 5.3). The connections between the themes are explained in section 5.4. A summary of the themes and stories concludes the chapter (section 5.5).

## 5.1 THE CASES

To re-orient readers to the data from which the themes emerged and the research questions answered, each principal’s story and school have been summarised into tables. Each table follows a brief summary of the school context and the principal’s definition of quality teaching. Formatting the data in this way frames connections between habitus, field, and practice, revealed through the organising elements of three-dimensional space narrative design. After each table, the relationships between the school’s contextual factors and the principal’s perceptions of quality are clearly extrapolated.

### 5.1.1 Marie’s case

Marie is the principal of the low ICSEA level school; of the three contexts explored for this project, her school is characterised by the highest amount of socio-educational disadvantage. Marie defined quality teaching as an ability to engage students in learning, know content and the best strategies to link the learner to the learning, and reflection.

Table 5.1 *Summary table of Participant 1*

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Place
Ideas of quality teaching initially centred on student engagement but now more inclusive of pedagogical practices, incl. reflection Views influenced by societal changes	Regular reference to Standards, clearly evidenced in APR stages with teachers reflecting on practice Removal of career stage headings when working with teachers	Range of roles in range of geographical areas Work with AITSL Significant experience in low SES settings	Standards clearly underpin practice in school PDP robust process that has been developed by leadership team Teachers select mentor, reflect on practice, create goals, and monitor progress Pedagogical framework moved away from ASOT – in initial phase	Science of brain function needs to be more incorporated into teacher preparation and professional development Teachers need further understanding of how to apply the Standards to judgements of pre-service teachers	ICSEA value close to 970 Diverse range of students (i.e., socio-economic status high to low, students in care, students with disability, Indigenous students) Early career staff, few long-term teachers
Marie’s Perception of Quality Teaching					

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*I think it's about an ability to engage kids in learning, it's about, you know, there's a certain amount of acting in teaching. It's, you've got to know your content, it's not okay to not know your content, but you've got to know what strategy to use and when to use it to actually link the learner into the learning. So it is about the pedagogy and then you've got to be able to reflect, how did that go? How did I, did I meet the needs of my learners? What could I have done differently, you know? I think it's all those things in that definition, but I think that the reflection is a really important part of it.*

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### **5.1.1.1 Consistencies and differences between the personal and the place**

Data from Marie's interview reveal that her perceptions of quality teaching are heavily influenced by levels of student engagement and what teachers do in their classrooms to create emotional connections that make learning relevant for their students. This emphasis is two-fold. First, student behaviours and affect are relied upon by Marie to determine whether quality teaching is occurring. Second, content knowledge, pedagogical practices such as sharing explicit learning goals and knowing which strategies to use and when, and a teacher's ability to reflect are also indicators of quality teaching for Marie. Data gleaned from an analysis of her school's Professional Development Plan (PDP) for teachers reveal an alignment between this structural element of her site and her personal focus on reflection. Importantly, this was the only additional document Marie supplied. Because they were in a period of transition at the time of data collection, she explained that she did not wish to provide other documents that no longer reflected the school's approach. An additional consistency appears with her frequent reference to the Standards, and the role of the Standards in the PDP process.

The PDP states that teaching staff are to "reflect on school context and local priorities using key documents including the Explicit Improvement Agenda, Annual Improvement Plan, and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers." This statement explicitly links the structuring principles of the broader field of education to Marie's specific school context. Moreover, teachers must use the self-reflection tool provided by AITSL, thus evidencing a connection with Marie's personal focus on reflection. Marie's habitus has also been clearly shaped by institutional elements as she has had experiences in the fields of AITSL and other administrative spaces. Although she did not enjoy the period in which she worked in that space, she recognised that it allowed her to "take that whole concept of the APR process in its infancy and actually work in schools saying, 'let's focus on growth and development of our teachers'."

The most immediate difference to emerge between Marie's personal perceptions of quality teaching and how it is expected to be evident in her school context is through an absence of student engagement in the formal mechanisms of the PDP process. Marie clearly explained the process that sees teachers select a mentor, reflect on their practice against the Standards and then

create one or two goals to develop their performance. However, whilst this is obvious evidence of how Marie’s school engages with the Standards, it remains unclear how the school captures and considers evidence of student engagement as indications of quality teaching.

### 5.1.2 Teresa’s case

Teresa is the principal of the mid-range ICSEA level school. Although her students represent average levels of socio-educational advantage, her school is often described as a “leafy green” – a term used to describe schools situated within middle to upper class pockets of suburbia. For Teresa, quality teaching is when teachers know and care about their students, and know what strategies to use in order to help them improve; it is about pedagogy and relationships.

Table 5.2 Summary table of Participant 2

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Place
Similar beliefs to original views of quality teaching (engaging, challenging and relevant for students) – but it is the different nature of students now that impacts beliefs	Expects to see student engagement in classrooms Expects to see evidence of Pedagogical Framework’s artefacts	Diverse range of school-based roles across different geographical areas (coastal, mining, metropolitan), “HoD of Everything” Experience with ‘Board of Senior Secondary School Studies’	APR process involves reduction of Standards teachers able to align development to APR process also informed by school’s priorities Framework is not important – as long as it is implemented consistently Supports students’ learning across multi-disciplines	Changing nature of students, parents, and society – impacts of technology and future of jobs Increasing accountability for teachers from parents	ICSEA value close to 1050 Mostly middle-class, defence force, police, public servants Long-term staff Workforce action plan to hire beginning teachers and those returning from country service

#### Teresa’s Perception of Quality Teaching

*I think that people know their kids, know what they need to do to improve and know what strategies to put in place to help them do that. You know, and that’s about relationships, it’s about pedagogy. It’s about caring what they’re doing.*

### **5.1.2.1 Consistencies and differences between the personal and the place**

Focusing first on the data from Teresa's interview, she sees quality teaching defined by teachers knowing their students and meeting their needs. Her perceptions are influenced by what teachers do to first create relationships and ensure students are engaged. She sees it as important for all students to be improving in an academic sense, but also stressed that students' social needs are currently presenting teachers with the most challenge. Analysis of documents from Teresa's school reveals an alignment between her perceptions of quality teaching and how it is framed within her school. Teresa looks for evidence of learning goals, success criteria, vocabulary lists, different activities in students' workbooks, quality feedback, and student/teacher and student/student relationships. Most of this evidence is explicitly identified by the formal structural elements of her school, including its Professional Development Plan, Pedagogical Framework Strategic Plan, and Collegial Engagement Strategic Plan.

An adherence to aspects of the quality teaching model that focus on the profession's collaborative practices is exemplified through the expectation of teachers to engage in observational processes. The Collegial Engagement Strategic Plan seeks to create collective efficacy through meaningful collaboration and targeted collegial engagement opportunities. Indeed, this document also reveals a clear relationship with the data generated from the interview regarding accountability, student needs and pedagogy. Evidence here is with one of the defining behaviours of the collegial plan being an "increased accountability and ownership of differentiated and innovative pedagogical instruction, to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the school context."

Students' social needs is a key difference to emerge from the comparison of data reflecting Teresa's habitus with data reflecting the nature of quality teaching within her school. For Teresa, teaching that addresses social needs is an integral part of quality pedagogical practice, yet recognition of this idea is lacking within the formal structures that measure and evaluate teachers' performance. An example is found within the vision statement for the school's Pedagogical Framework Strategic Plan. Before including the example, it is pertinent to refer to an issue identified in the literature review of this project regarding the semantics of the construct of quality teaching. When the term "quality" is substituted with "good", "effective" or "successful", its definitions may be narrowed (Strong, 2011, p. 12). Within the vision statement, "effective teaching" is highlighted by three characteristics: (1) use of effective instructional strategies; (2) use of effective classroom management strategies; and (3) effective classroom curriculum design. Remaining unclear is how students' social needs factor into evaluations of teaching.

