Contextualised Policy Enactment in Regional, Rural and Remote Schools: A Grounded Theory Study.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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This PhD is the product of determination and perseverance during a highly turbulent time. Most of this thesis was written during the Coronavirus pandemic that resulted in many school lockdowns: including those that this research was written for. The closure of these RRR schools resulted in a shift to online learning which posed immense struggles to children, families, teachers, and school administrators. I am grateful that I was able to continue working on this study through the pandemic and have many people to thank for their support and contributions.

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Statement of the Contribution of Others

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Abstract

In a culturally diverse and geographically large place such as Queensland in Australia, school communities vary greatly. Each school has a unique context that is deeply embedded in place. The demography, geography, resources and social and cultural structures of each place are specific to the area and determine how schools enact policies. During policy enactment, each school attempts to consider the actualities of their context and identifies, translates, communicates, practices, and evaluates education policies in diverse ways to suit their context and needs.

Far North Queensland (FNQ) is a region in Queensland that is over 1500 kilometres away from Queensland's capital city, Brisbane. All the region's population live in places statistically determined to be regional, rural or remote (RRR) based on their ability to access major services. As remoteness increases in FNQ, access to major services and resources becomes increasingly difficult. Distance from major services and from the metropolitan state capital means that centrally mandated education policies that are written in Brisbane cannot always be enacted according to policy makers' intentions.

This qualitative study presents contextualised policy enactment theory (CPET) – a new theory for understanding how school community members adapt policies to suit their context. To determine this theory, 14 students, 12 parents, 18 teachers and 3 principals from one regional, one rural and one remote school in FNQ were interviewed and observed over a three-month period. During this time, data were collected on the experiences and perspectives of school community members enacting policies to suit their context. Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, data were coded, categorised and theoretically sampled to determine a substantive theory.

FNQ School community members' perspectives demonstrated how contextual actualities in RRR places influence the way policies are enacted. School community members

described the unique insider knowledge they have into their community. They explained the challenges they faced enacting policies in RRR places and discussed the strategies that could be used to overcome these challenges. In a region with diverse contextual actualities, school community members acknowledged that a purposeful contextualised policy enactment process enables them to enact policies with fidelity.

CPET is a theory that describes these processes school community members use to adapt policies to suit their unique context. Three major theoretical categories of CPET emerged from this study: (a) enacting with people, (b) enacting in place, and (c) enacting with purpose. These categories draw parallels with current literature, national frameworks and education initiatives regarding context specific policy enactment.

This is the first study of school community members' experiences enacting policies in FNQ schools or in RRR areas. This new theoretical contribution to the field has implications for educational policy and practice in both RRR and metropolitan areas. As a recommendation for action, school community members from this study requested policy makers use a rural lens to understand the diversity of RRR places and to best support the needs of the community. Acknowledging context and enacting policies to suit the needs of the community optimises a trusting and collaborative school culture that devolves the responsibility of policy enactment to all members of the school community. Ideally, these recommendations and the practical application of CPET will provide a systematic approach to policy enactment that caters for flexibility and adaptability to suit the individual context of a school.

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Term
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ARD	Assistant Regional Director
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
CPET	Contextualised Policy Enactment Theory
EALD	English as an Additional Language or Dialect
FNQ	Far North Queensland
HOD	Head of Department
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IRRRRE	Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program of Literacy and Numeracy
NESB	Non-English-Speaking Background
NRRRES	National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy
P&C	Parents and Citizens
RAIS	Remote Area Incentive Scheme
RRR	Regional, Rural and Remote
SAE	Standard Australian English
SATE	Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance
SDM	Shared Decision Making
SLT	Student Leadership Team

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis examines the phenomenon of contextualised policy enactment within the context of regional, rural and remote (RRR) secondary schools in Far North Queensland (FNQ), Australia. This study employed grounded theory to understand student, parent, teacher and principal perspectives on how to adapt and enact policies to suit particular school contexts. Having been a teacher and leader in FNQ state schools, I wanted to explore the subjective meaning of policy enactment in these communities as well as the social norms that influence these meanings.

Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research background. I explore the current process of policy enactment in Queensland schools and introduce the concept of enacting policies to suit school context. I describe the value of school community members' perspectives on education policies and enactment processes. RRR context is also introduced. Later in the chapter, the rationale and research aims of this study are introduced as well as the thesis style and outline.

Research Overview

Education policies aim to improve educational and institutional outcomes. In Australia, most students attend public schools where state and territory governments are responsible for developing policies and procedures. In 2020, the Queensland Department of Education Central Office located in the capital city Brisbane mandated 37 policies and 181 procedures. The Department of Education (2020) differentiates policies from procedures, explaining that policies establish a clear and concise statement of the department's intent, actions and position and procedures provide 'how to' processes to implement the policy.

The Department's online Policy and Procedure Register is the source of information for school communities about how the department operates and makes decisions (Department of Education, 2020). On the register, policies, procedures and supporting information falls under twelve categories: schools and students; school community partnerships; international students; early childhood; employees and employment; workplace health, safety and wellbeing; ethics and integrity; delegations and authorisations; facilities and assets; finance and purchasing; technology and information management; and governance (Department of Education, 2020). Compliance with the 218 policies and procedures across these categories is mandatory in all Queensland state schools, despite schools' geographical location. However, current research suggests that context, which varies between geographical locations, affects the way policies such as these are enacted in schools.

Policy enactment is defined in this research as a multifaceted creative sense-making process that involves school community members identifying, translating, communicating, practicing and evaluating policies in different contexts. Educators and researchers often mistake policy enactment for policy implementation. Although the two concepts are not binary, generally, implementation is a top-down process where policy makers tend to assume the best possible environments in which the policy is to be implemented (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). Policy implementation assumes adequate staff and resources are available, enabling policies to be effective (Ball et al., 2012). On the other hand, enactment means the diverse variables and factors in schools are considered (Barrera, 2013; Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011). The Department of Education (2020) Policy and Procedure Register uses the word "implementation" when detailing how policies and procedures are to be used in schools. This directive fails to consider the unique context of schools.

During policy enactment, school community members enact policies through the situated, material, professional and external contextual actualities of their school community

(Ball et al., 2012; Braun, et al., 2011; Miller, 2018). Therefore, the context of a school – identified in this research as the location, population, culture, infrastructure, resources, values, curriculum and external community - is an active force in using education policies effectively (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011; Cuba, 2002; Gonski, 2018; Halsey, 2018; Sahlberg, 2014). As policies are enacted through the context of individual schools, policies are capable of more than one interpretation (Ball et al., 2012; Barrera, 2013; Braun et al., 2011). What works in a school in Brisbane will not necessarily work in a school in FNQ. Therefore, it is important to understand the perspectives of those school community members who know the actualities of their context and enact policies accordingly.

Policy development does not afford equal agency to all school community members. Principals and sometimes teachers are offered an opportunity to engage in policy rhetoric; however, parent and student agency is tokenistic. Students and parents are too often 'passive pawns' in the policy enactment process (Ng & Yuen, 2015). This finding had implications for my research design as it demonstrated that researchers, let alone educators, do not thoroughly understand or even comprehend school community members' perspectives on contextualizing policy enactment in schools.

As a doctoral researcher, I wanted to understand the perspectives of students, teachers, parents and principals. These school community groups represent the key stakeholders for which policies are written. Gaining an insight into their perspectives enables a rich and detailed description of the unique contextual complexities in their school as well as the unique interpretation and enactment of policies. Providing an authentic voice for RRR school community members was essential in this study so they could feel the research had been done with and for them as opposed to being done to them.

Policy enactment in RRR areas. Understanding policy enactment in RRR areas requires further insight into the geographical standards of Australia. The Australian Bureau of

Statistics (ABS, 2020) uses the Australian Statistical Geography Standards (ASGS) to divide Australia into statistical geographical areas. ASGS areas are classified according to the population of the area and the amount of road travel required to reach major services. There are five levels of relative remoteness across Australia: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Remoteness Areas of Queensland

Note. Adapted from https://www.health.qld.gov.au/mass/subsidy-schemes/rural-remote. Copyright 2014 by Queensland Government.

In 2016, the Department of Education (2020) made the decision to use the ASGS to identify the locality of individual schools across the country. Therefore, RRR schools refer to schools located in inner regional Australia, outer regional Australia, remote Australia and

very remote Australia. This classification acknowledges place and rurality. According to Reid et al., (2010), place refers to the physical location of the school as well as the social, cultural and economic intricacies of the school community. Although this definition reflects an understanding of place, literature recommends that studies steer clear of broad, blanket definitions of place and instead select definitions that are appropriate for the study and reflect the context (Chigbu, 2013; Roberts & Green, 2013). In this study, place is intertwined with rurality and RRR context as each school is in a RRR location. In these contexts, place is a sense of home that is characterised by the shared identity of people who live there. Within these RRR areas, there are 1,108,035 full time students (see Figure 2) attending either primary or secondary school (ABS, 2020).

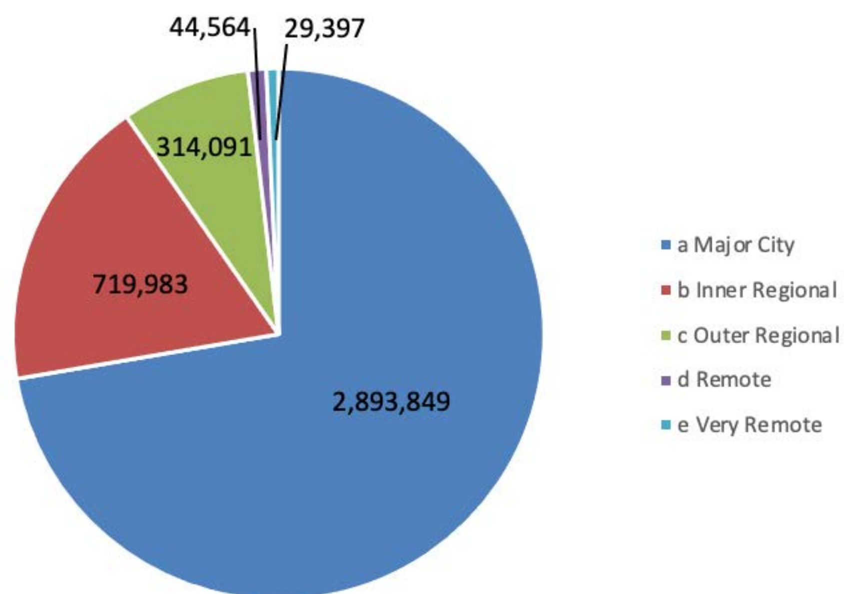

Figure 2: Number of Full Time Students (FTE) by Geographic location

Note. Adapted from

https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/2020/Table%2046a%20Students

%20%28FTE%29%20by%20ASGS%20Remoteness%20Indicator%2C%202020.xls

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RRR students face geographical disadvantage due to limited financial, material and human resources and consequently demonstrate poorer outcomes than their metropolitan counterparts (Halsey, 2018; Mitchell Institute, 2015). In some RRR communities with large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, language, cultural beliefs and values contrast inherited Western attitudes towards education that underpin state policy. As a primary example, it is mandatory to conduct education in Standard Australian English (SAE), which creates a major disadvantage for many non-English speaking background (NESB) students and their families accessing the education system (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2020). In addition to the diverse challenges for students, RRR schools face many challenges attracting and retaining capable and committed staff, funding and offering a broad curriculum (Mitchell Institute, 2015).

To understand the extent of socio-educational advantages and disadvantages of each school, ACARA (2020) developed a scale called the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA), which is computed for each school. ICSEA levels are individually determined and published to allow the public to make comparisons between schools based on the level of educational advantage or disadvantage in an area. The ICSEA scale has a median of 1000 and schools normally range from approximately 500 (extreme disadvantage) to approximately 1300 (extreme advantage) (ACARA, 2020). The level of disadvantage experienced in Queensland can be seen in Figure 3.

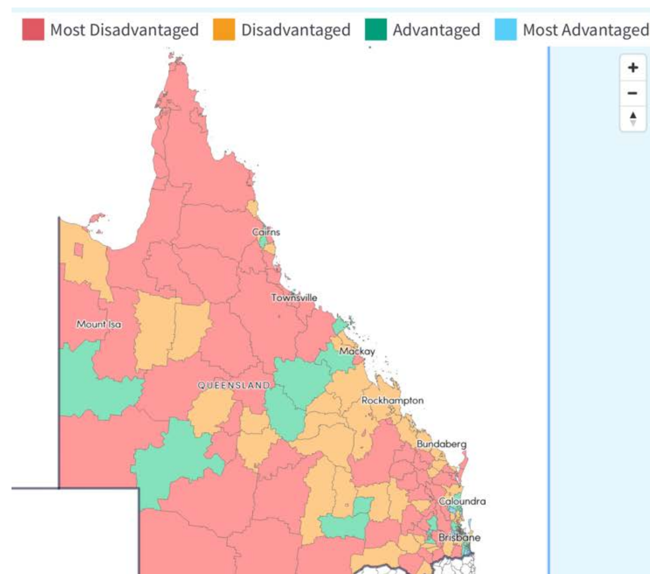


Figure 3: Teach for Australia – Disadvantaged schools in Queensland

Source: https://teachforaustralia.org/disadvantaged/ Accessed March 2, 2021

To moderate geographical educational disadvantage, the national Department of Education, Skills and Employment announced the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) (Halsey, 2018). The review considered the key issues, challenges and barriers impacting RRR students as well as the effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide (Halsey, 2018). The review determined that RRR students face geographical disadvantage when accessing outcomes (Halsey, 2018). Halsey (2018) recommended that the outcomes of RRR students become a national priority. Since the IRRRRE, an Expert Advisory Group was established to respond to these challenges and recommendations to help improve RRR student results (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). The group established a national focus on RRR outcomes, which aims to improve access and opportunities in RRR areas (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019).

Rationale for This Research

Until this recent focus on educational outcomes in RRR schools, research has primarily been based in metropolitan centres with few studies exploring policy enactment in

RRR schools. During the development of this research proposal, no studies were found that examined the experiences of adapting and enacting policies to suit the context in FNQ by RRR students, parents, teachers and principals. The lack of studies that examine contextualised policy enactment in RRR areas, such as FNQ, limits society's understanding of how to adapt policies to suit these contexts. My doctoral research directly addresses this knowledge gap to contribute to the body of literature that informs educators, policy makers and RRR school communities of the most appropriate strategies to adapt and enact policies that are responsive to the contextual actualities of the school. The purpose of this and similar research is to improve the effectiveness and impact of policies in these regions. A better understanding of how people interpret policy initiatives would provide greater knowledge of policy in practice (Barrera, 2013).

My personal experiences of enacting policies in RRR schools initiated my justification to undertake this project that would provide empirical research on this crucial educational issue. As an educator who has worked extensively with students, parents and staff in regional and rural schools, I have had first-hand experience with policy enactment in the research setting. I have witnessed the ways in which RRR schools are expected to enact policies uniformly yet are provided little agency or support in the policy making and enactment process. My experience in these settings gave me an insider perspective, allowing me to define the problem for this research project and determine an effective research design to be used in RRR school communities.

I began working in Far North Queensland RRR secondary schools in 2013 as a classroom teacher and went on to hold roles as a Wellbeing and Support Coordinator. I moved to a rural school in 2016 and became the Head of the Engagement and Wellbeing Department. I then moved into Regional Office where I held a Principal Education Officer

role in the Student Engagement team. These positions required me to adapt engagement and wellbeing policies to suit the context of our school and our region.

When adapting policies, I noted the challenges inherent to contextualising policies in RRR settings. I recall reading through an attendance policy that promoted student attendance and avenues for following up an absence. One of the reasons students would give for their absence is that they had missed the school bus. Without public transport in the community, they had missed their opportunity to attend school for the day. The policy detailed attempts that needed to be made to contact a parent or carer if a student was absent. Some of the parents I needed to contact lived in communities that did not have mobile phone reception so phoning home or sending a text message was futile. In addition, parents were located up to an hour away from the school, making home visits a time-consuming process.

Another policy that was introduced during my time at a rural school was a wellbeing policy. The policy indicated that school staff needed to undergo training. When I researched the training options available for staff, they were almost all face-to-face and located in the closest regional centre, which was two hours away. Alternatively, training sessions were located in Brisbane, which could only be accessed after a two-hour drive and a two-hour flight. To attend these sessions would mean that staff were off school grounds for at least a day. Being in a rural school, finding teachers that could relieve staff to attend the professional development days was difficult and sometime impossible. This meant that some teachers missed the opportunity to attend valuable professional learning.

In attempting to make these policies work in RRR schools, it was obvious to me that there was no 'one-size fits all' model of education policies or of policy enactment. I was acutely aware of the contextual actualities that meant that policies and the policy enactment process needed to be adapted to suit the school community. In 2018, I took leave from my

role in education, which allowed me more time to further understand ways to overcome these challenges through doctoral research.

Research Aims

The substantive area of inquiry for this grounded theory study was to explore, describe and theorise how students, parents, teachers and principals in RRR schools in FNQ understand and experience adapting and enacting policies to suit their context. The aims of the study were to:

- explore and inquire into RRR school community perceptions and experiences of policy enactment processes in their school;
- develop a theoretical framework that details the processes used by RRR school communities to adapt policies to suit their context;
- identify the implications of research findings and the theoretical framework for policy enactment in RRR schools and for policy makers.

Thesis Style

Writing a thesis requires consideration of the audience. Therefore, to aid audience readability, I wrote according to several conventions. First, I wrote this thesis in the first person to improve readability and position myself as a researcher within the study, which is integral in grounded theory research.

Second, throughout the thesis, I refer to study participants as 'school community members,' or by the name of their more specific group (students, parents, teacher, principals). To maintain confidentiality and to emphasise their perspective, I identify each participating member of the school community according to their location and role. The words from school community members are used as supporting evidence of the study's findings and are emphasised in italicised text.

Thesis Structure

This thesis contains eight chapters. This first chapter includes an overview of the research, the rationale for completing this study, research aims, and the conventions used to enhance readability. Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2 I situate the study in the FNQ setting. I provide an overview of the geographical and demographical area and detail the three school sites (Regional School, Rural School and Remote School) and their communities.

In Chapter 3, I begin outlining my methodological decision-making process and explain how my philosophical standpoint influenced the research design. I discuss why I chose to employ grounded theory for this study and then explain the practical application of this methodology. In Chapter 4, I further explain how I engaged school communities in FNQ to conduct data collection and detail the data collection methods used. Data analysis processes are discussed, and limitations of these processes are explored.

In Chapter 5, I analyse present literature that relates to policy enactment in this context. I present my published literature review that interrogates literature surrounding RRR context. This initial presentation of the literature confirms the importance of this study and provides a contextual understanding of RRR schools.

In Chapter 6, I present the major findings from this study in the form of a grounded theory. I explain the overarching contextualised policy enactment theory and detail the three interconnected, central dimensions and their attributes while using data to support these findings. In Chapter 7, I situate these findings in relation to relevant literature. I position the findings according to empirical research, educational frameworks and educational reviews.

In the final chapter, Chapter 8, I evaluate the contribution of the study to the education field and address limitations of the study. I then summarise the thesis and make recommendations for policy makers and educators and make suggestions for future research.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the thesis as well as the concept of policy enactment. I described the current challenges of policy enactment in RRR areas and explained how this formed the impetus for this study. I introduced the motivation for this study, the research purpose and research aims. I provided an overview of the thesis and explained the style of the thesis to enhance readability. In the following chapter, I will present the research setting to contextualise the thesis.