### 5.1.3 John’s case

John is the principal of the high level ICSEA level school. His school’s student demographic is culturally diverse, and it is located within a community committed to education and to the school. For John, quality teaching acknowledges students’ contexts and needs in order to provide opportunities for success, and is when students are engaged.

Table 5.3 Summary table of Participant 3

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Place
Quality teaching informed by student engagement and contextually informed teaching strategies	Looks for students’ behaviours Evidence of learning goals Committed staff	Range of roles in range of geographical areas Extensive experience in low SES settings	Pedagogical framework enables fundamentals of good, quality teaching Provides structures for context, content and feedback Teachers engage with Standards when doing APR – observed by line managers	Need to reduce complexity of the formal structures Sheer number of Standards’ focus areas problematic	ICSEA value around 1070 Wealthy areas coupled with pockets of housing commission Long-term staff Recent renewal in leadership team

#### John’s Perception of Quality Teaching

*If I start defining it in my head, quality teaching for me is instruction or teaching that provides the opportunity for all students to succeed based on their context and their needs more than anything else. So I think that’s that context stuff and their needs stuff has got to be in there. If you’ve got that young person who’s writing at prep, sitting in your Grade 9 classroom then their success is going to be vastly different, so you’ve got to, so the quality of teaching for that young person is very different from someone sitting in Metropolitan School A. The other part of that for me is really that engagement stuff, so it’s that quality teaching is for me when the young people are engaged in the learning. It’s meeting their needs, they’re engaged in the learning, it’s in context, so they’d be the elements that I say really define quality teaching as.*

#### 5.1.3.1 Consistencies and differences between the personal and the place

Much of John’s interview was shaped by his reflections of quality teaching, and the differences he has noticed between the various sites in which he has worked. John’s habitus has been shaped by the experiences and locations in which he has worked over the last thirty years, and now being in a site where challenging student behaviours and social needs are minimal to simply infrequent, his focus has shifted more towards pedagogy. The inner direction of John’s narrative revealed that his habitus has been shaped by extensive experience in low SES schools



where managing challenging behaviours and building trusting relationships with students were two of the strongest indicators of quality teaching. Now that John works in an environment with higher levels of socio-educational advantage, he considers particular pedagogical practices as reflecting quality teaching.

The influence of John's current site on his perceptions of quality teaching is evidenced in his explanation that he now looks specifically to what the teacher is doing to facilitate students' learning as co-constructors of knowledge. Clear and consistent connections between John's habitus and the structuring elements of his field are apparent when examining his overall data. Data emerging from John's interview revealed a focus on student engagement, a range of context specific teaching strategies, and frequent feedback to students as evidence of what he perceives quality teaching to be. Reflecting these key ideas were his school's documents.

Throughout each of the documents provided, evidence of an emphasis on engagement and relationships, and feedback emerged. Teaching staff are encouraged to reflect on the strategies they use for a range of pedagogical practices. A suite of rhetorical questions across key domains of teaching practice reveals reflection as an important component of quality teaching within John's school. However, a difference herein lies as a focus on reflection was absent from John's interview data. With reference to the implementation of the Standards—similar to his ideas about the limited significance of the Standards impacting teaching practice—John's school documents also only reference the structure in a superficial manner. They are briefly referenced in the infographic that represents how the school implements the APR process. A clearer alignment is apparent between the habitus element of John's perceptions, and the pedagogical framework of his school. John represented feedback as an integral aspect of quality teaching and this is repeatedly referenced in the documents pertaining to his school's implementation of ASOT as its pedagogical framework.

Finally, John's inclusion of context as characterising quality teaching appears across his school's documents. In the outline of the APR process, as well as in documents addressing potential types of feedback available to give students, context is highlighted as an important element of teaching practice. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to use an array of dynamic and engaging teaching behaviours that are responsive to specific class and student needs.

## **5.2 ANALYSIS PROCESS**

Qualitative data analysis can occur through any number of methods, including discourse analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and narrative analysis; despite differences occurring within each approach, they are underpinned by similar processes. These processes include: coding; identifying important phrases, patterns, and themes; isolating emergent patterns, commonalities and differences; explaining consistencies; and relating any consistencies to a formalised body of knowledge (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This five-step sequence was used to unpack this project's data, with the analysis also influenced by the processes of Iterative Categorisation (Neale, 2016). According to Neale, "it can be helpful to simplify qualitative data analysis into just two core stages: (i) description and (ii) interpretation" (p. 1098). Chapter 4 is evidence of both the descriptive and interpretive stages, but the purpose of this chapter is to present the themes that emerged from detailed analyses of each participant's case and examine the links of these themes with the existing literature. The themes were determined through the processes of thematic analysis. As a method, it was most suitable for this project as it "works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Under investigation was what principals perceive quality teaching to be (their realities) and the contextual factors that impact their perceptions (under the surface elements).

### **5.2.1 Preparing the data**

The interview data were prepared through a transcription process I completed shortly after each interview was conducted. Transcription began as a naturalised approach, however, I quickly realised that neither the scope nor scale of this research provided space for discourse or conversational analysis. I therefore moved to a denaturalised transcription method because its focus on informational content was preferable for my thematic analysis (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1277). The transcripts were formatted into tables, with space for codes appearing to the left, and identification of potential themes and connections to the literature organised in a column to the right. Documents provided by each principal differed, yet each of the texts was read alongside the interview transcripts to determine the levels of congruence between the personal and the place.

## 5.2.2 Coding the data

Thematic, inductive coding was the approach adopted to make sense of and unearth patterns from the data. I scanned each text approximately four times to obtain a complete picture of each principal’s habitus, field, and the factors which impact these elements. To facilitate the comparison of data within and across codes, I entered the codes from the initial analysis into a table, with each participant assigned a specific column. This allowed me to both systematically and comprehensively explore initial, obvious similarities and differences between the principals and their schools. Duplicates were then deleted. From there, re-scanning of each transcript occurred to ensure no data remained uncoded, or opportunities for different codes to be missed. Once reduced in number, codes were then mapped across the three interviews to help identify patterns. After these patterns were identified, I then grouped them according to the main research question and two research sub-questions. In this stage of the analysis, I simultaneously looked for reminders of the consistencies and variations between the principals’ data that I had noted during the initial interpretation stage.

The second sub-question sought to identify the contextual factors that operate within a school which could be evident within a principal’s perception of quality teaching. Because structural elements such as the APR, Pedagogical Framework, and the Standards were expected contextual factors (with reference to the theoretical framework, these are all structuring elements of the field – this being education in Queensland state schools), it was necessary to separate the contextual factors into people and policy. The reasons for this will be explained in the discussion of the themes. See Table 5.4 for a sample of this mapping process.