Chapter 2

Research Setting

Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research setting where this study took place. I describe FNQ as a place as well as a context for education and policy enactment. I explain why I chose FNQ as my research setting and then explain why I selected each of the study schools. I then describe the location and demography of the study schools and provide an overview of each school's context at the time this study was conducted.

Far North Queensland

FNQ is the largest of seven regions in Queensland. Covers an area of 272,215 square kilometres, FNQ spans from Cardwell to the Torres Strait Islands (See Figure 4). The region's major city is Cairns, which comprises most of the region's population of 292,000 individuals (State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, 2021). The area is home to some of the state's biggest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and has a rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage (ABS, 2020).

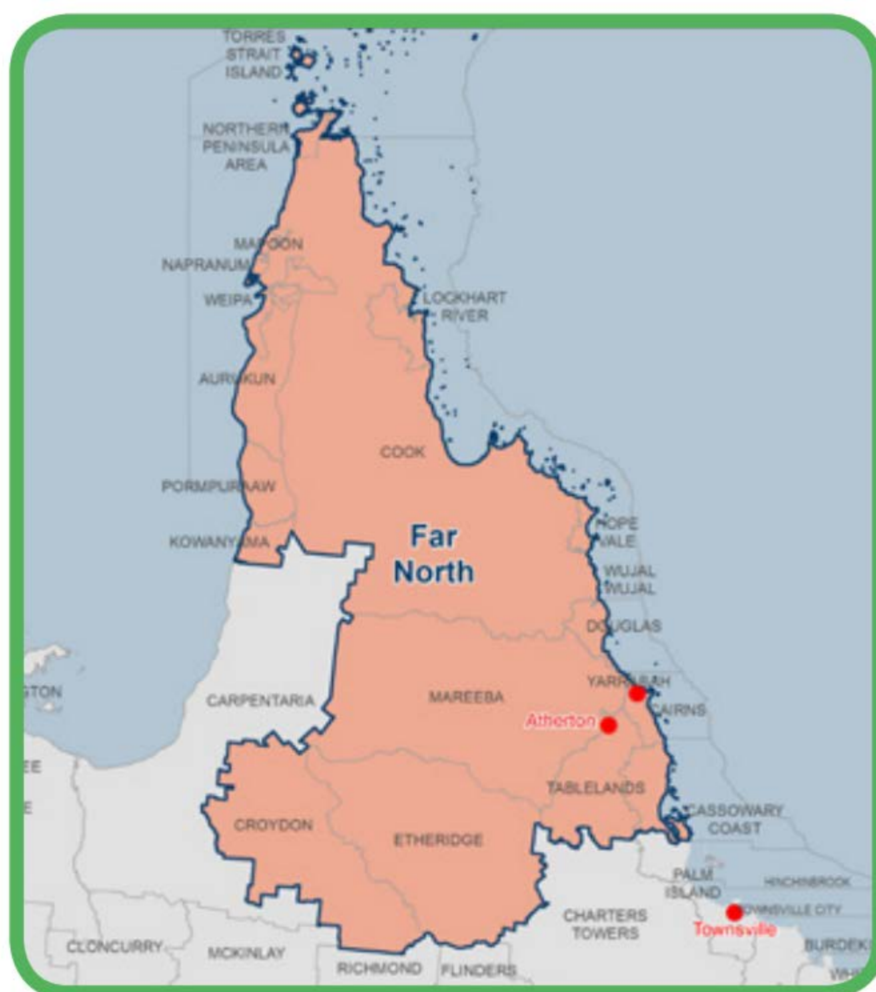


Figure 4: Department of Education - Far North Queensland Region

Note. Adapted from https://education.qld.gov.au/contact/Documents/farnorthqld.pdf. Copyright 2021 by Queensland Government.

FNQ is renowned for its tourism and agriculture. Tourism generates roughly $2.4 billion a year for the region while agricultural products such as sugar cane, bananas and mangoes generate approximately $925 million each year (Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, 2021; State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, 2021). These two industries provide employment opportunities for many of the region's population; however, the region is currently experiencing a steady unemployment rate of 5.7 percent, impacting the outcomes of the region's students (State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, 2021).

Education in Far North Queensland. The FNQ region educates approximately 36,300 students at its 86 primary schools, 12 secondary schools and 14 P-10/12 schools in addition to 1 school of distance education, 3 environmental education centres and 1 special school (ABS, 2020; Department of Education, 2021b). These schools are all classified as RRR schools and are far removed from Department of Education Central Office of Brisbane in which state educational policies are created.

Location of the study

To effectively address the research goals and questions of this study, I purposely selected three state secondary schools in FNQ. I identified one school from each geographical region, determining Regional School, Rural School and Remote School as the research sites for this study. Owing to issues of confidentiality and anonymity of the research site and participants, pseudonyms were ascribed to each school and the research participants.

Regional School. Regional School is an independent public secondary (year 7-12) school located in an outer suburb of a large regional city in FNQ. Independent public schools operate in line with the same legislation, directives and policies as other state schools; however, they have greater autonomy to make local decisions and work in new ways to maximise student outcomes (Department of Education, 2018). It is located 1706 kilometres from the Department of Education Central Office in Brisbane, where state education policies are created. Established in 1983, the school is situated within a suburb of primarily middle-class residences and has an ICSEA value of 986. The area is diverse in age, socio-economic status and ethnic composition.

The student population reached 1193 (646 boys and 552 girls) at the time of the research (January 2020) and was growing consistently from previous years. This was reflected in the student population which consisted of 11 percent Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, 3.7 percent disabled students and 17 percent NESB students. Of the

students from the previous year (2019), 27% of students went to university, 23% went to TAFE/ vocational study schools, and 31% were employed with careers.

The school faculty consisted of a male principal, one male and two female deputy principals, 44 non-teaching staff and 97 teachers. The faculty were predominantly staff members from areas other than FNQ, although many had settled permanently in the area.

Regional School follows the Australian Curriculum for all grade levels and was in its first year of transitioning to the new senior ATAR system during this research. The school prides itself on literacy and numeracy support programs, music programs, academic programs and sporting programs. Regional School has a student council, school council and Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C).

The school has multiple single story classroom blocks with classrooms accommodating approximately 30 students per class. Some rooms were not large enough to fit all students and demountable buildings were being used while classroom construction was occurring. The school was equipped with a library, multiple computer rooms and science laboratories.

Rural School. Rural School (year 7-12) is a public secondary school located two hours south of the major regional centre in FNQ. It is located 1666 kilometres from the Department of Education Central Office in Brisbane. Rural State School was established in 1964 and is the only high school within a 50km radius. The school is situated in a suburb of middle-class residences in a rural town servicing rural farms and has a ICSEA rating of 939.

At the time the research was conducted, majority of the student population (367 boys and 333 girls) came from the cluster of feeder primary schools in the area. Of the 700 students at Rural School, 21% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 9% were NESB students. Of the students from the previous year, 20% attended a university, 17% attended a TAFE/ vocational study school and 50% were employed.

The faculty consisted of one principal, two deputy principals, 33 non-teaching staff and 62 teaching staff with a 90% retention rate from the previous year. All teaching staff had obtained a bachelor's degree and two teaching staff completed a master's degree program. There were less than 5 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff. The age and experience of teachers ranged from retiring teachers to graduate teachers, many of whom had come from other regions.

The Australian Curriculum is offered at Rural School and region-specific subjects such as Agriculture, Aquaculture and sporting excellence programs are provided to reflect the values of the school community and students. The school has a student council, P&C and has recently encouraged greater parental engagement through open days at the school.

The school has multiple single story classroom blocks with classrooms accommodating approximately 30 students per class. The school is equipped with a library, multiple computer rooms and science laboratories and at the time the research was conducted, construction was about to take place for a manual arts centre.

Remote School. Established in 1973, Remote School is a senior campus (year 7-12) that is part of a larger college in the northern area of FNQ. The school is located 2653 kilometres from the Department of Education Central Office in Brisbane. Remote School provides education for students from the five surrounding Indigenous communities. These communities are mostly Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families and the school's ICSEA rating is 722.

At the time of research, the college student population was 673 (347 boys and 326 girls); however, the high school population was 227 (117 boys and 110 girls). Of these students, 98% were indigenous and NESB students. Pathways from the previous year indicated that 0% of students went to a university, 33% went to a TAFE/ vocational study school and 17% sought employment.

Within the campus there were two Indigenous teachers, 18 non-Indigenous teachers, one deputy principal and one principal. The age and experience of staff varied with some graduates who were planning to leave after 2 years to some teachers who had stayed in the community for 8 years.

The Australian Curriculum is offered at Remote School and staff were conscious of embedding local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in their curriculum. There are no excellence programs at the school but there were extracurricular programs such as sailing available. The school has a student council, but it has not been in operation for several years.

The school has multiple single story classroom blocks with classrooms accommodating approximately 30 students per class. Some rooms needed repair. The school was equipped with a library, computers in some classrooms and science laboratories; however, the laboratories were not fully functional.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of FNQ as the research setting, details of education in FNQ and specifics of the geographic and demographic details of the study schools. The following chapter will provide an overview of the methodological decision-making process I undertook to determine the most appropriate research design for this study.

Chapter 3

Finding Methodologies

Chapter Outline

The formative stages of this research project were spent taking steps forward (and sometimes backward) towards a methodology that suited the research aims. This chapter provides a reflection on this methodological decision-making process I conducted as an emerging researcher. This chapter provides a summary of how I familiarised myself with policy enactment through personal reflections. I explain my philosophical standpoint and the philosophical underpinnings of my research. I then describe how these processes and my exploration of qualitative methodologies led me to determine constructivist grounded theory as the overarching methodology for this study. Each of these methodological decisions helped me form a research design that was appropriate to achieve the aims of this study.

Exploring Experiences of Policy Enactment in Regional Rural and Remote Schools

My research began well before I began my formal education as a PhD student. During my time as an RRR educator, I experienced the difficulties of trying to align a policy to the needs of these schools. My professional experience gave me what Reid et al., (2010, p.174) call "insider knowledge" of the challenges, decisions and issues encountered when contextualising education policies in RRR schools.

Prior to beginning my research, I spoke with many different school community members about similar frustrations they had with the systematised approach to policy enactment. Social and cultural expectations and relationship with place and education were a major determinant of how school community members engaged with and experienced policy enactment. School community members in RRR areas identified themselves as being different from their metropolitan counterparts – they discussed the disadvantage they

experienced being far removed from the metropolitan centres in which policies were developed.

I wanted my research to challenge the orthodoxy that conceives RRR education as problematic. Instead, I aimed to frame RRR education proactively, advocating for RRR schools and their community members. To truly advocate for RRR people and places in research, Roberts (2013) explains that first-hand experience is valuable. As a researcher with RRR experience, I am able to provide a more detailed account of the intricacies of these communities and am better able to conduct research for and with the people in these communities (Bartholomaeus et al., 2014; Roberts & Green, 2013). Speaking with school community members prior to commencing my study provided a solid foundation for my future research. I felt as though my insider knowledge could help illuminate the values, experiences and particularities of school community members in RRR areas. The discussion that follows reveals how I reached an understanding of how to illuminate RRR meanings through research.

Philosophical Standpoint

Philosophy underpins all research and researcher worldviews (Creswell, 2015). Consciously or subconsciously, researchers use their experiences, beliefs and assumptions about themselves and the world to seek knowledge (Birks, 2014; Creswell, 2015). Roberts (2013) calls this idea the researcher's standpoint. A researcher’s standpoint depends on the researcher’s perception of reality (ontology) and how knowledge is created (epistemology) (Urquhart, 2013). This standpoint influences a research project. Therefore, understanding the underlying philosophical standpoint of researchers supports the strength and validity of the project’s research design and outcomes (Creswell, 2015).

Deciding on a philosophical standpoint. When I first engaged with my research topic, I was spurred by the belief that school communities create their own understandings of

policies based on their experiences and context. Therefore, I believed that realities are subjective and socially constructed; this was my ontology. My epistemology was that policy enactment as a phenomenon must be understood by an in-depth examination of the process: interpreting not only the process itself, but also the meaning that the school community ascribes to it.

Understanding the importance of a philosophical standpoint to the outcomes of my study, I explored a variety of paradigms that could align with this philosophical standpoint. These included (a) postmodernism: reality is subjective and socially constructed, (b) critical theory: reality is shaped by relationships of power that are social and historically situated; and (c) social constructivism: multiple realities exist and are constructed through lived experiences and social interaction (Birks, 2014). Upon initial understanding of the paradigm, social constructivism aligned with my experiences of policy enactment and my philosophical assumptions that realities are subjective and socially constructed. Social constructivism seemed an appropriate paradigm to shape the design and outcomes of this study.

Social constructivism. Social constructivism explores an individuals' subjective meaning of experience, which is shaped by social interactions as well as the historical and cultural norms that operate in peoples' lives (Creswell, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivism is considered an epistemology in which collective knowledge and experience informs individual knowledge and experience (Atwater, 1996). Although constructivism focuses on how an individual creates an interpretation of the world based on experiences and interactions, social constructivism goes one step further, determining that culture and context important in determining how individuals develop understandings of the world (Bryceson, 2007; Derry, 1999).

Social constructivism emerged as a social learning theory developed by Lev Vygotsky in the post-modern era. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that cognitive growth occurs first on a

social level and later on an individual level (Amineh & Asl, 2015). He argued that an individuals' knowledge is developed from their interactions with their surroundings and other people before it is internalised (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

Researchers working from the social constructivist perspective aim to observe and recognise the subjective and objective reality of society, understanding the meaning that is shared between the community (Andrews, 2012). Reflecting on my philosophical standpoint and considering the social focus of my research topic, I decided social constructivism provides a perfect paradigm for this study. Social constructivism recognizes that knowledge about processes such as policy enactment are socially and collaboratively constructed within the context of a particular setting (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Creswell, 2015; Kim, 2001). Therefore, I went forward contemplating my research design with a social constructivist lens.

Qualitative Research

Once I reflected on my philosophical standpoint, I considered the approach I would use to achieve my research aims. Given the social nature of the study and my social constructivist worldview, I decided to take a qualitative approach to conducting this research. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand and explain social events, groups, and phenomena and the meaning these groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative research assists in describing and focusing on participants' perceptions, meanings and experiences in the setting in which they occur (Creswell, 2015). For this study, a qualitative approach recognized the importance of place and ascribed meaning to the place-based accounts of participants' experiences (Ball et al., 2012).

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the key instrument who collects multiple sources of data, providing insight into the context of participants' lives (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative researchers collect and analyse data until a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon emerges. They are reflexive, reflecting on the data and their own place in the

study, which provides a rich and holistic account of the phenomenon (Birks & Mills, 2015; Ball et al., 2012; Creswell, 2015). For this study, qualitative research was preferred over quantitative research as a qualitative study granted greater flexibility to adapt the design and focus of the study in response to individual and school contexts.

Deciding on a qualitative methodology. After deciding on a qualitative approach, I identified a suitable qualitative methodology. Methodology is the theoretical and ideological foundation of a method that provides specific direction for procedures in a research design (Creswell, 2015). I wanted to find a methodology that valued subjectivity while foregrounding RRR and school community member meanings. Howley et al., (2005) explain that valuing subjectivity and particularity in this way limits the erasure of rural meanings. Therefore, I set about finding a qualitative methodology that values subjectivity and could provide a foundation for exploring RRR experiences of policy enactment.

Creswell (2015) lists five major qualitative methodologies that were considered when designing this study: narrative research, case study research, ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory. Given the research aims and scope of this study as well as my professional role and experience, I initially explored phenomenology and case study design. Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry in which the researcher describes a phenomenon through the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2015). On the other hand, case study research is an in-depth investigation of an individual, group, organisational, social, or political phenomenon (the case) in its real world context (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2014). I researched the methodological design of phenomenology and case studies and found that both methodologies seemed to address the aim of my research: understanding RRR school community perspectives and experiences of adapting policies to suit their context. However, given the scope of my study included three geographically and demographically unique school communities, multiple case study methodology seemed most appropriate as it

allowed contrasts and comparisons to be made across sites and allowed generalisations to be made to other contexts (Merriam, 1998; Ulusoy & Argun, 2017; Yin, 2014). Case study design was also relevant in helping to compare contextualisation across RRR schools and prove that contextualisation varies from place to place even if those places are in the same region.

As case studies explore how and why phenomena occur, this research design enabled participants' subjective views of policy contextualisation to be shared. I determined that through case studies I would be able to understand and subsequently describe rich narratives about participants' attempts to contextualise education policies within their school contexts. Importantly, this approach allowed my familiarity with the RRR context and subject area to be used to interpret the participants' responses in an open and transparent manner (Roberts & Green, 2013). Based on this understanding, I initially chose to use a multiple case study methodology for this study.

To inform the steps I needed to take to form a robust research design, I read literature pertaining to case studies as a methodology as well as case studies conducted in education. I then began the data collection process and initial thematic analysis, which involved conducting interviews, observations and developing case reports for each site.

Following data collection, interview and observation data were professionally transcribed and were collated using a qualitative data analysis software called NVivo. As I read through the data, I recorded my initial thoughts and ideas about emerging themes in a research notebook. Transcriptions were read thoroughly and repetitively to identify preliminary themes and sub themes. I then undertook a series of steps to ensure thorough thematic analysis: organising and preparing the data, exploring and coding the data, describing and developing themes, representing findings and validating findings (Creswell,

2013). These themes and sub themes were then combined to form key themes and findings that aided the development of a case report (Creswell, 2013).

After completing the initial stages of the thematic analysis, I reflected on the substantive area of my study: to understand RRR school communities' perspectives and experiences of adapting and enacting policies to suit their unique school context. The thematic analysis revealed several themes that explored RRR school communities' perceptions of policy enactment processes in their school, which aligned with my first research aim. However, the analysis failed to provide a thorough understanding of the experiences of RRR school communities adapting policies to suit their context. My results did not provide a practical output that could be provided to schools wanting to adapt policies to suit their context.

To understand this discord further, I revisited the data and my analysis. I noticed that I was reporting results directly from the data as opposed to reporting the broader concepts from the data that informed the policy contextualisation process. I approached my PhD supervisors about my methodology that did not seem to meet my research objectives. They advised me about a published PhD thesis (Cheer, 2019) that demonstrated clarity of thought and achieved research aims. The study used grounded theory as a methodology to construct a theoretical model of the processes used by midwifery students to manage the provision of care to women following stillbirth. I read this thesis and it occurred to me that Cheer's (2019) methodology chapter aligned closely with how I could achieve my educational research aims.

In Cheer's (2019) study, she developed a general theory of a process that was grounded in the views of participants (Creswell, 2015). As I was seeking to understand the views of RRR school communities about the policy enactment process, I began to research grounded theory further. My research suggested that employing grounded theory as a methodology would mean I could develop a theory of the contextualised policy enactment

process that was grounded in RRR school community perspectives and experiences. Employing this methodology would help me produce a practical output for schools wanting to adapt policies to their context.

Through grounded theory, my findings could go beyond a description of contextualised policy enactment in RRR areas and provide a theory that explains the underlying social processes related to policy enactment (Cheer, 2019; Creswell, 2015). To incorporate this methodology further into my research, I altered my second and third study aims slightly to include language used by grounded theory researchers: (1) understand and explore RRR school communities' perceptions of policy enactment processes in their school (2) develop a framework detailing the processes used by RRR school communities to adapt policies to suit their context, and (3) identify the implications of the research findings and theoretical framework for policy enactment in RRR schools in the future. I then began reading literature about grounded theory to understand the intricacies of the methodology and the steps to achieve successful research design.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a methodology that searches for new understandings of social processes in natural settings (Chong & Yeo, 2015). According to Urquhart (2013) and Charmaz (2014), grounded theory focuses on how individuals interact with phenomenon, investigating their social and subjective meanings and providing human agency.

Grounded theory is defined as "the discovery of theory from data – systematically obtained and analysed in social research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theories are derived from data acquired through fieldwork interviews, observations and documents. Using iterative strategies, grounded theory researchers go back and forth between data and analysis and document the theory that emerges (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that theories need to enable prediction and explanation of behaviour and be usable in

practical applications. The theory must be readily understandable by other researchers as well as laymen in the field. Therefore, data must be relevant and applicable to the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) further explain that having a theory that achieves this is difficult, which is why they suggest that the theory be discovered in the data itself.

As grounded theory relies on subjective experience, Opie (2004) explains that the theory is truth as it is "intimately linked to data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 4). Chong and Yeo (2015) argue that grounded theory provides a more sophisticated explanation of a phenomenon than grand theories or theories derived from other studies as it permits new perspectives to be constructed without restrictions and allows phenomenon to be studied holistically. However, as the generated theory is developed close to the data, generalisation is difficult for alternative studies (Creswell, 2015).

Emergence of grounded theory. Grounded theory was advocated and developed by Strauss and Glaser in the 1960s (Chong & Yeo, 2015). It emerged as a methodology from their social sciences study about death in hospitals (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* Glaser and Strauss (1967) outlined grounded theory as a new research methodology that aimed to systematically derive theories of human behaviour from empirical data rather than verifying existing theories (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2008; Urquhart, 2013). According to Charmaz (2014), the methodology "aimed to move qualitative inquiry beyond descriptive studies into the realm of explanatory theoretical frameworks, thereby providing abstract, conceptual understandings of the studied phenomenon" (p. 8). At a time where qualitative research was usurped by quantitative studies, Glaser and Strauss ignited interest in qualitative methods (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory grew as a popular methodology in the social sciences, particularly in health, and has now become a common qualitative methodology in many fields (Urquhart, 2013).

Since its inception, Glaser and Strauss have outlined several developments of the methodology including the role of literature, coding families and the technical application of grounded theory (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After the initial establishment of grounded theory, the two founders of the methodology diverged in their understanding of the methodology (Charmaz, 2014). When Strauss and Corbin (1990) produced a detailed manual of how to perform grounded theory, Glaser (1992) contended that this preconceived systematic process ignored the emergence of categories, which contradicted the fundamentals of the methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2015). These two different understandings of grounded theory reflected positivist (knowledge and meaning are derived from experience of a phenomenon) and symbolic interactionism (people create, enact, and change meanings and actions) philosophies that were prevalent at the time (Charmaz, 2014).

In the 1990s, Kathy Charmaz began to move grounded theory from a positivist to a constructivist approach. Constructivist grounded theory adopts Glaser and Strauss' open-ended and flexible approach to the methodology while resisting methodical applications (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) explains how constructivist grounded theory aligns with influences of social constructivism as it views knowing and learning as embedded in the subjectivity of social life. Constructivist grounded theory design focuses on individuals' opinions, beliefs, experiences and philosophies rather than their acts (Creswell, 2015).

Constructivist grounded theory supposes that we are part of the world we study, the data we collect and the analysis we produce. Charmaz (2014) explains, "we construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices" (p. 17). In constructivist grounded theory, the researcher's position, privileges, perspectives and interactions are taken into account as part of the research (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, researcher reflexivity is required.

Reflexivity in constructivist grounded theory research requires the researcher to self-reflect on biases, theoretical predispositions and the entire research process. These self-reflections establish validity in research as the perceptual, political and cultural circumstances that influence data collection and analysis are acknowledged (Urquhart, 2013). Klein and Myers (1999) explain three principles that indicate reflexivity in research: (1) interaction between the researchers and the subjects – reflecting on the socially constructed nature of the findings, (2) dialogical reasoning – reflecting on the possible contradictions between researcher preconceptions and actual findings, and (3) multiple interpretations – reflecting on the multiple interpretations of the same event. These principals highlight the relationships between researchers and participants and explains that this relationship continues to impact the study through data collection and analysis (Chong & Yeo, 2015).

Deciding on a grounded theory research design for this study. Chong and Yeo (2015) advise that researchers select the grounded theory research design that parallels their beliefs about the studied phenomenon. Having already commenced a case study methodology, I had to find a grounded theory research design that would best suit the methods of data collection I had used. I needed to blend case study and grounded theory methodologies.

My research aimed to understand RRR school community perspectives and experiences of how to adapt and enact policies to suit their context. The subjectivity of this human experience could be achieved in both case study and grounded theory methodologies. Both case study and grounded theory methodologies acquired data through fieldwork interviews and observations before comparing data sets. Therefore, the data I had already collected through case study design could be used when I employed a grounded theory methodology.

In choosing a grounded theory research design, I explored the intricacies of Glaserian, Straussian and constructivist grounded theory. I then reflected on my theoretical standpoint and experiences in both RRR education and this study. Charmaz (2014) notes that Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory assumes the researcher to be an objective and passive, neutral observer. Alternatively, Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory assumes that the researcher's position, perspectives and interactions are an inherent part of the research too.

I chose to engage a constructivist grounded theory approach as it allowed me to employ researcher reflexivity and examine my preconceptions and values that shaped the research. My social constructivism theoretical standpoint and experiences teaching in RRR areas highlighted my desire to explore the subjective meaning of experience in this study as well as the social norms that influence these meanings. Employing constructivist grounded theory meant I could theorise about the process of contextualised policy enactment while also examining the specific conditions under which this theory came about (Charmaz, 2014). Having decided on a constructivist grounded theory research design, I explored how to best use this methodology in my study. My understandings of this process are detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reflected on my methodological decision making that informed the research design of this study. I detailed my philosophical standpoint considering my experiences adapting policies in RRR schools and explained how this standpoint influenced this study. I discussed different research paradigms and explored the social constructivist standpoint underpinning the research methodology.

As this research design was used to inform this study, the following section will introduce and explain how I came to achieve my research aims. I will discuss how grounded theory methodology links to the methods used in the research. I will then explain the

application of constructivist grounded theory in this study, providing ethics statements and approvals.

Chapter 4

Conducting the Research

Chapter Outline

Grounded theory was employed in this research as a means for understanding the policy contextualisation process from the perspectives of RRR school community members. In this chapter, I discuss how I used literature to understand the RRR context. I then explain the practical application of grounded theory methodology in this study, outlining the ethical considerations. I elaborate on the data collection methods and procedures before outlining the data analysis process. I then determine how collected and analysed data were managed and stored.

Understanding the Regional Rural and Remote School Context

Prior to conducting data collection, I wanted to further understand the contextual actualities of RRR places. Although I was already familiar with the RRR context in FNQ due to my professional experience, I reviewed the literature to confirm and strengthen my understanding of the topic. Typically, in grounded theory studies, reviewing literature about the topic occurs after the theory has been developed. Glaser (1992) explained that engaging with the literature could contaminate and impede the researcher's ability to generate categories. The data should influence the theory rather than theories from literature influencing the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, subsequent thoughts about grounded theory suggest that it is not unusual for researchers to have read about the topic they are researching (Charmaz, 2006; Urquhart, 2013). Researchers are exposed to knowledge in their field, which often prompts their area of study (Urquhart, 2013). This is particularly the case for PhD dissertations where it is often necessary to engage in a literature review prior to the study.

Using Literature in this Grounded Theory Study

To complete a literature review prior to conducting a grounded theory study, Urquhart (2013) and Nathaniel (2006) recommend that researchers evaluate literature at a surface level and conduct what Stern and Porr (2011, p. 49) identify as a 'primary review.' Martin (2006) explains that a primary review allows researchers to develop sensitivity to the topic and find their research topic. This process allows the theory to emerge without existing literature influencing coding and analysis (Glaser, 1992). Once the theory has been developed, researchers engage more thoroughly with the existing literature to solidify their theory (Glaser, 1992; Urquhart, 2013). Stern and Porr (2011) call this more thorough review the 'evolving review,' which “integrates the emergent theory with extant theories and existing knowledge to make the theory more valuable” (p.29). I conducted a primary literature review (detailed in Chapter 5) to understand the RRR context in greater detail and conducted an evolving review of the literature during and following data analysis, which is incorporated into the discussion offered in Chapter 7.

Conducting a primary literature review. When starting the primary literature review, I aimed to review literature regarding the contextual factors that affect policy enactment in RRR schools. I reviewed 49 journal articles, national reviews, books and policy documents. I reviewed each piece of literature for empirical and theoretical evidence of barriers, challenges and actualities of RRR contexts that impacted the way school community members could enact policies. The primary literature review revealed historical and cultural norms that operate in RRR contexts and shape policy enactment. This review was published in a peer review journal and is detailed in chapter 5.

A major piece of literature by Braun et al. (2011) identified a policy enactment framework that disrupted the idealism of policy and introduced the reality of school contexts. The literature review used the four contextual factors in Braun et al.’s (2011) framework as thematic organisers for the findings: (1) situated context (locale, history and location), (2)

professional context (staff values and experiences), (3) material context (staffing, budget, building, available technology and infrastructure) and (4) external context (governance, legal requirements, school ratings and relationships with other schools). The findings of the primary review are set out in Chapter 5.

Applying Constructivist Grounded Theory

After conducting a primary literature review, I was equipped with the contextual understanding to apply constructivist grounded theory to the study context. Constructivist grounded theory is similar to other variants of grounded theory as it involves a cycle of sampling, data collection, coding and categorising, constant comparison, theoretical sensitivity, memo writing and theory building (Charmaz, 2014). Data is collected through interviews, observations, focus group discussions and documents in a systematic manner and becomes more structured as the theory emerges (Chong & Yeo, 2015). As data are collected, they are concurrently analysed and grouped into categories, which results in theory formation (Chong & Yeo, 2015). Charmaz (2014) explains that this process is non-linear; however, there are established stages to the practice of constructivist grounded theory (see Figure 5). Each stage is transformed into the next with constant comparison, theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity and memo writing occurring across each stage, meaning the researcher has to be vigilant and consistent.

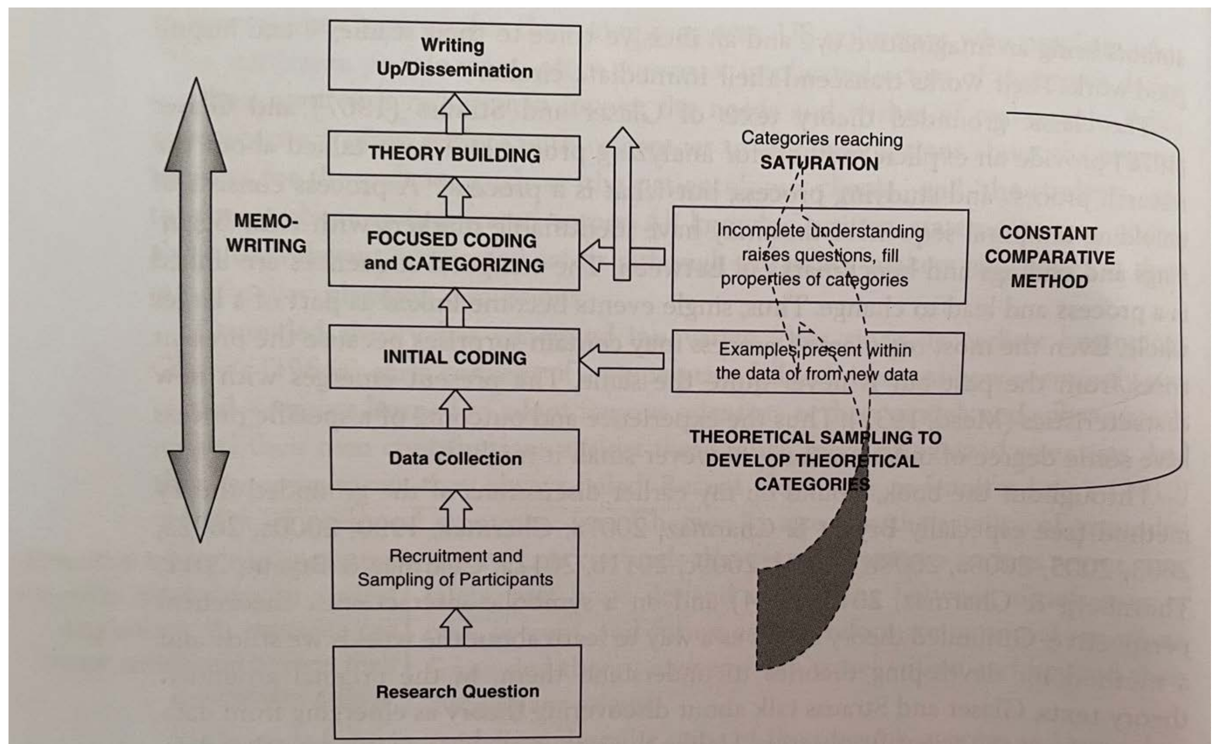


Figure 5: A visual representation of grounded theory research *Note.* Reprinted from *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* by K. Charmaz. Copyright 2014 by SAGE.

Ethical considerations. Before engaging in grounded theory methodology, I received ethical approval from the James Cook University (JCU) Human Research Ethics Committee and the Queensland Department of Education. In accordance with the Department of Education's guidelines for conducting research in Queensland schools, I applied to the Regional Director for permission to approach each school principal. This approval process allowed this research to be considered suitable against departmental policies regarding research. Department of Education ethics approval also meant this research aligned with the department's research priorities and research plan. JCU and the Department of Education deemed this research a negligible risk project in which there was no foreseeable risk to participants. Once ethics permission was granted, I sought final approval to conduct the research from each site school principal.

Upon receiving research approval from each of the site school principals, all participants were provided with an information sheet. The information sheets detailed the research aims, methods, demands, risks and potential benefits as well as contact details. This information sheet was also explained verbally to ensure comprehension and to overcome any language comprehension barriers. The information sheets provided context to consent forms that participants and their parents were required to sign to confirm their willingness to participate. The consent form stated that participants agreed to being interviewed, audio recorded and observed. Students were asked to take their consent forms home and have a parent or guardian sign the form before they participated.

I clearly communicated to school community members that participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality was assured throughout the recruitment process and up to the point of publication and storage of data. Confidentiality was achieved by carefully disguising details of individuals and using pseudonyms for the schools and school community members. A concerted effort was also made to conceal the demographic data of school community members. Given the sensitive nature of the research, school community members were identified only by the rurality of their school and their role in the school.

Recruitment and Sampling of Participants

Having taught and studied in FNQ for several years, I had the advantage of knowing the principals of several schools in the region. I approached the principals of Regional School, Rural School and Remote School in June 2018 to explain the purpose of my study and ask if they were willing to participate in the research project. Each principal was willing to participate and advised their own staff of this cooperation provided I obtained approval from both JCU and the Department of Education. After our first correspondence, I built and maintained a professional relationship with each of the school principals by communicating

with them about my research and informing them of my ethics approval. I attempted to align my correspondence with the schools' annual improvement agenda and school values so principals could see the value of their participation in the research.

After obtaining departmental and university ethics approval as well as principal approval for conducting the research, I began recruiting participants. I purposefully selected the participant groups of this study based on their role in the school and to obtain information that was specifically relevant to the research questions and goals (Salim, 2016). This study aimed to understand student, teacher, parent and principal perspectives of contextualised policy enactment in RRR schools. Therefore, the research population of this study consisted of those school community groups at each school site. Community members external to the school context were not included in this study due to their lack of experiences and involvement in with the school.

Choosing these school community groups enabled a detailed description of the processes regarding contextualised policy enactment. This information also allowed for a better understanding of the subtleties, complexities and uniqueness underlining the relationship between policies, policy makers and RRR schools. During my research, I was able to understand not only RRR school community perspectives of the policy enactment process, but also how contextual factors influenced this process.

Upon receiving final approval, I was permitted to advertise participation to students, staff and parents in each school directly through the school principal. Principals advertised participation through the school newsletter and school Facebook page at each school. At Regional School, participants expressed their willingness to participate to the deputy principal, which was then approved by the principal. At Rural School and Remote School where student and teacher populations were smaller, the principal was asked to assist in identifying student and teacher participants to reduce disruptions in the school community. At

Remote School, the principal was also asked to assist in reaching out to parents who may be interested in participating in the research as no parents came forward to engage in the study initially. The final groups of school community members are outlined below:

- Students: four Regional School, five Rural School and five Remote School students were interviewed. The students had a range of experiences in a variety of geographical contexts and had varying understandings of policies and how they were enacted. The student participants were both male and female and ranged in year level from year 7 to year 12. They were interviewed in face-to-face focus groups.
- Parents: four Regional School, five Rural School and three Remote School parents were interviewed. All parents were involved in school activities such as the school tuckshop, teacher aides or P&C committee. At Remote School, the principal identified that language was a barrier for parents and appointed a community engagement teacher aide to assist with language translation. Except for one male, all parent participants were female and ranged in age from 39 to 46 years old. The number of years they had lived in their area ranged from five years to their entire lives. Parents were interviewed in face-to-face focus groups.
- Teachers: seven Regional School, six Rural School and five Remote School teachers were interviewed. The teacher participants included a representative sample of teachers who demonstrated a high understanding (could recall policy names and policy aims), moderate understanding (could recall policies being enacted but could not recall policy titles or aims) and low understanding (could not recall any policies or policy enactment process) of policies and the enactment process. Selection of the teacher participants considered diversity of age, professional experience and subjects taught. The teacher participants were both male and female and ranged in age from 25 to 59 years old. The number of years they taught at the school and in an RRR area

ranged from less than a year to 10 years. Teachers were interviewed in face-to-face focus groups in Regional School and Rural School and were interviewed individually in Remote School as there were no other teachers to relieve a group of teachers together.

- Principals: the principal from each school was interviewed. The principals had a range of leadership experience in different RRR schools. They were all male and ranged in age from 38 to 56. The number of years they had been principal at their school ranged from less than 1 year to 5 years. Principals were interviewed individually and in person.

Data Collection

Charmaz (2014) explains that after recruitment, collecting detailed and focused data from participants provides a rich and detailed description of a phenomenon and is the basis for generating strong grounded theory. Charmaz (2014) states: "[data] reveals participants' views, feelings, intentions and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives" (p. 23). The method of data collection depends on the researcher's topic and access. To align with Roberts' (2013) view that rural research needs to use methods that value particularity, I sought to find methods that valued subjectivity and varying perspectives. I reviewed methods used previously in RRR settings and in policy enactment research. During these reviews, I found that interviews and observations were used most. Interviews and observations were also consistent with my research aims and constructivist grounded theory methodology.

Interviewing is a common research method within education and requires an exchange of views between two persons who are conversing about a theme of common interest (Kvale, 2011). Researchers use qualitative interviews to understand the way society perceives social practices and behaviour. Interviews provide insight into the ways in which research

participants experience and understand a phenomenon through their own words, experiences and opinions (Kvale, 2011; Tuckman & Harper, 2012).