Table 5.4 *Sample of codes mapped across research questions*

<b>What are the perceptions of quality teaching held by principals across three diverse school settings?</b>	<b>To what extent does the socioeconomic status of a school impact on a principal’s perception of quality teaching?</b>	<b>What contextual factors (if any) operate within the school and are these evident within the principals’ perceptions?</b>
Reflection	Low SES to “leafy green”	Impact/influence/involvement of parents
Strategies	School growth	Commitment
Engagement/disengagement	ICSEA	Families-supportive of school and education
Engagement	Low SES – different low SES settings	Staff to school commitment
Lesson structure/phasing	Diversity	Growth and development
Enactment of pedagogy	Population	Curriculum
Thinking has changed over time - leadership	Knowing students	Teaching experience and career
Teaching strategies	ICSEA	

Underpinning of knowledge	Change-dynamic nature of staff	stages
Success – prepare students	demographic/students	Not multicultural
	Wealthy families	Challenges/Students/Mental health/Behaviour/Parents
	Enrolment, no students from outside district	Reputation
	Behaviour	Context
		Values
		Long term staff – entrenched
		Collegial feedback
		Staff attitudes/reluctance
		Teacher observations

### 5.2.3 Defining the themes

After the codes had been mapped across the research questions, they were further refined in an effort to generate the themes. For Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme is “something important about the data in relation to the research question and presents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). I engaged in the cyclical process of applying the broad themes that emerged initially from the codes to the research questions. In doing this process, I considered the organising themes of the literature review (quality teaching and quality teachers; policy and professional standards; and teacher evaluation methods), to ascertain whether there would be clear connections between the data generated from my research, and the dominant ideas from the existing body of knowledge. Potential themes were also considered with reference to the theoretical framework that shapes this project. Here, attention given to Bourdieu’s theory of practice ensured the identified themes reflected the participants’ stories accurately and that they had been represented with trustworthiness. Initially, I experienced difficulty in defining discrete themes due to the interconnected nature of the elements that contribute to quality teaching. This was not surprising considering it is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Croninger et al., 2012, p. 3). Evidence of this thematic analysis process is in the following table.

Table 5.5 *Determination of themes*

What are the perceptions of quality teaching held by principals across three diverse school settings?		To what extent does the socioeconomic status of a school impact on a principal’s perception of quality teaching?		What contextual factors (if any) operate within the school and are these evident within the principals’ perceptions? People and Policy	
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
Teacher behaviours	<b>Engagement and</b>	Students’ behaviours,	<b>Interdependence of</b>	Parents’ attitudes	<b>Influence of students’</b>

Student behaviours	<b>Relationships</b>	challenging students	<b>students' habitus and teachers' practice</b>	Students' needs (social, mental and academic)	<b>context</b>
Engagement	Quality	Students' attitudes –	Encapsulates ideas about students' behaviours and academic needs	Staff changes – age, experience and attitudes (more open in low SES)	Students' needs – how students play the game
Reflection	influenced by what students are doing, are they engaged?	relevance vs. excitement	Extent and influence of collegiality	Pedagogical Framework	<b>Disparity between theories of policies and their practice within schools</b>
Curriculum/Content	If yes, what is the teacher doing to engage them?	Collegiality and reflective practice		Formal and informal observations	
Knowledge	Teachers must know their content, but they must be successful in delivering the content.	Challenges vary in nature – poverty and poor attitudes to education		Pedagogical Framework	
Relationships	Students won't learn from someone they don't like, actors in a performance, buzz, energy. Are teachers reflecting?	versus parental pressures to succeed		APR	
Pedagogy (teaching strategies)	What feedback are they giving their students?	resulting in mental health concerns		Engagement with the Standards – only in Marie's school are they considered outside the APR process	
Feedback		Focus on environment			
		Resourcing, funding, Gonski, equity			

### 5.3 THE THEMES

This section introduces and details the four overarching themes that emerged from the principals' stories and analysis of their cases. First, I present a model to demonstrate the relationship between the themes before moving to a discussion of how the themes link together. More detailed discussion of each theme is then presented.

The themes that have emerged from the analysis and subsequently shape the responses to the research questions are:

1. Engagement and relationships
2. Teaching strategies
3. External influences that impact teaching practice
4. Variations between policy and practice.

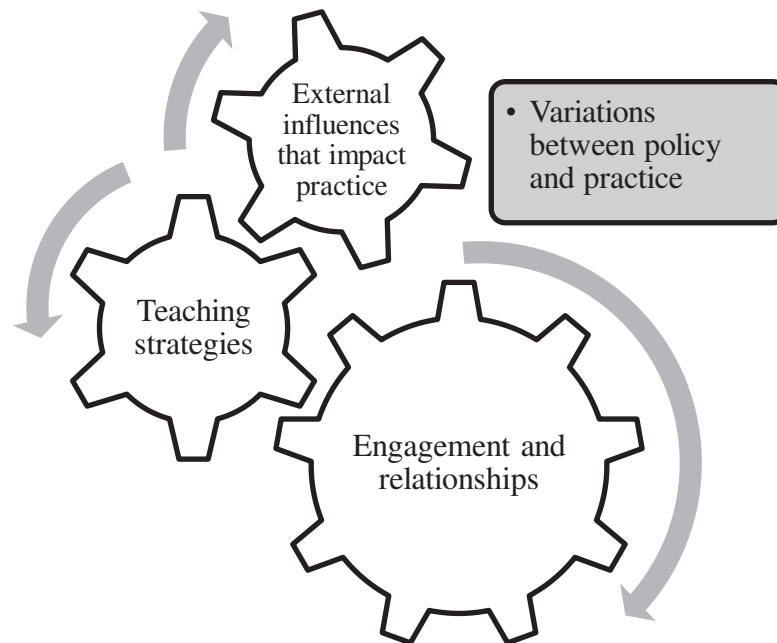


Figure 5.1. Relationship between the themes

#### 5.4 HOW THE THEMES ARE CONNECTED

“Engagement and relationships” sits as the most prominent theme in this model and this is a purposeful representation of how it emerged from the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) address the issue of prevalence in thematic analysis, and argue that the importance of themes cannot be determined simply by the frequency in which they appear (p. 83). Moreover, they recognise that “researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (p. 84). However, ideas about student engagement and student/teacher relationships appeared with striking regularity in the coding processes of each interview transcript. Consequently, the saturation of this theme in terms of how principals perceive quality teaching cannot be underrepresented.

Although appearing as a relatively simple theme, “Teaching strategies” covers the range of teaching practices that principals describe as evidence of quality pedagogical practice, including behaviour management and the creation of engaging learning environments. Furthermore, the theme encompasses the principals’ references to elements of their schools’ pedagogical frameworks that they expect to see. Representing a connection between habitus, practice, and field, these expected teaching strategies are indicators of contextually responsive quality

teaching. Themes 1 and 2 are examples of two of the different groups that determine quality teaching identified by Strong (2011); first, these are psychological or personal attributes, and second, classroom practice and pedagogical skills. Within these themes is evidence supporting the notion highlighted by Goe (2007) that teaching quality is better indicated not by what teachers have, but by what they do (p. 8).

The third theme is comprised of the external influences that affect teaching practice within the three participants' schools. Despite having only three principals under investigation, the notion that elements occurring outside the field of specific schools affect teaching practice can be transferred across other sites. Indeed, research into the effects of pervasive material poverty on student outcomes is one such example (Lupton, 2005; Burnett & Lampert, 2016). With teaching practice varying according to external influences, principals' evaluations of pedagogy are thus also informed by these external influences. According to the data, these influences can be separated into people and policy. Students' social and emotional needs, and the impacts of parent/carer attitudes toward education are examples of the human elements. Technological advancements, the changing nature of jobs, and society's expectations of teachers, are examples of the policy-influenced factors that impact teaching practice. For those working within schools, this is most likely unsurprising. However, the emergence of this theme further solidifies the idea that value-added measures and other forms of teacher evaluation methods that are not inclusive of context, do not accurately reflect the quality of teaching that is taking place. Connecting with Theme 1, consideration of students' social and emotional needs is a fundamental aspect of developing and maintaining engaging student/teacher relationships. How the enactment of this consideration can be measured remains unclear.