Focus group interviews are an extension of the one-on-one interview method and are used among groups of two or more participants. The term ‘focus group interview’ is often used interchangeably with ‘group interview’ ‘and ‘focus group discussions,’ which all rely on generating and analysing interactions between participants rather than asking multiple participants the same questions in different settings (Barbour, 2011). Focus group interviews require interaction between participants rather than just the interviewer. This group interaction triggers thoughts and ideas that may not emerge in individual interviews (Lichtman, 2012). As focus group interviews require multiple participants, there is the propensity for disagreements to ensue. Barbour (2011) explains that it is important to view disagreements as a resource for analysis and facilitate this process.

Traditionally, interviews are a structured, professional interaction, rather than a spontaneous exchange, designed to meet the interviewer’s purpose (Kvale, 2011, p. 8). Structured interviews have the propensity to exclude detailed explanations and do not always allow for improvisation or for meaning to be interpreted (Lichtman, 2012). Alternatively, open-ended and semi-structured intensive interviews allow interviewers and interviewees to co-construct data through direct and authentic contact with the interviewee’s realities (Roulston et al., 2016).

Semi-structured intensive interviews allow for depth and the development of comprehensive narratives. They offer the best possibility for gathering meaningful data in an unstructured response mode (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). According to Charmaz (2014), this type of intensive interviewing “focuses the topic while providing the interactive space and time to enable the research participant’s views and insights to emerge (p. 85). Charmaz (2014) also notes that intensive interviews in grounded theory research are typically gently

guided conversations that explore a person's substantial experience within the research topic. To facilitate an intensive interview, Barbour (2011) recommends asking a few brief questions to provoke and sustain discussion. However, commonly during these interviews, the participant talks and the interviewer encourages, listens, learns and asks varying questions as the situation demands (Charmaz, 2014; Lichtman, 2012).

There were multiple advantages of using a combination of individual and focus group interviews for this study. Focus group interviews were time effective for students and teachers who needed to take time out of classes. These interviews also reduced power imbalances between the researcher and school community members, particularly students. Students are often 'othered' in research and can lack agency as they are younger, less powerful and possess different communicative abilities (Lichtman, 2012). Through focus group interviews, students are better able to affirm their understanding with other group members which Lichtman (2012) explains is the exact purpose of this type of interview. The flexible and semi-structured approach to questioning and holding discussions in focus group interviews also developed the students' thinking and enabled them to demonstrate agency (Dunphy, 2005; Ulusoy & Argun, 2017).

There were also advantages conducting both types of interviews in RRR settings where languages and culture differ between regions. Interviews were conducted in Standard Australian English. Interviewing participants from various cultures and language systems allowed language to be better clarified, and for complex cultural experiences to be understood (Hass & Abdou, 2018). Interviews also allowed language and meaning to be grounded in context (Scheurich, 1995, p. 240). Charmaz (2014) explains that clarifying and bringing attention to language and the construction of meaning within interviews advances theory construction.

Despite the advantages of interviewing to obtain subjective understanding, Tuckman and Harper (2012) and Roulston et al. (2016) suggest that the method of interviewing can create several problems. (1) participants must cooperate, (2) they must tell what is true rather than what they think the researcher would like to hear, and (3) they must know their feelings and experiences to report them. Additionally, in RRR communities where the population is often tight-knit, local norms and peer and race relations can potentially render some voices silent or distorted. Both the interviewer and interviewee bring their own priorities, knowledge and concerns to the interview; therefore, Charmaz (2014) explains that interviewers must balance the individual participant's story with searching for the collective analytic story.

To create this balance, Charmaz (2014) explains that when interviewing, four theoretical concerns need to be taken into consideration: theoretical plausibility, direction, centrality and adequacy. Grounded theory researchers determine whether interview statements are theoretically plausible and whether their participants deem them as accurate. Therefore, to maintain theoretical plausibility, data collection should be broad and deep in its coverage (Charmaz, 2014). As the researcher conducts the interviews, the theoretical direction and centrality of the study can emerge. Patterns in responses become clear and guide the subsequent interviews. The researcher directs parts of the interview to focus on main codes and tentative categories. Finally, later interviews assess the theoretical adequacy of the categories which finalises the theoretical sampling that has taken place (Charmaz, 2014).

Individual and focus group interviews were supplemented with informal observations of school community members in their school settings. Observations assisted in understanding the complexity of behaviours and the interrelationships that exist when enacting policies (Lichtman, 2012). I used my position as an educator to act as a participant observer by engaging in conversations about policy enactment. Remaining in this position

enabled me to participate in incidental conversation such as policy discussions in the staffroom. Being a participant observer means potential biases can be produced; however, coupled with the passive objectivity involved in interviews, this method was important to acquire a better understanding of the hierarchical nature of policy enactment and the policy processes in which school community members engaged.

Data collection process. I visited each of the schools between November 2019 and February 2020. I was warmly greeted by the principal at each school and was able to establish routines, acquaint myself with the school's policies and procedures and finalise the research process. In Rural School and Remote School, I was given a tour and was able to attend staff meetings to introduce myself and provide an overview of the study. I explained the investigative nature of my research and made it clear that I was here to find out more from their perspective as opposed to instilling my own projections onto them. This approach was instrumental in helping me build rapport with staff since they often experience outsiders coming into the school and doing research "to" them as opposed to "with" them (Roberts, 2013).

Acquainting myself with the people, spaces and problems of each school was crucial. I had insider knowledge of all these contexts due to previous teacher experience or the knowledge of colleagues who worked at these schools. This made it easier to understand the intricacies of the school community members' experiences. To build trust with the school community members, I took the time at the beginning of each interview to disclose my own experiences in RRR settings. I shared my experiences with RRR places and teaching, which brought credibility to the study and encouraged the subjects to divulge their experiences. Importantly, this approach also allowed my familiarity with the RRR context and subject area to be used in interpreting the school community members' responses in an open and transparent manner.

Each principal made every effort to facilitate the study: they identified times when teachers and students were available to be interviewed and assigned substitute teachers to replace participating teachers where possible. I was also invited to staff lunches and meetings, which enabled further observations. I spent time visiting classes, staffrooms and making my presence known to encourage informal conversations and to build trust in each of the school communities. These experiences provided me with deeper insight into the way policies were enacted in the schools and the context in which they were trying to enact them. By the end of my time at each school, the school community members seemed comfortable in sharing their experiences and perceptions with me.

School community members ranged from feeling hopeful and excited about contextualised policy enactment to doubtful, sceptical and jaded about the hierarchical system that imposed policy enactment in their school. These individuals had a range of knowledge of current policies in place at their school. As a result, I made a concerted effort to develop positive and meaningful relationships with everyone who participated by continually expressing that all perspectives and knowledge were equally valuable to my research.

Interview process. The interviews at each school took place on either side of the summer school holidays. Rural School interviews were conducted in November 2019, the interviews at Regional School were conducted in December 2019 and at Remote School in February 2020. I conducted two interviews per day so I could provide enough time for interviews, reflection and room for unexpected interruptions. The process of scheduling interviews went smoothly due to the principals' cooperation and the school communities' willingness to participate. I conducted interviews for 20-40 minutes each in an available meeting room or classroom at each school. This room was designated to me by each principal for minimal disruptions. Where there were disruptions with teacher interviews, I was allocated an alternative space.

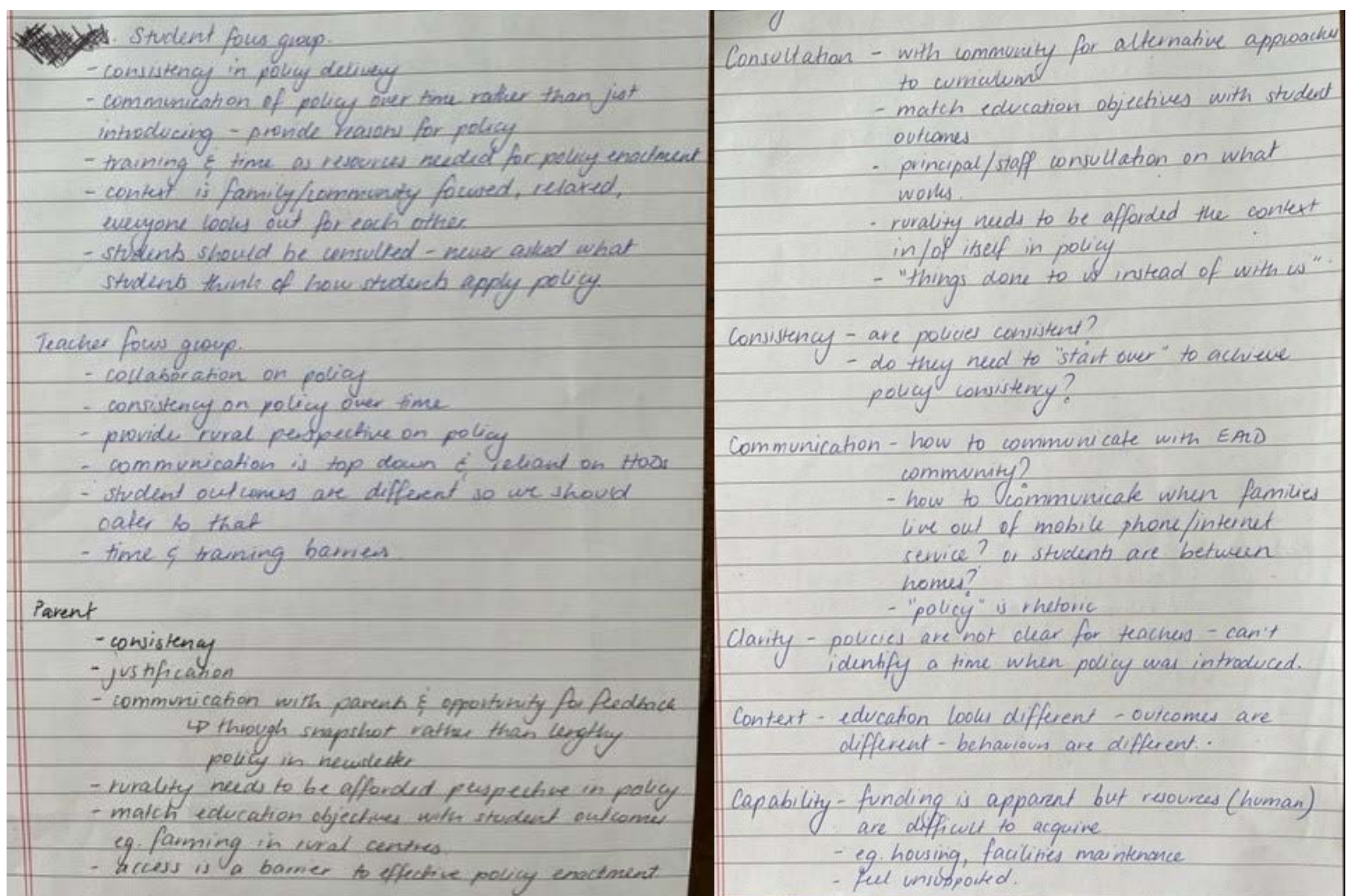
Although it was intended to use individual interviews for principals and focus group interviews for students, teachers and parents, the reality of schooling and contextual actualities did not always allow for this. In Rural School, the intended interview style was followed; however, at Regional School, students and teachers were interviewed in two smaller focus groups. At Remote School, each teacher was interviewed separately, and parents were interviewed in smaller groups with an Indigenous teacher aide present to assist with communication or NESB parents.

Before each interview, I set up my recording device and brought my interview guide and notebook to write down memos. I made it clear to every school community member that I was interested in hearing their perspectives and asked them to draw directly on their experiences in RRR schools. At the start of each interview, I introduced all members to identify their voices during transcription and establish group dynamics (Barbour, 2011).

During the interview, I demonstrated active listening through eye contact and body language to maintain school community members' ease through the process. Additionally, I only took notes and engaged in memo writing following the interviews. I provided wait time after each question to enable members to reflect on their opinions and express their responses comprehensively. This was particularly the case with students.

As mentioned in the previous section, students possess different communicative abilities than adults (Lichtman, 2012). I extended my sincere interest in their responses to questions during the interview. Dunphy (2005), explains that that this is important when interviewing children and younger people. Starting with a situation or experience with which the child is familiar and posing open ended questions better elicits in-depth responses. I remained conscious of students being active participants and guided the course of the interview with their responses just as I did with parents, teachers and principals.

I maintained my flexible semi-structured approach to questioning, which Dunphy (2005) and Ulusoy and Argun (2017) identified as enabling participants to demonstrate metacognitive awareness and agency. School community members responded to all questions in the interview guide and were asked to elaborate on any unclear points in their responses. At the end of the interview, the audio recordings were stopped, and each school community member was thanked for their time. When they had extra time, school community members stayed and engaged in further conversation about the topic; I took notes of their points during this time in my observation log. Following each interview, I wrote memos. I also recorded my immediate observations and reflections on interviews (see Figure 6). Further, I noted any salient features of group dynamics and initial concepts and patterns (Barbour, 2011).



Student focus group.
- consistency in policy delivery
- communication of policy over time rather than just introducing - provide reasons for policy
- training & time as resources needed for policy enactment
- context is family/community focused, relaxed, everyone looks out for each other
- students should be consulted - never asked what students think of how students apply policy

Teacher focus group.
- collaboration on policy
- consistency on policy over time
- provide rural perspective on policy
- communication is top down & reliant on HODs
- student outcomes are different so we should cater to that
- time & training barriers

Parent
- consistency
- justification
- communication with parents & opportunity for feedback
  ↳ through snapshot rather than lengthy policy in newsletter
- rurality needs to be afforded perspective in policy
- match education objectives with student outcomes eg. farming in rural centres
- access is a barrier to effective policy enactment

Consultation - with community for alternative approaches to curriculum
- match education objectives with student outcomes
- principal/staff consultation on what works.
- rurality needs to be afforded the context in/of itself in policy
- "things done to us instead of with us".

Consistency - are policies consistent?
- do they need to "start over" to achieve policy consistency?

Communication - how to communicate with EALD community?
- how to communicate when families live out of mobile phone/internet service? or students are between homes?
- "policy" is rhetoric

Clarity - policies are not clear for teachers - can't identify a time when policy was introduced.

Context - education looks different - outcomes are different - behaviours are different.

Capability - funding is apparent but resources (human) are difficult to acquire
- eg. housing, facilities maintenance
- feel unsupported.

Figure 6: Interview Reflections

Having initially employed a case study methodology for data collection prior to choosing grounded theory, I was concerned that theoretical sampling had not occurred. Theoretical sampling is a key strategy used in grounded theory whereby data is collected, coded and analysed collectively to decide what data to collect next. Further data is collected or sampled based on emerging concepts. I obtained the ethics approval and collected all my data by using interviews and observations through a case study methodology. Unfortunately, the Coronavirus pandemic did not afford me the time or access to return to the school sites. Urquhart (2013) explains that not having the luxury of collecting data over several instances is a common issue for researchers due to problems with access and expenses. Urquhart (2013) further explains that instead, it is possible to review data that has been collected and complete a preliminary analysis after each interview. During this analysis, the researcher can identify emerging themes and use those themes to guide future interviews and analysis.

Once I employed a grounded theory methodology, I was able to determine that due to the geographical location and short time frame at each site, theoretical sampling could only be conducted after a preliminary analysis of each interview within each site. I was able to reflect on my notes and see that I had engaged in theoretical sampling by reflecting on what data to collect or questions to ask based on emerging concepts (see Figure 7). The content of previous interviews allowed focussing and more direct questions on areas of theoretical interest.

b. How many years have you lived in a rural, regional or remote community?
c. How many years have you been part of this school community?

Topic 2: Context

For the government policy makers to understand how to help RRR school communities, they need to understand the context of the school. School context means the conditions of a school, including the history of the school, experiences of school community members, school reputation and facilities and resources. Given that there are so many schools in FNQ let alone QLD, understanding your context is really important

1. What is it like to be a member of this school community?
2. Let's discuss your school context (this could involve a photography or drawing exercise):
   a. Describe your school's history and location (situated context).
   b. Describe your school values.
   c. Describe your experiences at this school. How are rules made?
   d. How are policies/ rules introduced and managed/ achieved (professional context). - Who is in charge of making decisions?
   e. Describe your access to resources eg. staffing, access to technology and your facilities (material context). Can you use all the things you need to learn well?
   f. Describe how your school is run/ governed.
   g. How does your school compare and relate to other schools? (external context)? How is your school the same/different from others?

Topic 3: Policy enactment

Once policies have been written, they are sent to schools in the area and it is the school's responsibility to deliver those policies according to what will best suit the needs of the school community. To do this, schools often discuss how a policy should be enacted (aka delivered or applied) with students, parents and staff. This means schools are making decisions about the rules/policies instead of the government.

Think of a time a new rule was introduced...

2. Think of a recent policy your school has adopted. Describe what happened last time your school delivered a policy.
   a. How were policies shared with teachers, parents and students at your school?
   b. Who shared this information with you?
   c. Did the Department of Education communicate with you about government policies?
   d. How did you contribute to delivering the policy?
   e. How did the policy influence your experiences at school? How did this new rule make school better or worse? as an RRR school

Topic 4: Contextualised policy enactment

3. Think about your school context we recently described (recall notes from responses). How are policies suited to this context? how do policies/curriculum/what you learn suit your school?
4. How do you think the process of suiting policies to your context is different from how other schools (particularly urban schools) suit policies to their context?

Figure 7: Evidence of theoretical sampling

Interview guide. As a doctoral researcher, the interview guide (see Figure 7) was a flexible tool that was useful for determining the fundamental issues I wanted to uncover during the interview (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) explains that having an interview guide that simultaneously focuses on the research topic and fosters unprompted discussion is best. From my primary review of the literature as well as my first-hand experience, I was able

to use my knowledge of RRR areas to create prompted questions that considered the context of the study. School community members were asked about their role and experiences in the school community, their understanding of school context, current policy enactment processes in their school and how policies could be enacted to better suit their RRR school context. I began with the least threatening questions first, explored brief responses and developed new questions as unexpected leads arose during the interviews.

I shared my draft interview guide with my PhD advisors and colleagues to elicit feedback and refine the process. Their feedback identified some personal biases and assumptions as well as closed-ended questions. Other feedback exposed questions that would not suit the breadth of the knowledge, understanding and language in all school communities. I rephrased questions to deliver an unbiased and open-ended set of questions that could encourage authentic responses and allow participant stories to be told.

Observation process. During each site visit, I attended a staff meeting, spent time in staffrooms during lunch and class time, walked around the playground during lunchtimes and attended a family lunch at Rural School. I specifically observed the situated and professional materials, external context and conversations about policy enactment at each school site. 'What has to be done' in terms of policy ranged from school uniform to national curriculum, so it was important to document visual artefacts of all policy matters. In my observations, I gathered field notes by reconstructing dialogue and noting activities, processes, and demographic information. I noted the physical setting of the school, relationships between school community members and interactions between school community members.

I recorded details related to my observations in a field notebook and kept a field diary to chronicle my own thoughts, feelings, experiences and perceptions throughout the research process. To avoid the possibility of school community members deliberately changing their behaviour while being observed, I maintained a friendly rapport. I conducted observations in

an informal and unobtrusive manner and made sure to make notes after observations had occurred. The observation process enabled me to connect school community members' interview responses with their behaviour in their natural setting.

In grounded theory, data collection stops when no new conceptualisations emerge and when theoretical saturation has been reached. Urquhart (2013) explains that this is difficult in a PhD project given the time and scope. Rather than collecting new data, I revisited the data multiple times to saturate the theory and solidify categories for analysis.

Data Analysis

As soon as data are acquired in grounded theory studies, analysis begins. Data analysis is a creative interaction between the researcher and the data (Scheurich, 1995). The researcher is responsible for contextualising the data in the broader aims of the project by analysing what the data might mean (Scheurich, 1995).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I initially employed a thematic analysis process as part of a case study methodology. In this process, I followed a series of steps including organising and preparing data, exploring and coding the data, describing and developing themes, representing findings, and validating findings. The thematic analysis revealed several themes that included *capability, clarity, collaboration, communication, consistency, consultation and context*. When I changed my methodology to employ a grounded theory approach, I re-examined the data and employed grounded theory analysis strategies. Grounded theory analysis differs from other methods of qualitative analysis as it is not typically confined to the linear process of coding. Instead, coding occurs throughout the analysis using constant comparison, theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity to inspect data for new properties of categories and write memos to develop a theory. The next section discusses each of these strategies used to generate the substantive theory.

Coding. In constructivist grounded theory, coding is used to conceptualise what is happening in the data and to understand what it means (Charmaz, 2014). Coding allows researchers to ask questions about the data, engage in sensemaking processes and explore how the data responds to the research aims (Creswell, 2015). Grounded theory coding consists of at least two phases: initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding is a third level of coding advocated by Glaser (1978) in his variant of grounded theory. However, this third level of coding was not used in this constructivist grounded theory study as Charmaz (2014) explains that theoretical codes are sophisticated and particularly challenging for novice researchers. Charmaz (2014) suggests that as theoretical coding relies on known codes, the extent to which the coding is applied to research, as opposed to seeing it emerge from research, is ambiguous. She explains that theoretical coding tends to force data into pre-existing frameworks, which contradicts the purpose of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Several steps were taken to prepare the data for initial and focused coding. Due to the large amount of information gathered during this study, the raw interview and observation data were organised. This involved transcribing interviews and typing up field notes. Although Glaser (1978) advocates for coding from notes rather than transcribed interviews, Charmaz (2014) explains that this approach assumes objective transparency. A researcher will recall and record the most telling material from an interview.

For this study, interviews were transcribed by an external transcriber. Upon receiving the text transcriptions, I listened back to the interview while reading the transcription to check for accuracy and note any significant gestures, emphasis or expressions (Barbour, 2011). Scheurich (1995) explains that transcribed text decontextualises the words when the nonverbal aspects of communication disappear, so this process allowed meaning to be better understood.

After listening closely to the recordings multiple times while reading transcriptions, the transcriptions and field notes were categorised into folders in a qualitative data computer program called NVivo. NVivo offers efficient management of qualitative data and a complete toolkit for coding and analysis (Creswell, 2015). Within NVivo, data were stored in archival folders that contained all relevant documents and materials according to each school and each school community group. Creating archival folders enabled me to make sense of the complex data and facilitate searching through data, which was useful when coding commenced. Initially, I began coding using case study methodology; however, upon employing grounded theory methodology, I coded using initial coding and focused coding techniques.

Initial coding. Initial coding is considered a foundational technique in grounded theory as it provides an open analysis of the data where all unique insights are possible (Urquhart, 2013). Initial coding exposes data that is important and begins to guide the direction of the theory (Urquhart, 2013). In initial coding, researchers ask themselves, *what does the data suggest and leave unsaid* (Charmaz, 2014)?

Glaser (1978) and Charmaz (2014) recommend initial coding line-by-line to receive a detailed understanding of the data and avoid preconceptions of where the theory 'should' go. Using line-by-line coding brings the researcher into the data, which allows every aspect of the data to be studied (Charmaz, 2014). Line-by-line coding is particularly useful when analysing processes such as policy enactment because researchers can define implicit meanings and actions (Charmaz, 2014).

I began an initial line-by-line coding process in NVivo by analysing the data and determining what was important. Initially, I found myself still coding according to themes found through the case study methodology such as *capability, capacity, clarity, collaboration, commitment, compliance, communication, culture, consistency, consultation,*

consideration, context and *community*. I found these themes to be too broad and conceptual, which did not enable thorough analysis. Charmaz (2014) recommends attempting to code with words that reflect participants' actions so focus can remain on the analysis rather than making conceptual leaps. I changed my initial thematic codes to create provisional codes that explained how the school communities enacted policies and responded to context when enacting these policies. I coded according to the meanings they held of these processes and how and why these meanings evolved.

During line-by-line coding, I asked myself questions adapted from Charmaz (2014) about the data to identify contextualised policy enactment actions and processes:

- *How can I define the contextualised policy enactment process?*
- *How does this process develop?*
- *How do school community members act while involved in policy enactment?*
- *What do the school community members think and feel while involved in contextualised policy enactment?*
- *What are the consequences of contextualised policy enactment?*

Using these questions, a range of initial and provisional codes were determined that reflected meanings and actions from the RRR school communities' experiences. Examples of these initial codes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Example of Initial Codes

Excerpt from Interview Transcript	**Initial Open Code**
"Recognise that, you know, my level of success as an indigenous student in [Remote School] is probably very different to someone who is sitting in [Metropolitan School] in	Contesting metropolitan privilege

Brisbane. So, recognise that success is a word that is different for everyone."	
"I think over time it's getting better. The change in leadership has definitely improved that. People are not as afraid to ask questions… It is improving, which is making it, you know, a more enjoyable, positive place to work."	Explaining impact of good leadership
"In terms of my colleagues. And same with the kids really, I've taken all of like 7-12 months to develop relationships with the kids, which I totally get, because they have such a high turnover"	Developing relationships in the community
"If they were going to make changes that impact you directly, why would you not ask for your input, what you thought before… As a leader you want to ask what's the impact going to be? How can we make it best for you?"	Asserting perspectives through agency
"There's a bunch of stuff we're dealing with that possibly other schools don't have to, and just prioritising those things before, you know, implementing policies."	Comparing metropolitan capability with RRR capability

As codes were constructed in this grounded theory research, I made every attempt to be reflexive in how my previous experiences in RRR schools influenced my interpretations of the research and coded accordingly (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) explains that this reflexive process is important:

> we construct codes because we are actively naming data – even when we believe our codes form a perfect fit with actions and events in the studied world. We may think our codes capture the empirical reality. Yet it is *our* view: we choose the words that

constitute our codes. Thus, we define what we see as significant in the data and describe what we think is happening (p. 115).

To further avoid choosing words and phrases that I ascribed to the data, I interpreted the participants' meaning and identified significant words and phrases they had used to form initial provisional codes (Birks & Mills, 2011). In comparison to my initial thematic analysis, this grounded theory approach delved deeper into the school community meanings in their language and experience. These provisional codes simultaneously categorised, summarised and accounted for each piece of data (Charmaz, 2014).

Focused coding and categorising. Focused, or selective, coding directs the analysis early in the research process (Charmaz, 2014). During focused coding, the most useful initial codes are synthesised and analysed against the data, which advances the theoretical direction of the study (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) explains that focused coding determines the adequacy and conceptual strength of the initial codes by comparing them with data and distinguished codes that have a greater analytic power. She further explains that engaging in thorough initial coding means it is easier to identify which codes should be explored as categories (Charmaz, 2014).

During focused coding, categories become more definite and saturated with data (Urquhart, 2013). Categories are a conceptual element in a grounded theory; they explain ideas or processes in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) suggests that individuals treat focused codes as tentative categories, which prompts researchers to scrutinise them further. Charmaz (2014) explains that this type of concentrated and active involvement in the analysis process is a strength of grounded theory.

Focused coding is used to limit data to categories and subcategories that relate to the core category: the major category that relates to the research problem (Glaser, 1978). The core category is selected when the researcher can see relationships between categories, sub-

categories, their properties and dimensions (Birks & Mills, 2011). Glaser (1978) and Charmaz (2006) note that there can be more than one core category. A great number of categories may start to develop in this process so grouping of data might start to occur (Urquhart, 2013).

This stage of coding revealed the core categories as the major focus of the study, which deepened the analysis. Like the initial coding process, I used the coding function in NVivo to complete this process, which made the constant comparison of categories easier to determine. The focused coding process enabled dimensions of the research problem to become clear as I synthesised the adequacy and conceptual strength of my initial codes. I asked myself questions adapted from Charmaz (2014) to determine which codes would best serve as focused codes or categories:

- What patterns do my initial codes reveal?
- Which of these codes best account for the data?
- How do the codes compare?
- What do these comparisons indicate?
- Do the focused codes reveal gaps in the data?

Multiple focused codes were revealed, which included, *recognising context, communicating within the school community, collaborating with internal and external stakeholders, determining capability of the school community* and *committing to enacting policies within context.* These categories emerged from my own understanding of the data as well as language used by the participants. It was noted that some of these categories were the same as those found in the case study thematic analysis.

Due to the number of codes, I debated their meaning and relationships by grouping focused codes together and writing memos about the relationships between these properties. I

considered the names of the codes and the ways in which they represented the data. I also considered how some focused codes were an attribute of other broader codes. I further noticed that reduction occurred when I unified categories or properties to formulate the theory with a smaller and more relevant set of higher-level concepts (Urquhart, 2013).

The provisional focused codes were reduced to, *providing agency to all stakeholders; building trust between all stakeholders; recognising place; using available physical, human and financial resources; determining the capacity of the school community; evaluating the value of education in the community; identifying policy aims and enactment processes; translating policies to school context and values; communicating policies to the school community;* and *evaluating the policy in context.*

I initially determined that these focused codes would become categories as they identified conceptual elements of the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, as data analysis continued, I determined that these focused codes would form the properties of my categories as they were not sufficiently generalised. Once my theory emerged, I also reworded some of these properties to allow the school community to engage with the language used. The focused codes then became *being heard, building capability, building trust, using what is available, building capacity, engaging community values, acknowledging the tyranny of distance, identifying what will work, translating for context, communicating the why, practicing policy* and *evaluating the fit.*

To conceptually explicate these properties, I sought to obtain overall core categories. I used constant comparison to compare each school site and each school community group. By comparing different types of groups by location and school role within the broader education system, the scope of the theory was further increased. These different types of groups enabled me to identify fundamental differences and similarities while also verifying the usefulness of categories.

I determined three core categories: *forming collaborative relationships, recognising contextual actualities* and *developing a purposeful policy enactment process*. Again, I reflected on the language I had used and wanted the categories to be more conceptual and accessible to the school community so changed the language of the codes to *enacting with people, enacting in place* and *enacting with purpose.* These categories were active and reflected what the school communities were experiencing when enacting policies in their school context.

These diverse core categories and their properties started to become theoretically saturated, which meant the data responded to each category fully (Strauss & Glaser, 2004). I was able to code data specifically to the chosen categories by investigating relationships between the categories and creating a comprehensive theory. As I created conceptual categories to explain what was happening in RRR schools, I was able to move toward defining generic processes that transcended the bounds of the study (Charmaz, 2014).

Constant comparison. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that constant comparative analysis is used to generate theories. Constant comparison is the process of continuously comparing data and the categories to which that data belongs. Constant comparative methods establish analytic distinctions at each level of analytic work. These processes should intertwine throughout the research while making the generation of theory rich, complex and grounded in the data. Using comparative analysis to develop a theory means the theory is a process that is ever developing, allowing a detailed and multifaceted theory to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As mentioned in the previous section, I used constant comparative methods at the coding stage of analysis to compare statements within and between interviews and observations. I entered what Charmaz (2014, p.115) calls an “interactive analytic space” where I acted on the data and checked fresh ideas against the data. I then continually

interacted, compared, reviewed and relived the RRR school community experience through the data. I compared interviews and observations across different schools and between different school community groups. Using constant comparison methods between schools and school community groups, created more insightful theoretical analysis allowing me to identify subtle patterns and significant processes. I continued to use constant comparison methods throughout the analysis.

Theoretical sensitivity. In grounded theory data analysis, researchers employ theoretical sensitivity throughout the study to ensure the theory continually emerges from the data. Theoretical sensitivity is the ability to understand which data is important to theory development and is therefore worth being coded (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sensitivity allows the researcher to constantly reflect on what is meaningful to the theory, what the theory does, how it was conceived and what it achieves (Birks & Mills, 2015). Employing theoretical sensitivity allows grounded theorists to discern meaning and define distinctive properties of categories. I employed theoretical sensitivity throughout the analysis process by focusing on theory development and making sure the theory was rooted in school community perspectives. The longer I was immersed in the data, my theoretical sensitivity to analysis advanced, and the theory was strengthened.

Theory Building

After data are collected and analysed using grounded theory methodology, a theory is built. Theory is defined by Charmaz (2014) as a relationship between abstract concepts that aims to either explain or understand. In constructivist grounded theory, the researcher theorises the interpretive work of the research participants while also acknowledging their own interpretation of the data. When developing a grounded theory that can be applied, the theory must fit the area in which it will be used. It must also be readily understandable by laypeople and be sufficiently general for use in a variety of situations. Finally, the theory

must allow for the person applying the theory to understand and have flexibility in the situation with which they are applying it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Urquhart (2013) explains that the main characteristic of grounded theory is theory building. There are two basic types of theory that can be built: substantive and formal (Strauss & Glaser, 1967). Substantive theory is an explanatory theory that is developed to explain a social phenomenon or social pattern (Strauss & Glaser, 1967). On the other hand, formal theory is developed for a conceptual area of inquiry and is usually applicable across a range of substantive areas (Birks & Mills, 2015). A substantive theory was chosen for this study as it addresses the subjective experiences of a particular set of RRR school communities. Although moving from substantive to formal theory is considered a pillar of grounded theory, it was not deemed authentic to generalise this grounded theory to diverse school community groups. There was also no time or scope to interview diverse school community groups.

Memo writing. To aid theory development, I used theoretical memos. During each phase of coding, theoretical memos were written to help make sense of the data. Glaser (1978) explained that theoretical memos are a key tool used in grounded theory. This tool gives researchers the freedom to understand their own data. Urquhart (2013) explains that theoretical memos capture the 'lightbulb' moments of the data (p. 110). Charmaz further (2014) explains memo writing:

> memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallise questions and directions for you to pursue. Memo writing creates an interactive space for conversing with yourself about your data, codes, ideas and hunches (p. 240).

During the lengthy and laborious process of open and selective coding, it was helpful for me to remove myself from the research and write down my ideas about the theory that

was emerging. It was a beneficial opportunity to engage in reflexivity to avoid preconceptions about the data (Charmaz, 2014). Memo writing provided a space for making connections between data, codes and categories. I sorted and ordered codes and categories, which prompted me to compare categories at an abstract level (see Figure 8).

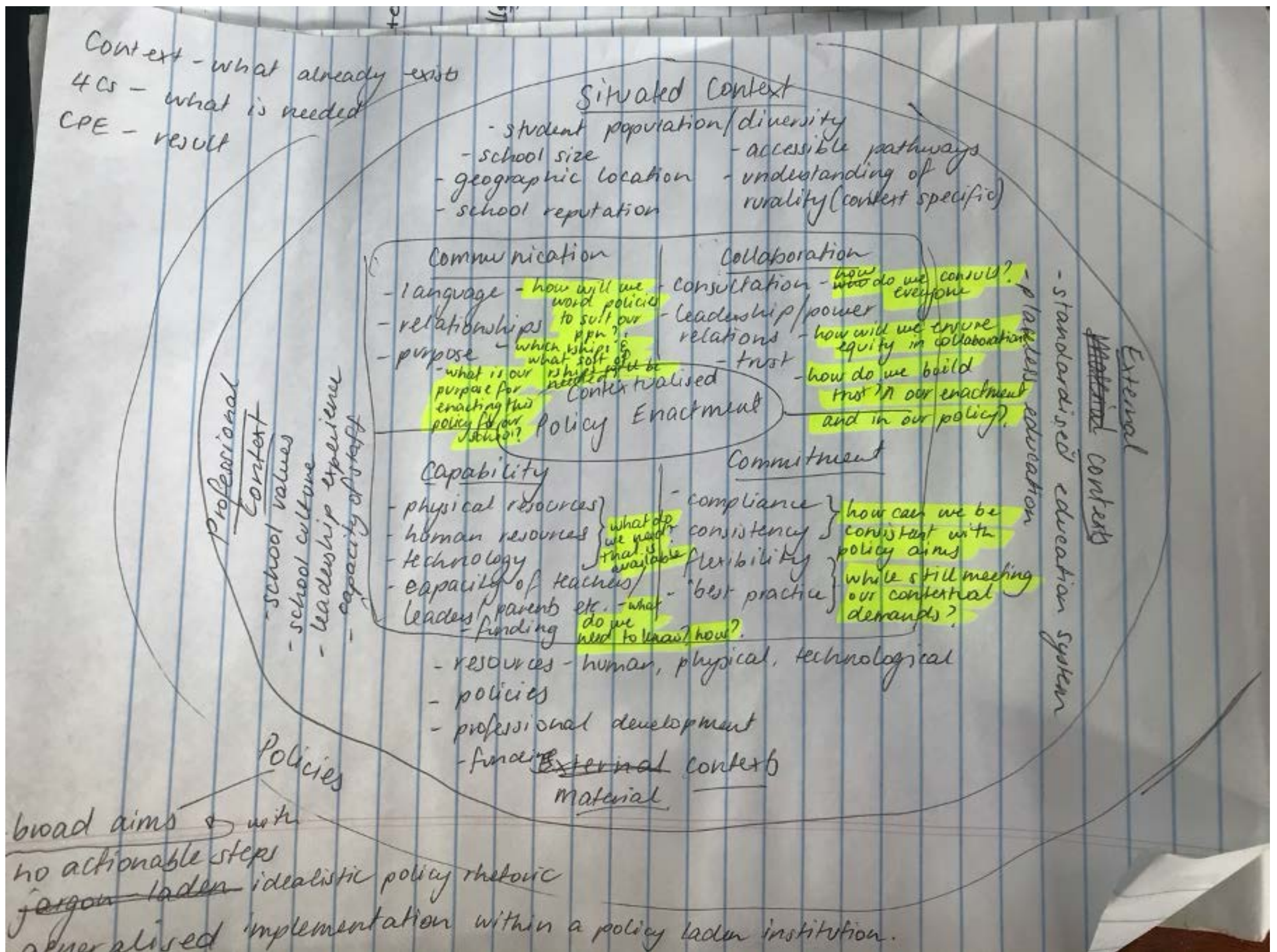


Figure 8: Sorting and ordering codes and categories in a memo.

Most of my memos contained diagrams or conceptual maps to support the theorising process. Strauss (1987) calls these diagrams integrative diagrams: a visual device that helps integrate categories into one diagram. Adopting this technique helped produce a map of the findings. Charmaz (2014) explains that sorting, diagramming and integrating memos in this way helps a researcher see the scope and direction of categories as well as the relationships

between them. I created many versions of these diagrams (see Figure 9 and 10), that built on each other and gave direction to the substantive theory.