Theme 4 sits outside the working mechanisms of the other three themes, but rests in the background of the other cogs. This is because "Variations between policy and practice" encompasses the ideas that are not explicitly evidenced in the principals' perceptions of quality teaching. Across each of the schools, the Standards, APR process, and Pedagogical Frameworks are structuring elements that represent the influence of policy on teaching practice, and I had anticipated that these structures would more closely inform how principals perceive quality teaching. However, each principal's reflections on these elements represented a consistent disconnect between the purposes of the elements at the institutional level and how they are implemented in actuality in each school. It is against the backdrop of policy that teaching occurs and evaluations of teaching performance subsequently shaped, yet each case indicated

inconsistencies in the implementation of these elements, irrespective of the school's ICSEA value. The individual themes will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

#### **5.4.1 Theme 1: Engagement and relationships**

The first theme to emerge from the principals' stories and analysis of their cases answers the main research question: What are the perceptions of quality teaching held by principals across three diverse school settings? Across each interview, the concept of student engagement quickly emerged as an indicator of quality teaching and was repeatedly referenced. Marie looks for "the buzz in the room", Teresa looks first for student engagement, and John, too, looks at what the students are doing, as well as evidence of "excitement in the learning". Each principal also stressed the importance of relationships. Of the three, John reflected the influence of this theme most explicitly: "So, you know, the, the old saying that a kid won't learn from someone they don't like, is just fundamentally true." Connections with the literature are evident when considering that the three principals' perceptions of quality teaching align with the model that characterises the concept according to subjective actions such as collegiality, community engagement, and teacher dispositions (see Allard et al., 2013; Cochran-Smith, 2002; Mockler, 2013).

The emergence of this theme has identified evidence to support the literature concerned with the problems of aligning evaluations of quality teaching to student outcomes (Berliner, 2013; Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008; Valli et al., 2012). In section 2.2 of the literature review, I examined a synthesis of research focused on the impact of teacher practice on student outcomes. After summarising Goe's (2007) primary findings, I concluded that the question of how teacher evaluations can occur without resting on student achievement remains unanswered. My research has identified how this occurs in three Brisbane secondary schools, however, it has simultaneously highlighted another gap. One strategy the principals employ to evaluate teaching practice in their schools is through classroom observations. Immediately, they defer to student behaviours and actions as evidence of quality teaching as it is these elements of the field that best evidence engagement. What problematises this practice is the inability to embody this strategy in a transparent, transferrable system that our policymakers appear insistent upon using. Olsen (2021) captures this friction, writing "[quality teaching] straddles the need to standardise teaching and the desire to leave teaching partly subjective" (p. 2).

This theme also responds to the first research sub-question: To what extent does the socioeconomic status of a school impact on a principal's perception of quality teaching? During



the analysis stage of this research, I determined that this sub-question could be absorbed into the second sub-question, as a school's ICSEA value is one of its key contextual factors. It therefore appeared superfluous to separate the two. Despite this, it remained pertinent to have the question stand alone as each principal revealed that there is greater emphasis on the importance of engaging learning environments and teacher/student relationships in schools facing higher levels of socio-educational disadvantage. Conversely, it was difficult to determine the extent to which a school's socioeconomic status influences a principal's current perception of quality teaching. This is because individuals cannot be separated from the temporal influences that shape their habitus. Because the participating principals have a wealth of diverse experience in education, what they believe quality teaching to be is influenced by factors outside the specific fields in which they are currently located.

#### **5.4.2 Theme 2: Teaching strategies**

Having already identified the apparent simplicity of this theme, I now discuss how the principals' perceptions of quality teaching move beyond the subjectivity of engagement and relationships, to teaching strategies that represent quality teaching. Some specific examples were given and are as follows: chunking; making the learning focus contextually relevant for students; providing feedback to students about their progress; reflection on teaching practice; presentation of learning goals and success criteria; vocabulary lists; and connecting the learner to the learning. In some circumstances, these teaching strategies were explicitly linked to the schools' pedagogical frameworks. Interestingly, both Teresa and John shared the sentiment that it does not matter which framework is used, as long as it is implemented consistently. For Marie, the pedagogical framework structures and supports the strategies that enable teachers to facilitate students' success. Applying this theme to Marie's case reveals a stronger emphasis on real-world skills preparation compared to the other two. After referencing elements of her school's new pedagogical framework, and the move in Queensland senior subjects to a focus on cognitions and thinking skills, Marie stressed that she wants her teachers to teach students to be critical consumers of information, and that as a team, they "talk about making them good humans".

Out of the three principals, John focused most heavily on the role of feedback as an indicator of quality teaching. It did not register as an influence in Marie's perceptions, and Teresa referred to it—only fleetingly—when she referenced teacher feedback as an artefact she looks for as evidence that quality teaching is occurring in classrooms in her school. An explanation for this disparity can be deduced from John's story. When reflecting on the differences in pedagogy

he has observed throughout his career between low SES schools and schools without high levels of socio-educational disadvantage, John identified that he first measured quality teaching by the ability to control a classroom and keep the lesson moving in a challenging space. Now, he sees it as an ability to create excitement in the learning. When teachers are not consumed by behaviour/classroom management, there are greater opportunities to generate feedback for students.

Reviewing the theme of “Teaching strategies” across the three data sets reveals that context significantly impacts the way teachers do their jobs, subsequently influencing evaluations of their practice. With further reference to the principals’ shared history of working in low SES schools, they each emphasised that routines, procedures and behaviour management are more important in disadvantaged settings. Again, proponents of the quality teacher model who believe the existence of quality resides within the individual, characterised by both input (e.g., content knowledge and qualifications) and output factors (e.g., students’ test results) (see Gere & Berebitsky, 2009; Stronge et al., 2007), ignore the variance that exists in terms of which teaching strategies are best suited for particular contexts. This perspective is further limiting when considering the relationship between this theme and Theme 1. Both Marie and Teresa—reflecting on what teachers do in low SES school classrooms—used the analogy of teaching being like acting; teachers perform for seventy minutes to ensure they are entertaining students in order to maximise learning.

### **5.4.3 Theme 3: External influences that impact teaching**

When this research first took shape, I considered contextual factors to be primarily concerned with the schools’ ICSEA values, and the structuring elements of their sites (APR, the Standards, and pedagogical framework). I had not anticipated that “people” would emerge as a contextual influence to the extent it did. The inception of this theme occurred during analysis of Teresa’s story due to her reference to the pressures that parents/carers place on their children, and the increased accountability parents/carers place on teachers. It is widely understood that students arrive in schools with varying values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences already shaped by fields outside schools. Not as considered is the extent to which elements external to schools impact teaching practice.

I examined the influence of families in each of the participant’s stories. For Marie, her students require greater focus on routines and procedures, and preparation for life beyond school

because of the gaps in their home environments. Teresa addressed the mental health concerns that students are facing due to increased parental pressures, and stated that teachers are experiencing changes and challenges in their practice as a result. Within John's story, his acknowledgement of parents/carers identified a strong valuing of education and commitment to the school. Perfectly encapsulating this variation between the sites is John's reflection on students from areas of higher socio-educational advantage: "...there's less distraction in their life. There's less noise in their life. They, you know, they've got those opportunities to learn. Yeah, the preconditions for them are better." This is supported in research which identifies that students see higher levels of achievement when their parents/carers have greater amounts of social, cultural and economic capital (Considine & Zappalà, 2002; Murphy, 2019; Owens, 2018). In addition, Lupton's (2005) research also addresses the role of parents/carers as contextual differences that exist between disadvantaged schools and schools located within higher socioeconomic areas.