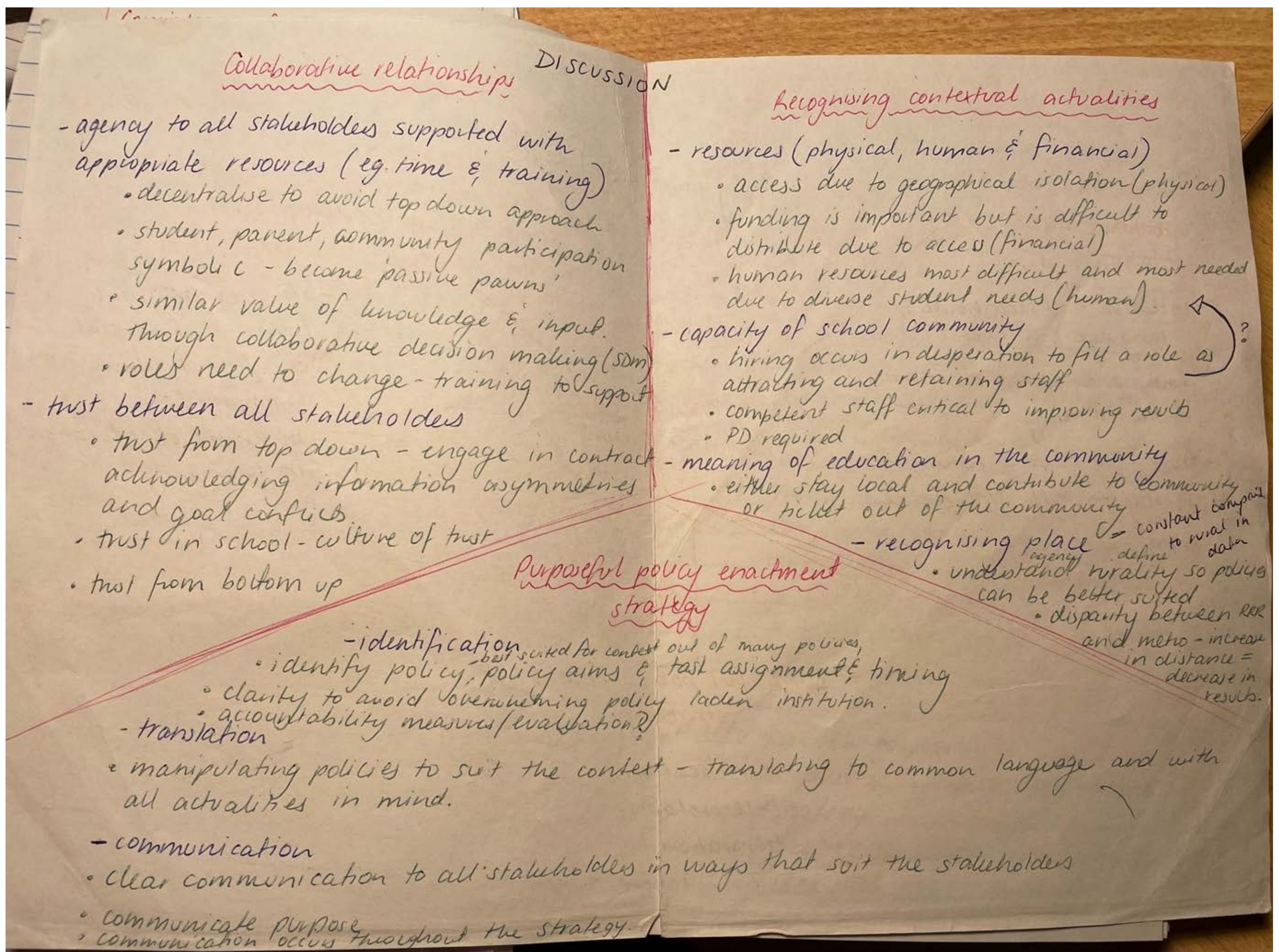


Figure 9: Example of integrative diagrams used for building theory

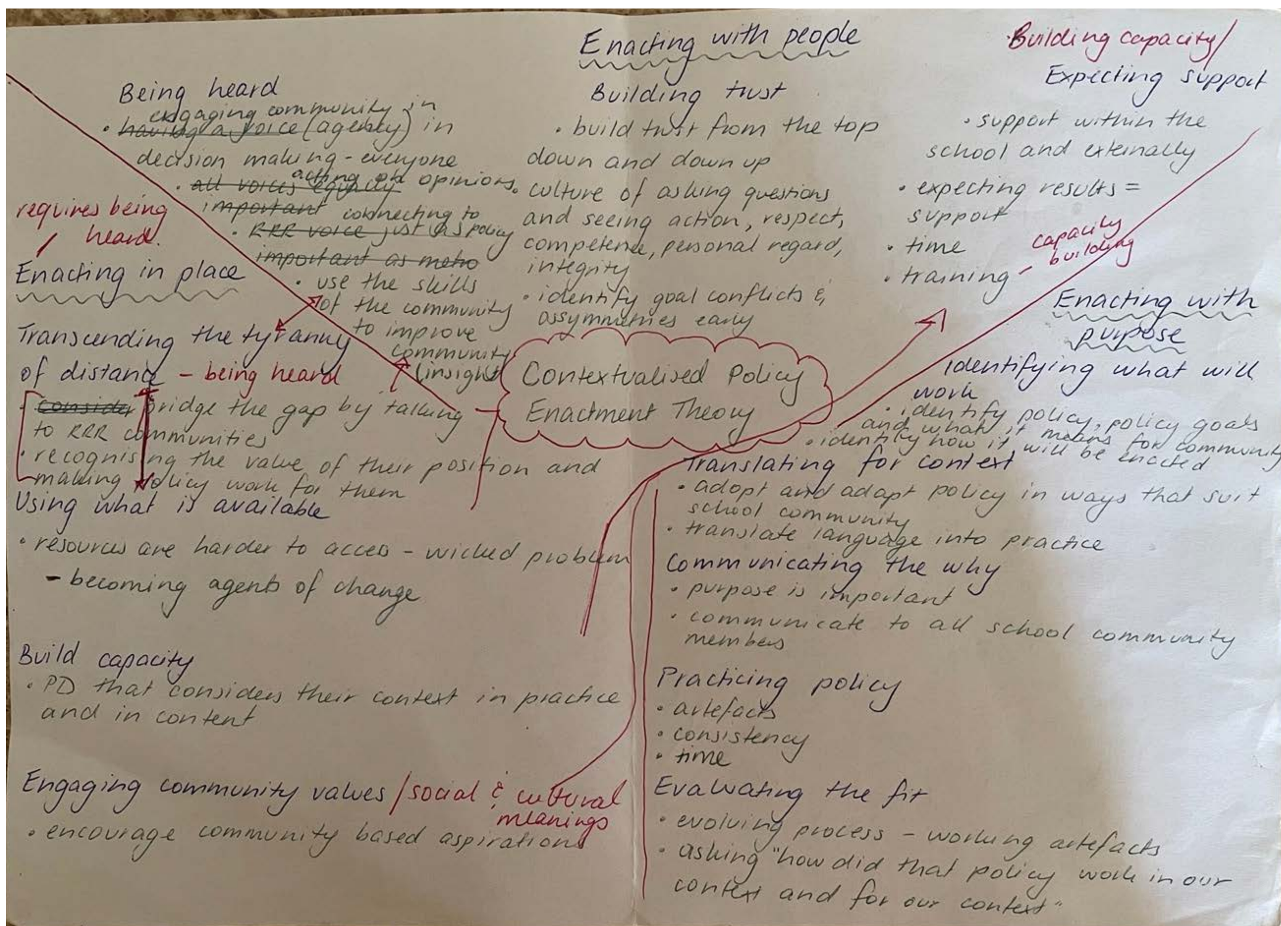


Figure 10 Example of building upon previous integrative diagrams to build theory

Writing Up

Charmaz (2014) explains that grounded theory writing presents the relationships uncovered during the analytic work. To write the theory, I collected the coded data and memos. I then presented the theory in a diagram to demonstrate the core categories, their properties and the relationships between them. I described each core category and its properties using narrative, which was supported by quotes from school community members. I revisited and rewrote parts of the theory multiple times as my thinking progressed, which Charmaz (2014) says is part of grappling with the material. Presenting the theory in a diagram and then using narratives to describe the theory was deemed a suitable form that

educators, policy makers and the broader education community could understand and use. The theory and findings are discussed further in Chapter 6.

Once the theory had been written, I related the theory to other theories in present literature to ensure validity. I extended the primary literature review and refined it for scope and relevance through an evolving literature review. In the evolving review examined how the emergent theory confirmed or contradicted the literature, revisiting the literature in a more detailed manner. Peer reviewed literature was searched using Google Scholar, JCU Library OneSearch, ERIC, EBSCOHost, Informit and JSTOR. These databases were selected due to the range of available articles relevant to policy contextualisation in RRR secondary schools. Titles and abstracts were searched for combinations of the following keywords and phrases: *policies, regional, rural and remote education, policy enactment, agency, shared decision making* and *context.* In addition, reference lists of identified articles were scanned for relevant literature. Only full text and peer reviewed papers published in English were considered. New literature was found that furthered the credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness of CPET. The evolving literature review is outlined in the discussion chapter that is offered in Chapter 7.

Data Storage and Management

At the completion of the constructivist grounded theory process and in accordance with approvals and commitment provided to JCU and the Department of Education, I adopted procedures to ensure the integrity and confidentiality of data during processing and storage. All identifying information was removed from the data to ensure anonymity of participants and schools. Raw data were stored on Research Data JCU and will be for 5 years post study completion. Signed consent forms will be retained for 15 years in accordance with the JCU Human Ethics Guidelines.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined how I conducted the study and developed a theory grounded in data. I explained how I used a primary review of the literature to determine the research context. I then explained how I decided on data collection methods and detailed the data collection and analysis processes. The next two chapters detail the findings determined from the primary literature review as well as the findings from the data collection and analysis methods.

Chapter 5

Situating the Study

Chapter Outline

This chapter aims to set the scene for the constructivist grounded theory findings by providing insight into the contextual actualities of RRR schools. This chapter enables readers to understand the context of this study by discussing the situated, professional, material and external context of RRR education and policy enactment. The chapter will begin by justifying the primary literature review. The primary literature and findings will then be reviewed.

Contextual Actualities in Regional Rural and Remote Schools

A primary review of the literature justified the need for this study and determined the extent of current knowledge on the topic. In addition, this literature review contributed to the written component for my mid-candidature review milestone required as a PhD student. Completion of this milestone was granted based on the presentation of a substantial piece of work. This primary literature review was submitted to a peer review journal and was accepted for publication. The following is a copy of the study that was published in the journal, *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* (Herbert, 2020).

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Chapter Summary

This primary literature review highlighted the contextual actualities that RRR schools consider when they enact policies. The chapter placed the study in context and presented significant background information regarding the situated, professional, material and external context of RRR schools. It also discussed the ways in which these factors affect policy enactment. Understanding these factors highlighted the need to examine how RRR school communities can adapt policies to suit these contextual actualities. The following chapter considers adapting policies according to RRR school community members in FNQ. I use data from school community members to explicate the categories and properties of the grounded theory.

Chapter 6

Findings

Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I present the findings that emerged from the research data. I explain the theoretical model of Contextualised Policy Enactment Theory (CPET) that emerged as a result of careful data analysis, using a grounded theory methodology. The theory provides an explanation as to how school community members perceive and experience policy enactment in RRR areas of FNQ. CPET incorporates three dimensions to help achieve contextualised policy enactment: enacting with people, enacting in place and enacting with purpose.

In this chapter, I present a conceptual overview of the theory that emerged from the data. I then describe the three dimensions and relevant properties of this theory using supporting relevant data. I use the dimensions of this theory as headings within this chapter and use the dimension properties as subheadings with the intention of grounding readers in CPET and directing them through the analysis (as per Charmaz, 2014; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

Overview of Contextualised Policy Enactment Theory

CPET is a theoretical model that emerged from a study in three RRR school communities in FNQ. The purpose of this theory is to explain how school communities adapt policies to suit individual school contexts. The process by which the school communities in this study were able to best adapt policies to suit their school context was through contextualised policy enactment. The definition of contextualised policy enactment that emerged from the research is a dynamic, collaborative sense-making process where policy is interpreted, translated and communicated into practice through the actualities of context. School community members described the process of contextualised policy enactment using terms such as “adaptable”, “communication”, “trust”, “consultation”, “consideration”,

“collaboration”, “capability”, “flexibility”, “rural voice” and “support”. In contrast, they described decontextualised policy enactment processes using terms such as “non-negotiable”, “top-down”, “unclear”, “unsupported” and “unsuitable”.

CPET is a multifaceted theory with interconnected and dynamic dimensions and properties (see Figure 11). CPET seeks to explain the who, where and how of policy enactment by incorporating three dimensions: enacting with people, enacting in place and enacting with purpose.

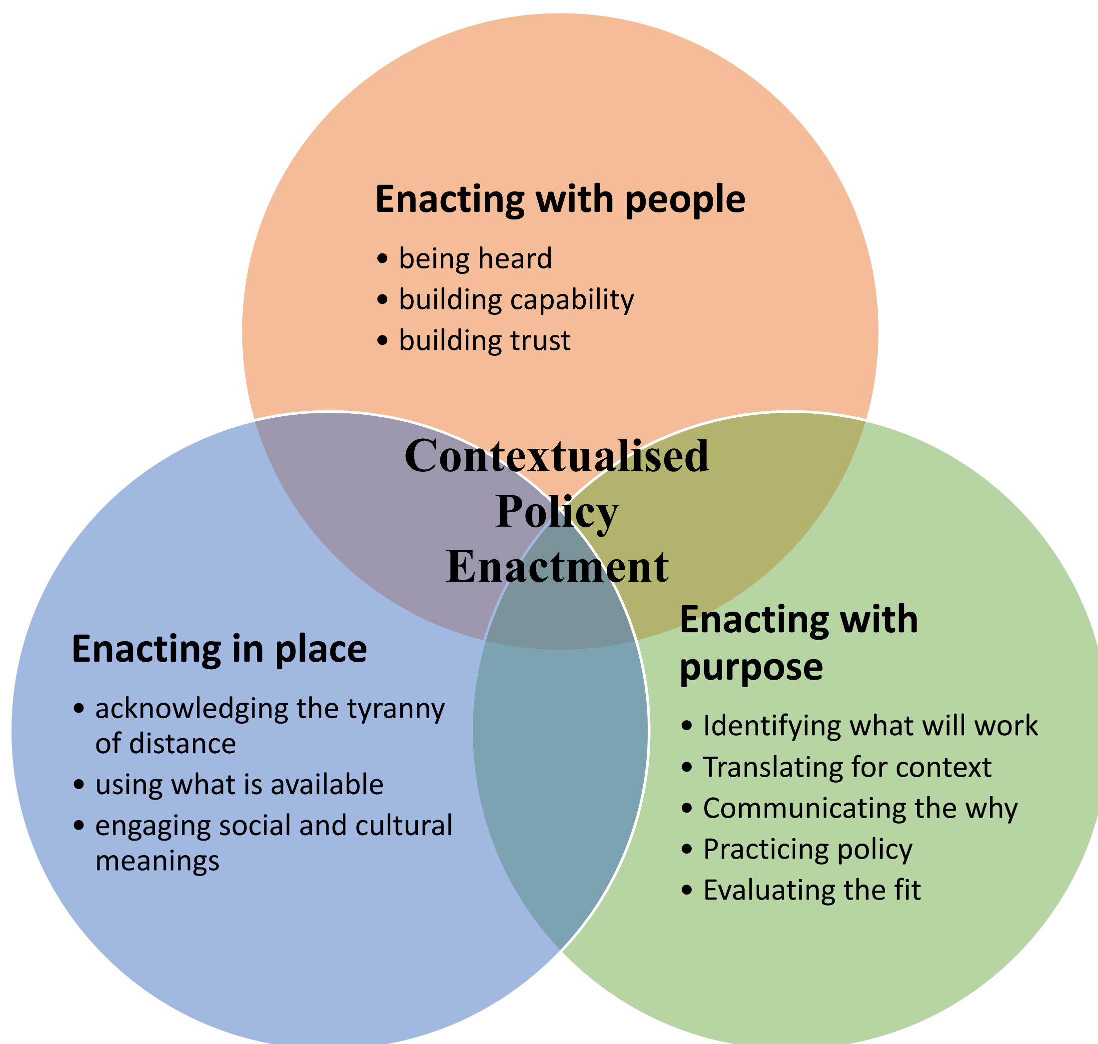

Figure 11: Contextual Policy Enactment Theory (CPET): How to adapt policies to individual school communities through contextualised policy enactment

School community members deemed enacting with people to be an integral part of determining school community needs and contextual actualities when adapting policies to suit school context. In seeking to respond to the needs of the school community, school community members were determined to enact policies in place, considering the social and cultural meanings of their location and using what is available to enact the policy effectively. In conjunction with enacting policies with people and in place, school community members determined that policies need to be enacted with purpose, following a purposeful enactment process that makes the policy work for the school community. Although the theory emerged from a study of RRR schools, the model itself is not exclusively for use in RRR practice. Rather, the remainder of this chapter includes descriptions of each of these theoretical dimensions and their properties with supporting evidence from the school communities studied to demonstrate how the model came to be and an example of how it can be applied.

Enacting With People

Contextualised policy enactment requires involvement from school community members who hold various roles in the school. Enacting with people is a dimension of CPET that acknowledges the role of school community members when enacting policies in context. As shown in Figure 12, the enacting with people dimension incorporates three properties: being heard, building capability, and building trust.

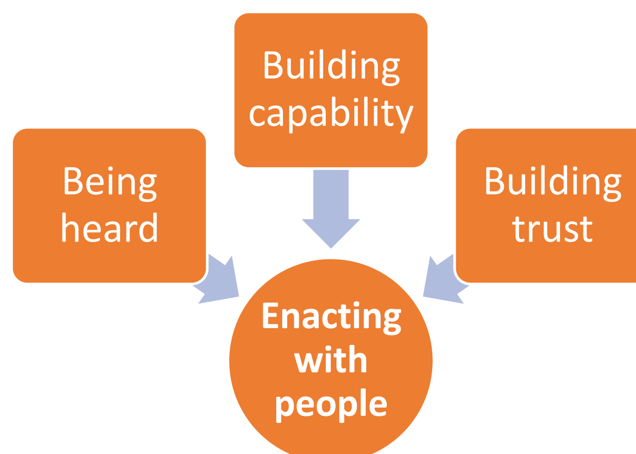

Figure 12: Enacting with people dimension and properties

This study found that when multiple school community members such as parents, students, teachers, principals, regional directors and policy makers have agency and support in the policy enactment process, trust is built, and policies are better contextualised to suit the school. When the school community is welcomed into the policy enactment process through forums, meetings, surveys and informal but authentic discussion, they feel heard and supported. Being part of these decision-making processes means school community members determine that their opinion is valued, and the needs of their communities are being acted upon. Consequently, they take ownership of the policy in practice and engage authentically and successfully in the policy enactment process.

Being heard. The practice of being heard aligns the school community and their relevant context to the policy. School community members' opinions and decisions are listened to and acted on accordingly. For school community members in this study, being heard means school community members offer their knowledge as valuable insight into the particularities of their context and the unique impact that policy has on their outcomes. A Rural School teacher called this *"insider"* knowledge. By offering insider knowledge, school community members believe they can inform best practices and make decisions about policies that represent their community: *"because we're from here, it's nice to represent our own school…it's like representing our culture as well."* (Remote School student). The principal of Regional School commented that when insider knowledge is used to inform policy decisions, the school community feels more connected to the policy. He explained, "*the more that we're involved in it, the more we understand it, the more we can adapt it and pass on the message – the true message."*

Being heard as a regional, rural and remote school community. According to school community members, insider knowledge is understood only by those who have direct

experience in that community. A Regional School parent explained, "*unless [policy makers] have actually got a background that they've come from a rural area, they wouldn't understand."* This knowledge is specific to the unique dynamics of a community such as size, relationships, geographical location and subsequent access to human and physical resources of the community. Without understanding these unique dynamics, school community members explained it is hard for policy makers to know what policy is best suited for their context. For instance, a Remote School student commented: *"[policy makers] don't know anything because we're a small community."*

The Rural School principal gave an example of how insider knowledge of school communities impacts the way policies are enacted. He recalled that in 2012, a category 5 cyclone hit the area in which the school community is located. Although there were policies in place to respond to any disasters that might occur in Queensland, the principal said he needed a more localised response. When the cyclone hit, the principal explained he needed to close the school for community safety; however, in accordance with centralised policies, only the regional director had the power to do so. The Rural School principal said that rather than decisions coming from a person who was far removed from the situation, *"the wealth of the solution lay within the community themselves."* He determined that school community members equipped with insider knowledge were best able to respond to the needs of their community.

To gain insight into this context specific insider knowledge, school community members suggested that policy makers experience RRR school communities for themselves. One Regional School parent suggested, *"come and see the school and look what we need in the school."* Seeing and experiencing the school community not only allows policy makers to see what RRR schools need but also what RRR schools can offer. Another parent from Rural School recommended, *"come and visit our school and have a look at what else they offer that*

the city guys don't have. Like the Agriculture, you know, the cattle, the Aquafarming." The Regional School principal explained that understanding more of what RRR schools need and can offer *"provides true insight into communities and a contextualisation of what the policy means in that community."* This insight provides a far greater understanding of context as opposed to *"what context looks like on paper"* (Remote School principal).

The principals of each school explained that there are examples of policy makers starting to engage RRR perspectives, particularly in the era of virtual face-to-face meetings via Zoom and Skype. The Rural School principal spoke about one example of a forum he was involved in on behalf of his school community and as a representative of RRR areas:

> *I'm in a State rural and regional committee…having reference groups that utilise people in different areas, so that they don't have to get there, is really important. So, they get some idea about what's happening in rural and regional areas.*

This opportunity to provide insider knowledge of RRR contextual actualities offers RRR people a voice and an opportunity to be heard.

Being heard as school community members. Being heard values the knowledge and contributions not only of RRR communities but also of the individual school community members within these communities. In practice, being heard means students, parents, teachers, principals and other school community members have an equal say in policy decisions and their language, socio-economic and cultural intricacies are each acknowledged and valued. Valuing the perspectives of everyone in the school community is important for the community to be a part of policy enactment. A Regional School student rationalised that involving the school community in the decision-making process means everyone can become *"part of the conversation… to make changes that impact you directly."*

The principal at Remote School gave an example of how he included school community perspectives when enacting an inclusive practices policy earlier in the year. He

explained that initially, some parents in the community resisted the definition of inclusivity presented in policy documents. He explained that this resistance posed a challenge to how the policy would be enacted in their school. Given the small size of Remote School and the close relationship between the school and the community, the principal explained: *"we have to listen to what [the school community] think is appropriate or not."* Feedback from parents led the principal to develop a contextualised definition of inclusivity that suited the school community.

According to school community members in this study, involving school community members in policy conversations is dependent on the size and accessibility of the community. The Regional School principal said it is easy to open policy conversations to the wider school community in regional and rural areas due to the smaller size of the communities:

> *I've been in regional and metropolitan schools, and I'd say as a regional school or rural school, to get access to the community is far easier. It's only a matter of driving somewhere – you know, 5 or 10 minutes down the road – meeting that person face-to-face, come out with a vision and then link it with your community to make it happen.*

By contrast, members of the Remote School community said involving the community is difficult due to accessibility. Reliable and accessible ICT and connectivity impact the way the school collaborates with parents in particular. The Remote School principal described the problems he encountered when trying to contact people in the community:

> *I can't pick up the phone and ring every family and every community because some of the communities have no mobile reception and no landlines. Some have no capacity to have internet. Some families just don't have contact details that are up to date, so we have to physically visit them.*

School community members who are available engage in decision making processes through meetings, surveys, forums, school councils, student councils and P&C groups at the school. In some cases, informal conversations at school events are enough for the school community to feel heard. One Remote School parent explained: *"just to come together and you know, just teachers and parents, not kids… then have a yarn and, you know, talk to one another."* For the Rural School principal, using these methods of collaboration means they can capitalise on the knowledge and skills in the community: *"we use each other's skills and resources."*

Regional School is an independent school, which means the school has more independence in making decisions that regard their school community. At independent schools, all decisions go through the school council, which a regional school teacher explained includes: *"a parent rep, there's an LCC rep. So, there's all different representatives."* One Regional School teacher commented that he enjoys working at an independent state school due to the increased autonomy of the school community:

> *independent schools have a little bit more say in what they can do, as opposed to being dictated upon… If we want to do anything that's got anything to do with the kids – so if we want to change curriculum, whatever, it's not involved with parents or kids then we can do it; but anything that involves parents or kids, got to be run off by the school council. Even if you want a job. Like, for example, when I went for my job here as HOD, the third person on my interview panel was on the school council and they decided whether I got the job or not. So, the school council plays a pretty big role*.

Where school council groups and P&C groups included principal, parent and teacher perspectives, there are also methods of understanding student perspectives. At Rural School, there is a Student Leadership Team (SLT) that comprises of members of the student body.

One Rural School student said the SLT allows them an opportunity to explain how policies impact students. She said, *"a teacher thinks how a policy will help a student, but how does a student think it will help the student."* The Rural School principal noted the competent leadership displayed by students in the SLT:

> *the school captains I report to, they then give my report to the SLT, which is about 20 kids. We try to involve them in things that are pertinent to us, the Student Leadership Team has actually changed a fair bit in its structure over the last 2 or 3 years. It's a fairly good representative group.*

Although the principal suggested the SLT was representative of the whole student body, students from Rural School wanted to see a greater diversity of students on the team:

> *I reckon just by picking a few students from around the school, like not anyone in particular because you've got to get the opinions of maybe the naughty kid or the smart kid or just the one that just sits there and does nothing; but you've got to get the opinions of everyone… I think it needs to involve a range of people, because no one really takes on the opinion of the kid that gets buddied out every second lesson, because they get buddied out, which they're most of the kids we need to focus on to show them how these policies work.*

In addition, students wanted to be consulted on issues more pertinent to policy. One student said,

> *students are consulted in the range of events and activities that are brought on; like SLT, they do a lot, but it's not to do with the rules and responsibilities of students of the school, it's to do with when do we do ice-cream day.*

The principal at Rural School noted that this authentic decision making is an area for improvement for the SLT. He explained, "*we're trying to give them some areas where… which has long-term change rather than just trying to buy a new picnic table for the school."*

At Regional School, students do not have access to a consistent student forum. However, students said they could discuss their ideas and opinions with their year coordinators. One Regional School student said, *"I'd probably talk to the year coordinators first, and then if they think it's a good idea then go forward with it to the principal."* Another Regional School student said they could email a teacher or the principal if they wanted to but then explained: *"normally we just follow the rules."*

For their ideas to gain traction, students said they needed support or needed other students to "*back us"* (Regional School student) because their individual opinion was not perceived as having much power. Similarly at Remote School, students spoke about power in numbers when it came to activating student voice. One Remote School student said, *"some kids find it hard because people, like teachers ignore them."* As a solution, she said she would approach the principal about creating policies that responded to student needs:

> *another classmate of mine and I, we're going to talk to [the principal] if there's like other ways of coping, instead of everybody wagging, ditching classes and stuff like that; if they could like put something else for them to learn.*

Building capacity. Supporting the school community is crucial if policies are to be successfully enacted to suit context. School community members explained that being involved in the policy enactment process requires sufficient supportive resources to build their capacity of engaging in policy enactment. A Rural School teacher explained that this level of support helps them "*do the policy well.*"

Building capacity of staff and community members has a positive effect on policy enactment; however, due to the transient nature of school staff in RRR school communities, building capacity is an ongoing process. The Regional School principal spoke about the difficulties of building capacity in a transient community: "*I think the other hardest thing is actually getting graduates into your school, training them up after two or four years and then*

seeing them go back to the metropolitan area." To overcome this challenge, the principal at each study school attempts to build capacity locally by hiring staff from the region.

At Rural School support and capability is being built among their local staff. The Head of Department (HOD) of English at Rural School was heavily involved in writing the new Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance (SATE) English program. A Rural School teacher explained that this example of building capacity in local staff meant their school was better able to enact the SATE policy: *"so, as for English we're probably ahead of a lot of schools because we had someone who was given a position."* In another example of building capacity locally, the Rural School principal identified a recent project to employ a HOD for their school as well as the primary schools in the area. This HOD would work on engagement policies and ensure the systems in each school were aligned. The principal commented that this local role would become *"an outreach centre for the region."* He further explained that building capacity in this way means that RRR areas can access support that is otherwise only available in bigger cities: "*traditionally, those sort of resources are based in the Cairns regional area, and not here. So, that has filtered down a little bit. So, we've actually got a region that's probably a little bit cognisant of some of this, and they're supporting us to some degree."*

Another way of building capacity of school community members involved in policy enactment is to engage in professional development (PD). Due to geographic distance and isolation, RRR schools struggle to afford their teachers' time to complete the work or PD that is expected of them when taking up the challenge of enacting policies in the local context. The Remote School Principal said, *"everyone has access to PD, everyone would get to a PD outside of the area once a year."* However, PD is highly disruptive to the school community. At the time of interviewing, he explained that one teacher was attending PD in a regional centre, which, due to the distance, required the teacher to take a flight. Due to the intermittent

flight schedule, the PD activity resulted in the teacher being out of the classroom for a week. This time commitment is not only challenging for school operation but also for teachers personally. Teachers in the Rural School informed this study that undertaking PD involved a lot of travelling and time away from the classroom and family which left them feeling "*frustrated*" and as though they were "*competing on an uneven field.*"

Another challenge of RRR school community members, particularly teachers, engaging in PD is that they need to be replaced with relief teachers who are difficult to access in RRR areas in the best of times, never mind when there is a teacher shortage in Queensland. The principal at Regional School commented on the difficulty of finding relief staff in addition to accessing PD in RRR areas:

> *when you look at PD, you probably triple your budget… flights, motels and everything like that… but also then trying to replace that teacher in the school; there's not that many supply teachers to replace. And the last thing you'd wish to do is prevent your teachers from receiving PD.*

To overcome these challenges, one Rural School teacher questioned, *"in this day of technology, why can't we have our staff meet in a webinar?"* This situation is likely to have improved since March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic forced education and many PD programs to be delivered online.

Although not mentioned by any other school community group, students in RRR schools suggested ways they could build their capacity to understand the policy enactment process. A student at Rural School commented on the gap in her knowledge, saying *"I would like to learn how to be involved in policy better."* She explained that professional development for students can be added to student timetables in schools quite easily. She described what this could look like, *"just helping [students] out and like teaching them how to do it."*

When school communities engage in capacity building, school community members can demonstrate greater commitment to policy enactment. A Regional School teacher commented that for policy enactment to be effective, a commitment is required from everyone involved. He said, *"[policy enactment] means everyone, all hands on deck. No excuses, and everyone working together. I think if policy is going to work everyone has to buy into it."* However, school community members see efforts to engage school community in the policy enactment process as difficult due to geographic location and transience. A Remote School student discussed the great impact a teacher had on community involvement in policies in the school while she was there. She said,

> *one of our teachers – but she's not here anymore – she made this student council group, and heaps of students joined. They did fundraising for the school. They did discos and stuff like that, and it was pretty good for the whole school too.*

Transience and geographic location also affect parental involvement in policy enactment. At Regional School, a school council with representative members from the school community was attended infrequently. A teacher explained, *"six people can be there. Sometimes you can rock up, there can be 20 maybe."* Infrequent attendance is due to the distance it takes to attend some of these meetings. A Regional School parent said where she lives requires her to travel up and down a mountain range, which prevents her from always attending the meetings. She argued such variance in attendance can lead to inconsistent decision-making that does not represent the entire school community.

The principal at Rural School also encountered challenges with commitment to the policy enactment process due to few school community members wanting to be involved in policy discussions. He discussed the P&C group and the ways in which they can influence policy decisions: "*they're really good, but they're also a very small representative group. So, I think that's a difficulty."* A similar issue with P&C groups was experienced in Remote

School where due to lack of involvement from parents, a P&C meeting had not occurred since the previous year. A parent from Remote School explained the reason for the decline in participation: *"sometimes parents disengage themselves from the school because when Education came in and put a block to stop the community out, the school just went down."* Therefore, to see an improvement in commitment, there needs to be an improvement in trusting relationships and methods of communication in the school community.

Building trust. When school community members were heard, they also wanted to feel as though their opinions were trusted and acted upon. School communities have varying levels of trust between community members, which affects policy enactment. To enact policies effectively and productively with people, school community members explained that trust needs to be apparent from the top down and the bottom up – between school community members, the school community, senior education staff and policy makers. Building trust between everyone involved in policy enactment in schools connects people to each other, to the policy and to the decisions made.

Building trust between school communities and policy makers. Building trust is important for school communities to feel connected to the policy and to feel as though the policy itself can be trusted and is valuable for their school. However, when school communities and policy makers have different agendas, trust is compromised. When school community members do not trust policy makers, they cannot see the value and purpose of policies emerging from Brisbane. As the Remote School principal explained, communities begin to feel *"[policies] are being done to us rather than for us."* School community members indicated that irrelevant policies that are not valued in the community create a level of accountability that does not add value to education. A Regional School teacher questioned this level of accountability:

[Policy enactment] is to tick a box… is that really making me better as a teacher – and that we are, educators of students – by doing that am I now a better educator? No… you keep getting more and more stuff till people become more and more resentful of it.

A Rural School parent also spoke about unnecessary accountability placed on school communities when policies are not relevant or valued: "*[a policy] doesn't think about the kids, it's just ticking the government boxes or whatever they have to please the next people up there with no faces.*"

When policies are seen as an accountability measure, they cannot be enacted with fidelity. Policies become perceived as impersonal, irrelevant and placeless documents that do not serve the students or the school community. Therefore, the school community becomes resentful of policies and policy makers. A Regional School teacher exemplified this resentment. She said, *"policies are just flying in the face of everything that schools are systematically built to deliver. So, it's always going to be pushing something uphill."*

To build trust in policies and policy makers, school community members suggest being heard and then having their decisions acted upon. When there is no consequential action from their consultation, school community members fail to see the point in sharing their perspectives. A Remote School teacher cited an example of a time she was part of a meeting with FNQ regional office staff to change safety policies. She recalled that ten different senior education staff, including the Restrictive Practices Advisor, the Assistant Regional Director (ARD) and senior school panel members once flew into the community on a chartered flight. She was one of a group of teachers who were asked for their opinions on what needed to be improved but said she doubted much would change:

We have all these people turn up and they all want my time or a small bit of the staff's time all at once. So, you get not depth, you get a very, you know, light brush over the

top of what we need help with, and then they disappear again. It's often like asking too much, or they'll just kind of wait until we stop talking about it and it will go back to normal again. It's like if we just ignore it long enough. We'll just put a few things in place on face value. What we actually need, and what we're asking for, isn't done.

According to school community members, discussing policy with school communities requires consideration, consultation, collaboration and action. If school community perspectives are listened to and acted upon, they feel as though policy is being done for and with their school community. Therefore, they trust the policy and policy makers and are more prepared to enact policies with fidelity.

Building trust in school communities. In addition to building trust between school communities and policy makers, trust also needs to be built between school community members. Building trust in school communities is dependent on the school culture. Where a proactive and positive school culture is present, school community members trust each other to enact policies in a way that suits their school. According to school community members, a proactive and positive school culture is characterised by asking questions, respect, competence, personal regard, sharing the load and integrity. School community members explained that positive, united and collaborative relationships are a sign of trust and effective policy enactment.

Rural School community members discussed the positive school culture in their community. They trusted that they were being asked to complete policy enactment processes that were purposeful. A Rural School teacher cited evidence of this trusting, open and respectful culture at his school: *"within staffrooms you're able to offer opinions and talk to HODs on a very relaxed basis, and it might be that extended community, because we're seeing each other all the time."* The Rural School principal was proud of this trusting culture and attributed it to the small and tight-knit nature of the community. He noted,

the closeness between teachers and students is closer at a rural school, because they see them in an external sense as well. So, they play touch football with them, they see them when they go to Woolworths or to IGA. So, there is a personal interest on how well they succeed. The job then becomes easier for staff to do what they're meant to do.

When school communities are considered close, or as a Rural School student explained *"sort of family,"* each person in the policy enactment process is *"relied upon"* to work towards a common goal (Rural School Principal).

In contrast, at Remote School, there is a history of disconnect between the school and the wider community. According to a Remote School teacher, there is a widening gap between *"us"* and *"them"* which results in fractured relationships. One Remote School parent believed the divide is due to cultural and language differences. He said, *"when we used to come to school here, we got our additional law or whatever, and school education and we respect them both. But today, we haven't got that same respect there."* A Remote School teacher noted that the fractured relationships are also due to the high teacher turnover in the school and the lack of trust placed in people who would soon leave the community. She said: *"in terms of my colleagues and same with the kids really, I've taken all of like 7-12 months to develop relationships with the kids, which I totally get, because they have such a high turnover."* She explained that having these close trusting relationships is crucial in more remote towns as the school and community are so closely intertwined.

Despite past troubles, all Remote School community members were looking to build more trusting relationships, knowing that trust works as an enabler to school practice and effective policy enactment. One teacher said there was evidence of this developing:

I would say that the community of this school has changed over time, from when I first started here it was a very tense place to be. You know, there wasn't much teacher

rapport, it's a struggle with different kids that we have in our school, but I think over time it's getting better. It is improving, which is making it a more enjoyable, positive place to work.

She explained that this improvement was due to the change in leadership at the school. She said since the new principal started, "*people are not as afraid to ask questions."* The change in leadership to a principal that encourages a positive school culture means she now trusts the principal to work in the best interest of the school community. The Remote School teacher said:

I feel like [the principal] is good in saying this we definitely need to do, and this we maybe don't have to do as such… just figuring out the balance there about staff wellbeing, given our context and how… there's a bunch of stuff we're dealing with that possibly other schools don't have to, and just prioritising those things before implementing policies or paying service to whatever it might be.

In addition to building trust through a positive school culture, school community members also suggest building trust through seeing their decisions in action. Similar to seeing action from policy makers, when there is no consequential action from their consultation within the school community, school community members do not trust the policy enactment process. A Regional School teacher explained a time he had been part of a committee that wanted to change the school uniform policy. He said that despite the process, nothing eventuated: *"we went to all these meetings, there were minutes taken, there were all these surveys, and then nothing happens."* He further explained, *"people come up with great ideas and jump through all these hoops – like do their scoping document and do all this – but there isn't any change."* The principal at Regional School suggested that this feedback is crucial in building trust and determining the direction of the school. He explained, *"we've just gone through a process that we've asked our staff, we've asked kids, we've asked parents*

where they wish to see the school going; what direction. Now it's a matter of us to align that together."