More external influences can be seen through the principals' references to technology and the changing nature of jobs. Teresa addressed this most obviously when she explained how her views of quality teaching have changed over time. First, she identified that teaching now focuses on developing transferable 21st century skills for students rather than preparing them for specific jobs. Second, students' access to, and use of, information and communication technologies has affected their attention spans, increasing demands for teachers to cater to this change in the ways students learn. Moreover, Marie identified the significance of teaching critical thinking skills rather than merely delivering content; students use Google to find information, rather than relying on their teachers as the source of all knowledge. John also reflected this change when he commented that he looks for teachers to be creating experiences in which students are co-constructors of learning, rather than viewing them as empty vessels waiting for teachers to instill required information. Having discussed the factors impacting teaching practice that reside outside the school environment, I move now to the variations that emerged between policy and practice.

#### **5.4.4 Theme 4: Variations between policy and practice**

When I summarised each principal's case and examined the consistencies and differences between the personal and the place, I acknowledged that the principals' perceptions of quality teaching were, to some extent, reflected in the contextual factors of their schools. Theme 4, "variations between policy and practice" sits separately from the interrelated nature of the other

three themes because its elements do not correlate directly to teaching practice in this research. Furthermore, the examination of this theme is more concerned with the variance that is evident between the policies' purposes and how the principals reveal their actual enactment within their schools.

Starting first with the Standards as an example of policy that shapes teaching practice and thus informs its evaluations, each school's engagement with the Standards varies significantly. An examination of Marie's habitus revealed her experience working with AITSL; her greater levels of personal engagement with the Standards can be attributed to this experience. Working within a low SES school, Marie leads her staff through regular collaborative and collegial reflection in terms of how the Standards are enacted within their school, and identifies where extra focus is required at different points in time. This close relationship between policy and practice was evident in her school's documentation regarding the APR process.

Conversely, both John and Teresa identified only a superficial engagement with the Standards in their schools. John and Teresa reflected that the Standards are only considered as influencing teaching practice when teachers engage with the APR process. John attributes this to the complexity presented by the sheer number of focus areas presented by the Standards. Teresa voiced that teachers see them more as compliance measures and have too much else to do instead of reflecting on the Standards to any great extent. These ideas are reflected in the literature which sees the Standards operating as measures intended to increase teachers' professionalism (Strong, 2011) and in that which addresses the passive role teachers have been assigned in the development of professional standards (Adams et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Mockler, 2011).

The significance of this theme in shaping principals' perceptions of quality teaching is evident within each of the principal's reflections. The Standards are problematic for Marie in terms of the career stage headings because many teachers believe "experienced" equates to "expertise" and this is not always the case. Teresa believes teachers engage with them most when they are applying for higher salary classification levels, thus supporting the view of standards as compliance mechanisms (Adams et al., 2015; Bourke et al., 2016). Finally, John's reflection illuminates a significant issue with the Standards being used to evaluate teaching performance. The mechanisms to prevent teachers from gaming the system in terms of manufacturing evidence do not appear to be in operation. This leads to a measurement of teaching performance resting on an individual's ability to meet selection criteria rather than being evaluated on meaningful practice. If AITSL, the body responsible for the creation, dissemination, and management of the

Standards, is posited and positioned as the definite source for how leadership operates, and there is diversity in how principals connect their practice to it, disparity therefore exists in terms of how this structural element filters through the remaining levels of educational hierarchy. This issue is reflected in Marie's assertion that, "principals all come from very different backgrounds and whether you like it or not, your principals and your deputies, they lead this space and...it depends on what quality is to them."

Similar to their reflections on the Standards, Marie's story revealed a greater consideration of how her school's pedagogical framework shapes teaching practice. Teresa and John voiced comparable beliefs that the specific pedagogical framework itself is not important. Instead, it is the consistency in which it informs teaching practice across their schools that has greater significance. John developed this idea in most detail, with his explanation that the knowledge base of what constitutes quality teaching is developed over time. He asserted that the fundamentals of good, quality teaching rest on contextually appropriate content with a focus on feedback and that sometimes, people get "bogged down in the framework".

## **5.5 SUMMARY**

The data from this research have shown that students' contexts form an integral aspect of teaching evaluation systems. Each of the three principals identified varying elements that affect students and consequently acknowledged that these elements of students' fields influence how teachers do their jobs. Principals' perceptions of quality teaching are equally dependent on the environments in which they work. As the nature of students and societal demands have changed, so have expectations of pedagogical practice. Structuring principals' reflections according to the framework provided by three-dimensional space narrative shows that principals' views are shaped over time, thus exemplifying the commitment of educational professionals to life-long learning.

As our field continually evolves, our changing habitus (which cannot be shaped independently of the contexts in which our lived experiences unfold) indubitably influences our practice. With regards to teaching, students change, teachers change, and societal expectations of teachers change. However, data that emerged from the principals' stories have demonstrated that the fundamentals of good, quality teaching rest on an acknowledgement of context. Different schools have different students with different needs. Whilst the Standards include one specific

reference to the impact of context, the frameworks currently in place to evaluate teaching performance do not recognise the extent to which context impacts teaching practice.

This chapter presented the participants' data as three separate cases in which their stories were summarised and their schools' contextual factors acknowledged. I then described the approaches to analysis that led to the research questions being answered. Identification of the themes followed, with each theme then discussed in more detail. With the data generated from this research, the chapter summary wove together guiding aspects from the theoretical framework, three-dimensional space narrative methodology, and organising concepts from the literature review.

The next chapter provides a summary of the research, presents the conclusions drawn, addresses the study's limitations, and provides suggestions for further research into the realm of quality teaching and the role of principals in this space.

# Chapter 6: Conclusions

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This chapter contains a brief summary of the overall research and provides conclusions derived from the participants' stories, analysis of the data, and discussion of the themes that emerged. Limitations of the project are also addressed, and suggestions for further research are provided.

## 6.1 PURPOSES OF THE RESEARCH

After first-hand experience of how school context impacts teaching practice, I was drawn to investigate what principals perceive quality teaching to be. This is because the formal structures that guide evaluations of teaching performance do not sufficiently acknowledge the influences of site-specific factors on pedagogical practice. Furthermore, a close examination into the phenomenon of teaching/teacher quality revealed a dearth in the research as to what characterises principals' perceptions of quality teaching.

The overall aims of this research were to investigate what principals believe quality teaching is, and to simultaneously explore the contextual factors that operate within their schools and therefore impact on their perceptions. The schools' ICSEA values were initially viewed as having the potential for considerable impact on what principals believe quality teaching to be. However, it became apparent that the value representing socio-educational advantage does not exist independently of schools' other contextual factors. It was anticipated that the data would reveal disparity between the principals' beliefs according to their specific sites, subsequently revealing the need for context to be more greatly considered in measures of teaching quality.

This project was shaped by the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of quality teaching held by principals across three diverse school settings?
  - To what extent does the socioeconomic status of a school impact on a principal's perception of quality teaching?

- What contextual factors (if any) operate within the school and are these evident within the principals' perceptions?

## 6.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

Interest for this project began shortly after I transferred to Brisbane after having completed my first two years of teaching in Weipa, a remote mining town on the western side of Cape York, Queensland. In the introduction chapter (see section 1.1), I commented on some of the significant contextual differences I observed upon starting at my subsequent school in Brisbane's Northside. These included students' literacy levels and behaviours, and general school conditions that impact how teachers do their jobs. These differences sparked the desire to investigate what secondary school principals perceive quality teaching to be; I struggled to fathom how my performance as a classroom teacher is evaluated within a framework that gives minimal consideration to the unique circumstances and elements that shape each school environment. It has now been five years since this project began, and the need to provide a space for principals' perceptions of quality teaching to be highlighted remains just as, if not more, relevant.

Through the literature review, I explored the problems associated with the terms "quality teaching" and "quality teachers" being used interchangeably; the former is associated with the more subjective and collegial behaviours of the profession, and the latter is more aligned to notions of quality residing within the individual. I then considered the relationships between policies, professional standards, and pedagogical practice, focusing on the opposing views of the Standards and their role in shaping evaluations of teaching/teacher practice. The review concluded with an examination of teacher evaluation methods and the issues associated with resting determinations of teaching quality on student outcomes.

Bourdieu's theory of practice provided the theoretical lens through which the project's data were displayed and analysed. Using Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, field, and capital ensured the participants' stories were re/presented with trustworthiness, while remaining true to the research purposes. For Connelly and Clandinin (2000), narrative inquiry is concerned with the continuum on which both people's and institutional lives are experienced (p. 19). Furthermore, Creswell (2014)



asserts that the province of narrative inquiry is to explore the experiences of individuals located within specific contexts in order to understand educational research problems (p. 507). For this reason, narrative research design was uniquely suitable because I aimed to explore both the individual (each school's principal), and the contextual factors that impact these principals' experiences. Three-dimensional space narrative was employed as the research methodology. Employing the elements of interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present and future), and situation (place) meant that I was able to closely examine the temporal and contextual influences that shape individuals' experiences. While the research revealed that principals' current perceptions of quality teaching do not exist in isolation from their past experiences in education, it was difficult for the project to determine the extent to which their schools' ICSEA values impact their perceptions.

Data were first presented as three separate stories, structured in accordance with the four directions that occur in any narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 50). These entail the inward, outward, backward and forward directions. Following Dewey's (1938) notion of interaction, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) contend that the inward direction moves toward internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, and moral dispositions, whereas the outward movement refers to the environment; backward and forward refers to temporality—past, present and future (p. 50). Using narrative inquiry enabled me to examine the individuals' personal beliefs about quality teaching before considering the elements of their environments that shape their perceptions.

Schools are an example of a field in which social activity is enacted, with cultural capital being both an object of the game and the means to divide its players. When this cultural capital remains implicit in affecting teaching practice, inequalities are reproduced and differences are misunderstood as deficits in individual ability (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013, p. 120). Overall, understanding the structural differences between the different locations in which the game is played, has demonstrated that each school's students enter the playing field with varying types and levels of capital. These variations in capital influence their chances of success in the schooling game, therefore requiring contextually responsive teaching. With teaching practice shaped by an array of factors, including those external to the specific school site, the data that emerged from this research have revealed that principals' evaluations of teaching practice are

heavily influenced by context. Furthermore, the principals' beliefs clearly indicate that quality teaching is not mirrored across each school site.

After analysing data from the principals' semi-structured interviews and their schools' documents, patterns emerged which led to the determination of four key themes. The interconnected nature of the themes was addressed in Chapter 5 (section 5.4). Importantly, each principal's perception of what constitutes quality teaching is underpinned by an emphasis on engagement and relationships (theme 1). Teaching strategies, factors external to each school site, and variations between policy practice were also determined as contextual factors operating within the principals' perceptions of quality teaching, thus answering the second research sub-question. The emergence of these themes reveals significant impacts for the future of quality teaching and evaluations of teaching practice. Of paramount importance is the need to move beyond the model which theorises that determinations of quality can be situated within individuals, and evidenced by value-added measures such as students' results on standardised tests.

### **6.2.1 Summary of the participants' cases**

The three principals who participated in this project ultimately share similar perceptions of what quality teaching is. They each stress the importance of teacher-student relationships with an emphasis on engagement. Contextual factors are clearly evident within principals' perceptions of quality teaching. Through reflections on their education careers and varying roles, student demographics were identified as having a significant impact on how they view teaching practice; the schools' pedagogical frameworks also play a significant role in shaping these reflections.

Marie was the representative for the low-level ICSEA value school and has had extensive experience working within low SES settings. She stressed the importance of relevance and reflection. What are teachers doing to ensure they are delivering contextually relevant learning experiences, and are teachers reflecting consistently on their practice? She is a strong supporter of the role the Standards can play in education, having worked with AITSL during the inception of the nationwide framework. However, she recognised current limitations with how the Standards operate in terms of pre-service teacher evaluations; do teachers understand them sufficiently in order

to accurately apply them to evaluations of pre-service teachers? Marie's views lead to the question being asked as to whether the Standards were introduced (in Queensland) with enough professional development to ensure fidelity before they were expected to be applied. Rejecting ideas that quality can be determined through teacher qualifications and subject knowledge, Marie asserted, "it doesn't matter what curriculum you've got buddy; unless the person standing in the classroom is capable of delivering that curriculum, you've got nothing."

Teresa represented the average value ICSEA school, although I identified that her school is sometimes referred to as a "leafy green". Despite many of the students in her current school experiencing mid-to-high levels of socio-educational advantage, her perceptions of quality teaching have been influenced by her experiences within various low SES settings. Factors external to her school site impact teaching practice, such as the changing nature of technology affecting how students learn/teachers teach, and a sense of increased accountability placed on teachers by parents and carers. Teresa reflected most explicitly on the impacts of external factors on teaching practice, and importantly noted, "teachers have so much work to do that they can't do it all." For Teresa, structural elements, such as the Standards, are perceived as regulatory measures with teachers engaging only when they work through the APR process. Furthermore, she asserted that the specific pedagogical framework a school employs is not as significant as the consistency to which it should be applied. Interestingly, Teresa was the only participant to address increases in students' academic levels as an important consideration of quality teaching.

John represented the high value ICSEA school. With similar experience to the other two participants in disadvantaged settings, his perceptions of quality teaching also demonstrated an inability to separate views of quality teaching from the temporal influences of one's career history. John's case represented the closest alignment between the personal and the place. Across each of the documents he provided, data from his interview was similarly evident. For John, an interplay between context, content and feedback is important for student success. His school's documents clearly identified an emphasis on teachers' reflection in terms of content and teaching strategies that are most suitable for specific groups of students. Significantly, John remarked that for students from schools with higher ICSEA values the preconditions are better. There are fewer distractions that impact their ability to achieve success.

### 6.3 CONCLUSIONS

As a profession, teaching continues to face consistent public scrutiny with media headlines bemoaning Australian students' declining performance in standardised assessments such as the NAPLAN and PISA testing regimes (Australian Associated Press, 2019; Goss, 2019; Holden & Piccoli, 2019). Prompting similar discussion and debate is the role of schools in addressing the nation's sexual violence crisis (Carr, 2021; Dias & Hunjan, 2021; Hope, 2021; Sparks, 2019). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that this research was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic where the nationwide closures of schools at varying stages prompted vigorous public debate about the structure of education in Australia (Duffy, 2020; Hooker, 2020). With parents and carers expected to support students' learning at home in unprecedented ways, *how* teachers do *what* they do was examined as families attempted to navigate the system without the usual structural elements of the field. Linking these three vastly different issues is the spotlight on teachers' professional practice with insufficient attention paid to the influence of context.

Whether teachers are working in remote mining towns near the northernmost point of the Australian continent, or are located in large metropolitan schools in capital cities, we continue to be measured by the same "yardstick" (Goe, 2007, p. 45). I first addressed this concern in the literature review when identifying that although Goe had questioned the suitability of this approach, remaining unclear was to whom the responsibility for teacher evaluations fall. Moreover, no suggestions were proposed as to how context can be better integrated as an influential element in evaluations of teaching practice. Context must be more heavily considered in evaluations of teaching performance. For teachers to engage in meaningful professional growth and development, the structural elements of our field that regulate and control our pedagogical practice need to be more inclusive of the pragmatic effects each school context has on our teaching. Principals' perceptions of quality teaching have demonstrated that context significantly shapes what they believe quality teaching to be. It is now time for the formal mechanisms that shape our practice to reflect the beliefs held by our school leaders.

In the summary discussion of the themes (see section 5.5) I argued that the Standards do not provide sufficient space for a school's contextual elements to be considered as influencing the quality of teaching. Whilst there are sub focus areas that

articulate the need for teachers to be responsive to the needs of diverse groups of learners, the current systems that evaluate teaching performance (APR process and national certification system) pay insufficient attention to how the location of the field impacts teaching practice. In addition, this research has demonstrated that what teachers *have* is also important. However, it is the teaching strategies they have at their disposal, rather than their qualifications, that are important. I have previously identified that I had expected greater disparity between the principals' perceptions of quality teaching due to the anticipated differences in their schools' socio-cultural contexts. Despite similar views on what constitutes quality teaching, the most salient similarity is the principals' focus on context. The fundamentals of quality teaching are inclusive of site-specific student needs that subsequently inform teaching strategies, thus influencing measures of quality by school principals.

The themes identified limitations of the structuring principles that were researched in this project. Both the Standards and APR process have limited impact on teaching practice across the three participants' schools; rather, their engagement with these elements acts as evidence of the Standards serving more as regulatory measures to hold teachers to account. In recent years, policymakers have invested significant energy into promulgating the significance of professional standards for teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2021). At this point, it is pertinent to refer to the quote that concluded Marie's story: "it is a human industry, they're trying to make it clinical."

An ability to create and maintain student engagement dominates each principal's perceptions of quality teaching. Yet nowhere in their schools' supporting documents is this clearly represented as an indicator of quality practice. I propose that this is because the structuring principles of the field of education constrain evaluations of teaching practice. Because it is difficult to measure student affect and teachers' dispositions and demeanours in transferrable ways, our policymakers are relying on aspects of the profession that can be quantitatively captured. Although this research identified certain disparities that exist between principals' perceptions of quality teaching, more important evidence has been uncovered regarding the influence of engagement on measures of quality.

## 6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Due to the size of the project, a limitation is evident in the lack of generalisability within each ICSEA range. The study could see greater validity if comparisons of principals' views could be drawn within each range. Initially, it was anticipated that the principals would represent schools with a greater range separating their ICSEA values. Participants from schools with values around 850, 1000 and 1100 were originally planned; unfortunately, participant availability and willingness to participate resulted in an inability to be more selective. It is possible that greater disparity exists within principals' perceptions of quality teaching between leaders of schools facing far greater levels of socio-educational disadvantage, and those whose students sit solely within the top quarter of socio-educational advantage. Furthermore, the principals' shared experiences in low SES schools meant that the conceptualisations of quality teaching identified in this project were all influenced by this particular sub-field. What may be impossible, however, is the identification of an experienced, state secondary school principal who has worked only in schools with ICSEA values above the mean. Having identified this limitation, it is important I acknowledge the gratitude I have for the three principals who participated. Without them, this project would not have taken shape.

With a focus only on state school secondary principals, opportunities for further research exist with investigations into principals' views from different school types and sectors. How do principals from the Catholic and Independent sectors view quality teaching? What are the structural elements of the field that impact their perceptions? What contextual factors operate within schools outside the public system that affect teaching practice? Moreover, comparisons could be drawn by examining primary state school leaders with their secondary colleagues. Investigations into gender perspectives on the issue of quality teaching at principal level could also provide insight, however, it was not feasible for this study to investigate the phenomenon from that particular theoretical lens. Further limitations are evident in the study as it is not clear what role length of service (principals' professional experience in their roles) plays in determining understandings of quality teaching. Furthermore, site-specific contextual factors of each principal's schools were not able to be considered to any depth. This is because specific information about a school's demographic, excluding its ICSEA

value, could have provided identifying information that would threaten the anonymity of the participants.

Although there are several limitations attached to this study, it has identified many avenues for further research into the realm of quality teaching within Australian schools. Specifically, the role of principals in making determinations about quality teaching within the Australian context needs deeper investigation.

## **6.5 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS**

Having identified the limitations of this research study, it is important to acknowledge that this project forms a new foundation for further research into the evaluations of teachers and how teaching quality is understood by school leaders. With the research identifying disparity between principals' understandings of quality teaching and quality teachers, it is now evident that further investigation is required. This is because Australia is seeing a move towards more controlled measures of teacher performance. The inception of a national certification system to recognise and remunerate quality teaching practice—through the HAT and Lead career stages defined by AITSL—has resulted in a system wherein quality is determined by teachers' abilities to provide evidence of their practice in alignment with the Standards. Issues with this process were recognised in the re-storying of John's perceptions. By recounting instances of staff seeking to initiate projects in order to manufacture evidence to meet certification requirements, John identified a potentially serious flaw with this system. Moreover, the emergence of the final theme, "variations between policy and practice", revealed the significant disconnect that exists between the purposes of the Standards and their actual influence within specific school sites. Future research could focus specifically on this one structural element of the education field. To what extent *do* the Standards operate within schools and shape actual teaching practice?

The certification system referenced in the preceding paragraph sees the decision for teachers to progress to the higher career stages resting with the determinations of external assessors. However, a salient point to identify for this research is that AITSL (2017a) states, "obtaining the endorsement of the principal/supervisor to proceed with the certification process is not mandatory but is strongly recommended" (p. 11). If it

remains that principals continue to closely impact teacher career and/or salary progression, there will be a vital need to more deeply understand how quality is perceived within schools. Presently, the only states for whom certification to career stages of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers is not in operation are Victoria, and some education sectors in Western Australia. The fervent push to further professionalise teachers, and therefore hold them even more accountable, exemplifies the need to investigate how quality teaching is understood and operationalised by the school leaders who are ultimately responsible for teachers' performance evaluations at the individual school level.

Returning to the purpose of this research, it is not so much that there exists significant disparity between what each principal perceives quality teaching to be, rather, there is a disconnect between the expectations structured by our professional frameworks (APR, the Standards) and principals' ideas of what quality teaching is and how they see it evidenced in their schools. Concluding a commentary on recent research articles concerned with the notion of teacher quality by a range of international researchers (see Darling-Hammond, 2021; García et al., 2021; Steadman & Ellis, 2021), Cochran-Smith (2021) writes:

It may well be that, given a complex, layered, and nuanced understanding of teacher quality as a shifting and dynamic global concept, it is not reasonable or even desirable to expect that teacher quality could or should achieve a consistent, stable definition that obtains across nations (p. 11).

I propose that we can apply this supposition to a far smaller scale, such as the one under investigation in this project. Future research could address the following question: What is to gain from a consistent, common understanding of what quality teaching is in Queensland schools?

This research was conducted on a small scale. Three principals from three schools in the greater Brisbane area were investigated to determine what they believe quality teaching to be, and what contextual factors operate within their schools that may shape their perceptions. Furthermore, this research identified that disparity does indeed exist between their principals, and is dependent on the sites in which they operate. However, significant similarities exist within their beliefs about what constitutes quality teaching. For each principal, engagement is a dominant aspect of pedagogical practice they expect to see as evidence of quality. How teachers engage



students in their learning is important no matter the location of a school and its contextual factors. Whether a teacher is working in remote schools of Cape York, Queensland, or in large metropolitan schools on the Northside of Brisbane, teachers must engage their students if they are to make any gains in student outcomes or success. As John states, “the old saying that a kid won't learn from someone they don't like, is just fundamentally true.” How student engagement can be measured in transferrable ways remains undiscovered, thus creating another avenue for further research.

This study's research questions have been clearly answered and represented in detail through Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Despite the clarity in what the participating principals perceive quality teaching to be, it is perhaps not so much this research's answers that are most significant, but the additional questions that have arisen as a result. Presented in no specific order are possibilities for further research that have stemmed from this particular project.

- **How can measures of quality teaching be more inclusive of context?** Site-specific factors indubitably influence teaching practice, so how can this be more greatly acknowledged in the formal structures that govern and shape evaluations of teaching performance?
- **What are the perceptions of teachers and school leaders regarding the use and application of the Standards?** This research identified significant disparity between the purported roles of the Standards and the reality of their existence within the schools under investigation in this project. Can this disconnect be extrapolated more broadly across Brisbane, across Queensland, across Australia? Likewise, do teachers and leaders from the same school share similar perceptions about the influence of this structural element?
- **In a world where the success of an economy is inextricably linked to its education systems (see Cochran-Smith, 2021), what will it take for measures of teaching quality to move away from student outcomes?** In this project, shared beliefs about engagement and teacher/student relationships dominated conceptualisations of quality teaching. Reference to student results was made only fleetingly, by only one participant. What role do student outcomes play in determinations of quality teaching by

school leaders across Australia? How can we see increased student willingness to attend school, a reduction in behaviour incidents, an increase in a student's enjoyment regarding education, and other important indicators of student success as influencing measures of quality teaching?

- **Are the Standards meeting their intention of raising the status of the teaching profession?** Data from Teresa's case revealed the sense of increased accountability on teachers by parents/carers. Section 6.3 presented three different concerns prompting media scrutiny within the field of Australian education. Are these issues suggestive of the idea that the profession is not held in the esteem of the framework's aspirations?

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# Appendices

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## Appendix A

### Research Conceptualisation

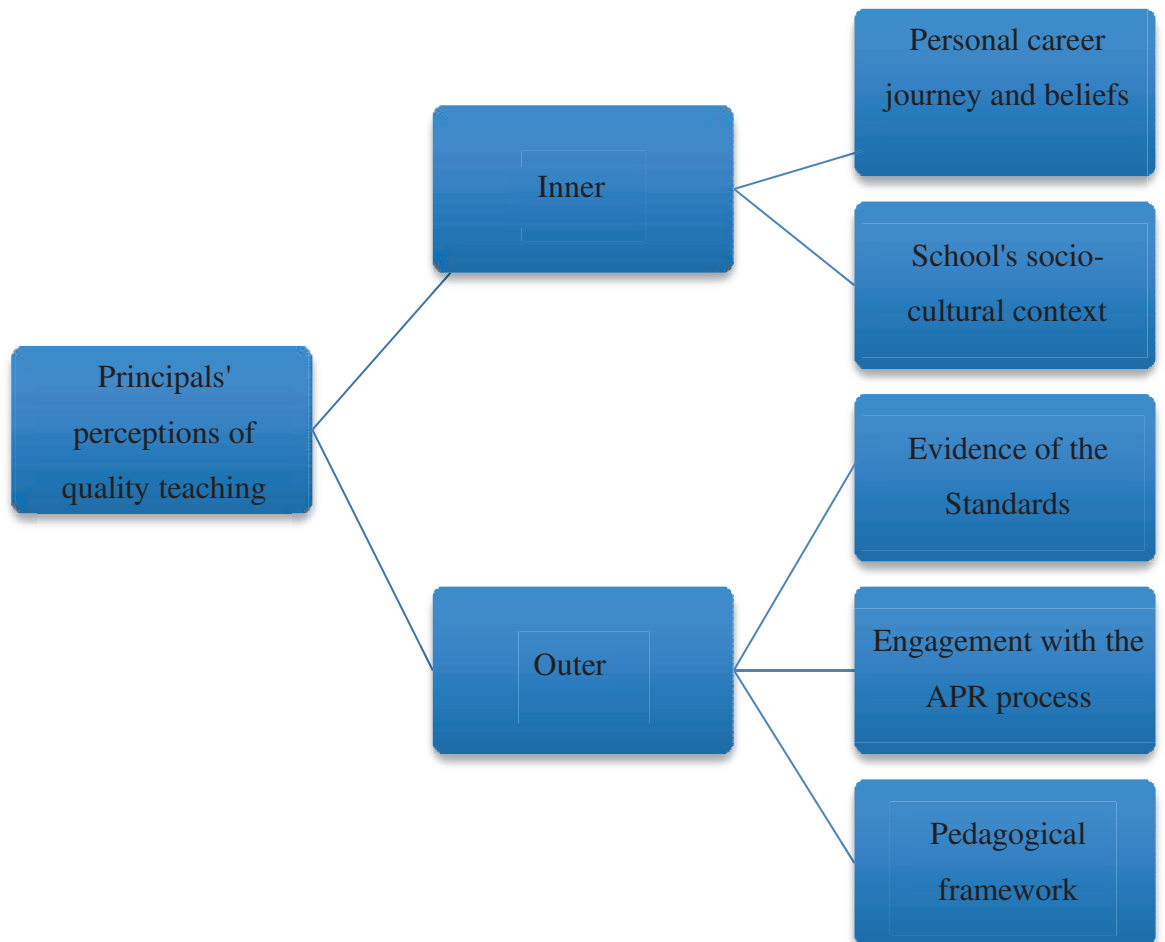


Figure A1. Research conceptualisation

## **Appendix B**

### **Chronological Order of Interview Questions**

- 1) You're a principal now, and everyone comes into this role from different avenues. Can you tell me about your career?
- 2) Can you tell me a bit about your school and its context?
- 3) When do you remember first thinking about teaching in terms of quality? Can you describe the situation?
- 4) What has influenced your perceptions of quality, and have they ever been challenged?
- 5) Have your ideas about what quality teaching is changed over time?
- 6) How do your ideas about quality teaching align with your school's pedagogical framework?
- 7) If you walked into a classroom, how would you know that quality is occurring, what would you look for? Do you think quality teaching is the same in each school?
- 8) How do you see the Professional Standards influencing ideas about quality teaching?
- 9) What relationship do you see between the Department's ideas about quality teaching and the Standards?
- 10) What is your opinion of this definition: quality teaching is teaching that addresses the academic, social and emotional learning needs of all students and in a diversity of contexts (Allard et al., 2013, p. 427).
- 11) How do you define quality teaching?

## Appendix C

### Narrative Direction of Interview Questions

Inward	Outward	Backward/Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You're a principal now, and everyone comes into this role from different avenues. Can you tell me about your career?</li> <li>▪ Can you tell me a bit about your school and its context?</li> <li>▪ If you walked into a classroom, how would you know that quality teaching is occurring, and what would you look for? Do you think quality teaching is the same in each school?</li> <li>▪ How do you define quality teaching?</li> <li>▪ What is your opinion of this definition: quality teaching is teaching that addresses the academic, social and emotional learning needs of all students and in a diversity of contexts (Allard, Mayer, &amp; Moss, 2013, p. 427).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What has influenced your perceptions of quality, and have they ever been challenged?</li> <li>▪ How do you see the Professional Standards influencing ideas about quality teaching?</li> <li>▪ What relationship do you see between the Department's ideas about quality teaching and the Standards?</li> <li>▪ How do your ideas about quality teaching align with your school's pedagogical framework?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When do you remember first framing teaching in terms of quality? Can you describe the situation?</li> <li>▪ Have your ideas about quality teaching changed over time?</li> </ul>

Table C1. *Narrative direction of interview questions*



## **Appendix D**

### **Ethics Approval Report**