Enacting in Place

School community members noted that place is specific to the people within specific areas. Place impacts day-to-day practice in schools and therefore needs to be taken into consideration when enacting policies. Enacting in place is a dimension of CPET that acknowledges the place in which a school is located when enacting policies in context. In this study, place was intertwined with rurality and RRR context as each school is in a RRR location. In these contexts, place is a sense of home that is characterised by the shared identity of people who live there. As shown in Figure 13, the enacting in place dimension incorporates three properties: acknowledging the tyranny of distance, using what is available and engaging social and cultural meanings.

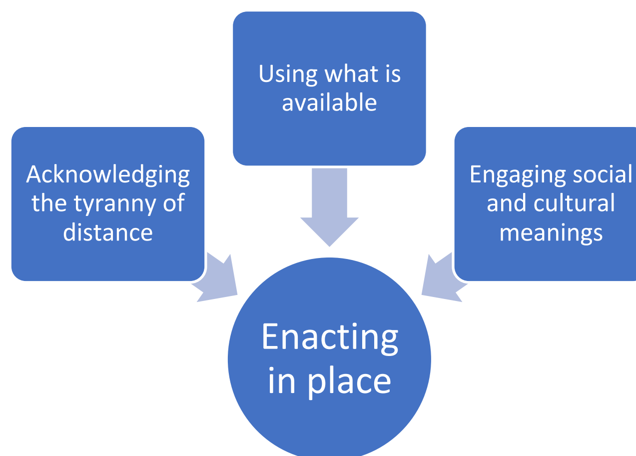

Figure 13: Enacting in place dimension and properties

School community members cited examples of the actualities of their school that were specific to their place including location, resources, and social and cultural meanings. Enacting policies in place requires consideration of these actualities; however, study findings are that, when combined, these factors can make policy enactment appear overwhelming and

sometimes impossible. When place is considered in the policy enactment process through acknowledging local needs, solutions and unique attributes of a place, policies are adapted to suit school contexts more effectively.

Acknowledging the tyranny of distance. Due to what the Remote School principal described as *"the tyranny of distance,"* staff, curriculum resources, reliable phone reception, internet access and upgrades and maintenance on facilities are difficult to access in RRR schools. According to school community members, these specific challenges hinder policy enactment in these communities. A Remote School science teacher gave an example of the difficulty she had accessing curriculum resources to enact a mandated curriculum. She noted that science practicums are difficult to organise due to the lack of resources available and the length of time it takes for these resources to be ordered and delivered. She said, *"if we compare this school to other schools…people would be horrified about the difference in resourcing."* A Regional School student offered a similar opinion about a drama course he is being taught: *"drama has a section where you need to watch a live performance, and if you live in [a RRR area], you're not going to get much live performance."*

Issues with material resources were not limited to curriculum resources. A Remote School teacher stated that distance from major services made completing upgrades and facilities difficult. Remote School is not accessible for trucks due to long stretches of corrugated road. Resources for both the school and the community need to be flown or shipped in. A Remote School teacher explained that this means if something needs to be fixed, it takes a long time:

> *the power hasn't worked for something like three years in the science lab. We haven't had gas for two years, so we can't do gas pracs… and then the infrastructure that's actually here is terrible… just getting a water pipe fixed here, or something electrical,*

is massive. You can't get it fixed before the end of the day. A locksmith only comes once in a blue moon. You can't get a door fixed if it's broken.

To alleviate the pressures imposed by distance, there is extra funding available to RRR schools. The Rural School principal spoke about this compensation: "*we do get an extra sort of funding bucket to assist in the fact that being a rural school has it's difficulties in terms of transport and in terms of accessing other people."* Despite this funding, a Remote School teacher argued that money allocated to schools cannot solve all the problems RRR educators need to overcome. He said:

The one thing we have is money. We get thrown money. But there's only so much you can do with that money. You know, it's not something that you can then go, 'Oh, we're going to go and employ these people' or 'We can buy these things, or do this, do that.'

The biggest barrier to policy enactment in RRR schools was accessing adequate staff. School community members explained that RRR schools are small and with small schools comes limited staff, which impacts the way policies are enacted. Teachers and principals compared their access to staff with metropolitan schools by noting that RRR schools were harder to staff, have higher teacher turnover rates, are staffed by newer, younger graduates and have more staff teaching outside their expertise. At the time of interviewing, Rural School had fourteen teachers leaving at the end of the year. Similarly, Remote School had two and half teaching loads that needed to be filled and struggled to find relief teachers if a teacher was absent. A Remote School teacher said staffing was hardest during big events or illnesses: *"If flu comes through in flu season, then we'll have 8 teachers away or something, and classes are combined. You can't run combined classes and actually teach kids. It's just hectic."*

Principals acknowledged that the issue of staffing is not limited to RRR schools; there is a state-wide shortage of teachers in Queensland. However, this problem places RRR schools in direct competition with metropolitan schools to find teachers. When faced with the choice of teaching in a RRR school or metropolitan school, a Remote School teacher commented, "*of course they're going to go down south before they come here. Why would you come here if you got offered it?*" In Remote School, the principal explained that there were even struggles to attract staff between the RRR schools. He noted that the appeal of their remote town in comparison to other nearby towns and cities was not as attractive. He explained there were the same government financial incentives to teach in a nearby remote school as there were in his school; however, the nearby community also had daily flights to major cities, access to a larger supermarket and better staff housing. He said, *"at the moment our housing is full. I can't actually place anyone anywhere. So, you know, besides putting a tent at the back of the school… it's a distinct challenge."*

These comparisons made between schools or regions were frequent when interviewing school community members. A Remote School teacher compared their access to service provisions in metropolitan areas, saying, *"there's a bunch of stuff we're dealing with that possibly other schools don't have to."* Teachers in particular noted feeling frustrated and unfairly considered due to policy maker's expectations that schools demonstrate equal compliance with mandated state-wide policies. A Regional School teacher stated,

> *the whole idea of the state system is that they're on an equal field, and they are not. It's very hard to implement those policies because they're all kind of assuming in my opinion, a base level of functionality… we're getting asked to work magic, but we have nothing to work with.*

A Remote School teacher cited this service disparity as a problem that does not have any easy solution: *"It's a wicked problem with so many variables. I've seen so many things*

tried and none of them have worked. And it's just, like I say, it's an impossible situation. There's only so much that can be done."

School community members cited feeling frustrated, overwhelmed and unconsidered when trying to enact policies in place. Therefore, acknowledging these needs and determining solutions provides a place-based response to policy enactment.

Using what is available. When speaking about place-based barriers RRR schools face, school community members also offered solutions to think about how to use what is available in their community. School community members want to be agents of change and use what they can to illustrate that they are not deficient, or what the Rural School principal called *"not up to it,"* in comparison to their metropolitan counterparts. The Rural School principal said that working out a solution to this *"wicked problem*" is not easy; however, *"there's always a solution to be had. We just have to figure out what it is."* A Rural School student offered the first step: *"think about where we are and change it up a little to suit where we are."*

Although there are many place-based barriers facing school community members during policy enactment, there was an overwhelming response during interviews that the biggest resourcing challenge to enacting policies in RRR areas is accessing staff. Therefore, that was the focus of school community members' solutions. The principals at Rural School and Remote School discussed the solutions they have seen work in their community. The Rural School principal explained that he planned to continue encouraging people in the community to become teachers:

> *People who start off in rural tend to stay here for some time. They don't tend to move too far. So, most of our promotion positions now are generally covered by people. And those people have come from the same areas.*

He also cited examples of schools in the same area that had formed a cluster and worked together to share human resources: *"we work very closely together to make sure that we use… the power of the community… the power of the clusters together."*

Meanwhile, at Regional School, the principal explained that he has resorted to personally flying to metropolitan areas to recruit staff and attract them to RRR schools:

> *I've actually started going down to Brisbane – I've done this for years now as a regional area, and I actually go and talk to graduates at some of the TeachMeet sessions, and actually let them know what real rural life is like. Sometimes they're scared to venture beyond the Sunshine Coast. And all the stories they hear, it's not really… you know, there is remote, there is rural; but what you want to put into those communities is what you get out of them. So, I think it's about providing them a real-life picture on what a lifestyle change it could be.*

To further incentivise teachers, there are financial allowances and benefits for teachers appointed to RRR schools in Queensland. A Remote Teacher spoke about the Remote Area Incentive Scheme (RAIS), which acknowledges some of the unique challenges associated with working in RRR schools and provides financial incentives. These incentives include return flights to metropolitan areas, continuous service payments, additional discretionary leave, a location allowance, relocation assistance, access to subsidised housing and family support. A Regional School teacher explained that these incentives are considered subsidies rather than incentives and proposed that teachers are provided with more financial incentives:

> *They need to pay teachers more to go there… if they turned around and said, 'We're going to pay you at a rate of 150 thousand dollars a year, like a HOD or a DP wage to go there as a teacher,' people would be more willing to go.*

Engaging social and cultural meanings. Due to the small size of RRR communities, school community members indicated that schools are the centre of RRR communities. A Rural School parent said the school was a *"connecting hub."* This idea resonated in all RRR communities. The Regional School principal explained, "*you could be the only high school in that town, the only primary school in that town; therefore, you are seen as the absolute pinnacle in that community. You are an absolute backbone to that community."* The small size of the RRR communities means school populations are culturally, socio-economically and linguistically diverse. Therefore, each school culture varies greatly. A Regional School parent commented, *"the values for what each family has is different, let alone each town, community is different."* School community members noted that it is important to consider and include these social and cultural meanings when enacting policies.

Remote School is in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and students from the five surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities all attend the school. Each community has their own unique culture, traditions and language so English is an additional language or dialect for most of the students and parents in the community. Given all policies are written in Standard Australian English, one parent at Remote School explained how this can prove difficult for the community: *"some of them are finding English is very, very hard to speak and they speak Creole same time, or they speak [their community language] at the same time."* As most languages in the community are oral languages, community members from Remote School recognise the need to engage the community through spoken language and with language aids. The principal explained that currently he attempts this: *"we contextualise [policy language] as much as possible."*

Despite these efforts to engage students through language and culture, there are debates between school community members as to whether language and cultural values and

meanings should be taught by teachers from outside the community. A Remote School teacher explained:

some family members say, 'You shouldn't be teaching my kid about culture. The culture is my job.' And then complete flipside is you've got members of the school community that say we should be seeing more culture in our classes and stuff like that.

Parents at Remote School suggested a joint approach between teachers, parents and the community to engage the community's cultural meanings. They reported that there was a time in the school where cultural protocols were taught by elders. One parent explained what cultural protocols are: *"our old people come in, they sing, they tell stories, teach us dance… Shake a leg, Aboriginal dancing."* Parents and students from Remote School explained that having a community leader in the school again would help teachers understand the language and culture of the community and engage the community in policies and education. Students agreed that they would listen more to people from their community and culture as opposed to teachers from other communities. One Remote School student commented,

say the teacher that's not from here says something offensive, like and they don't know that they're saying it, and then the kids get angry and then something starts. Say if a local person does something they'd have to address them.

Parents rationalised that engaging social and cultural meanings when enacting policies would improve the respect and value of education. One parent commented, *"I reckon getting cultural protocol back to the school, and religion back to the school, that's when you can get education restarted."*

Successful education and future pathways have a unique meaning in RRR communities. A teacher at Remote School spoke about how success is measured in RRR communities in comparison to metropolitan schools:

most people are here because they want to see our kids succeed in life. I wouldn't say that, you know, grades or whatever are the measure of that. I don't think that's how people actually measure success… my level of success as an indigenous student in [Remote School] is probably very different to someone who is sitting in [Metropolitan School] in Brisbane. So, recognise that success is a word that is different for everyone.

RRR school community members see students contributing to their community as a measure of success and encourage students to keep the town going by engaging in local jobs or in family. Rural and Remote School community members spoke about the difference in opportunities for different genders, commenting that there is lots of work available for boys but for girls, starting a family was a priority. A Rural School parent said,

I've got boys and they're all, yep, we'll take him on as an apprentice doing boiler making and diesel mechanic training. He's already got it lined up. So, as a boy, if you want an apprenticeship and you're keen, there's tone of work out there. But girls everything's 'Oh I'll just get pregnant.' Like, get married and have babies because that's easier to achieve than a job or a career here.

Employment in their community or close relationships with family are two of the reasons students aspire to stay in their communities upon graduation: to sustain the culture of their community. As aforementioned, In RRR areas, relationships within the community, particularly between family members are tight knit. A Rural School student said, *"in a town like ours, it's about family, community, events and all that type of stuff."* A Rural School parent commented that most students do not want to leave their family, the familiarity and the community. She said, *"50 percent of our students don't go to university. They stay here. They either get a job or they apprenticeship out."*

Each school valued all forms of knowledge and pathways. School community members encouraged students to engage in a career after school that suited them. The Regional School principal explained how he encourages pathways in his community:

it's about providing for that kid. They may not be succeeding in school… because they've lost maybe the drive, but as soon as you put them in a work environment then you see that drive and passion come back. But it doesn't mean that that's not learning; it's learning in a different environment. So, some of our kids have left school. We've put them into programs, and now they're starting on apprenticeships. It's a different pathway, but we've certainly made sure that… and I think that's you connecting with the community. Without those connections you would have no pathway, or nowhere to put the kids.

At Rural School, connecting with the community often meant conversing with the high percentages of farming and agricultural families. Many families have been in the cane or banana industry for generations. A Rural School parent explained this was the case for her family: *"I was born and bred here, cane farmer's daughter. Married a banana farmer… My oldest daughter's at uni doing agriculture; studying Agribusiness and Sustainable Agriculture."* A Rural School teacher explained the local industry influences students' meaning of education: *"I've got the most wonderful kids… and some of them only want to be farmers because that's what Granddad is. Success here is staying on the family farm and working."* She continued to explain that knowing this early on meant that students were not as invested in school as they could be if there were specific subjects that would help them achieve their goal:

They all want to finish school as well, you know? But now they've got to tick all these boxes. So, they tick the boxes to finish school, but they're not really invested in

school; they're only coming to school because that's expected, but they know that they're actually going to go farm. They're having more fun driving the tractor.

The students in RRR schools who want to go onto university must leave their community. Although Regional School is close by to two universities, the closest university campus to Rural School and Remote School is hours away. School community members were aware that there were better opportunities for further education in larger metropolitan cities. A Rural School Student said: *"you have a better chance of succeeding down there [in Brisbane] than up here."* One student from Remote School student commented on the difficulty of leaving her friends, family and community; however, that was the sacrifice that needed to be made. She said: "*if you want to be something, you have to leave."* Leaving the community to engage in further education in Brisbane was the only option for one Regional School student who wanted to become a boat mechanic: *"he had to go to Brisbane to do half his subjects, because he was a mechanic on boats. And nothing is offered anywhere outside of Brisbane"* (Regional School parent). The parent went onto explain that he was fortunate enough to be able to afford the opportunity; however, that was not the case for all students: *"accessibility to help the kids go with what they love, and what they are able to do, and what you can afford. All these things have to match up. It is very limiting to kids, a lot of kids; they don't get that opportunity to even try"* (Regional School parent). A parent from Remote School commented on the cost of sending their children to further education elsewhere. He said *"it's very hard"* due to transportation, accommodations and tuition costs. He commented, *"Cairns is too far south, too far from up here. Sometimes it's very tough. You know, the plane costs…"*

When students leave the community to engage in education, it is possible that they will not come back to sustain and add knowledge to their community. A Rural School teacher questioned if students would come back after attending tertiary education elsewhere:

> *Yeah, but will they come back? You know, they get that education, and their eyes are opened even more to the world. Once you've had a university degree, they can go anywhere with that, but are they going to be able to use that qualification to come back into this town? You know, for this community to survive, and for all rural communities, you need people to stay in there; and that's generations to come as well.*

To ensure their community is educated and that knowledge stays in the community, school community members want better access to opportunities offered elsewhere. A Regional School parent said she wanted *"to help out people given our kids don't have the opportunity what, you know, other kids down south get, where we don't have more of the resources."* To respond to this level of opportunity, school community members suggested upgrades to TAFE facilities in RRR areas as well as the introduction of satellite universities *"so, like if the student finish school here they've got choices, they've got maybe university or TAFE instead. You know, to upgrade more them skills and finish there then get a job"* (Rural School parent). A Remote School parent said that if there were more facilities like these available, the students would have broader choices when they finished school. In doing so, he said students could: *"bring that same knowledge back to our community."*

Enacting With Purpose

Enacting with purpose is a dimension of CPET that acknowledges the process schools take to enact policies in context. As shown in Figure 14, the enacting in place dimension incorporates five properties: identifying what will work, translating for context, communicating the why, practicing policy, and evaluating the fit.

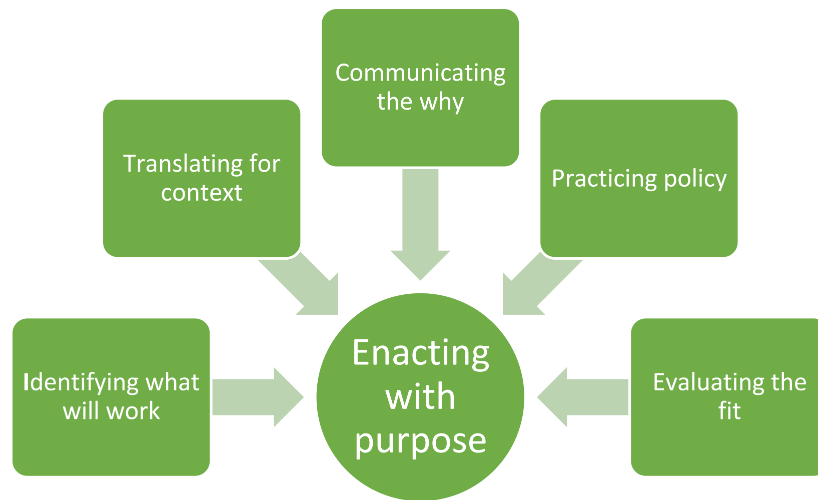

Figure 14: Enacting with purpose dimension and properties

Evidence gathered in this research indicated that enacting with purpose means school policies are enacted in a holistic and contextualised way where there is clear communication regarding a policy's purpose and substantial evidence of a policy's positive impact on the school. The Regional School principal explained that enacting with purpose requires schools to ask themselves: *"When are we going to adopt this? When's the adoption phase? When's the information stage? When's the action phase?"* Enacting with purpose requires people and place to be considered; therefore, many of the data from previous sections in this chapter relate to data presented in this section.

Identifying what will work. School community members acknowledge that it is impossible for every school to commit to a policy in the same way. The Regional School principal said that despite all state schools in Queensland being Department of Education schools, *"one size doesn't fit all on a lot of these policies…you've got small, remote communities with a school of three kids compared to a school of 3000 something. It's different."* Therefore, school communities identify what policies will work for them and what policy enactment will look like.

This stage of enactment requires careful consideration and consultation of the school community. School community members acknowledged that being heard is most important at this stage of the enactment strategy. Initially, identifying what will work involves the school community identifying an area of their school community that requires change. The principal at Rural School explained that identifying policies and the process that follows came down to wanting change: *"in any sort of change, we propose an idea that's come up for some reason, whether we're just thinking we can improve in an area or we think there's a deficiency."* Once school community members acknowledge the need for change, they set about identifying relevant policies that aim to provide a solution or process for change. School community members referred to several in-school and departmental policies that incited change, such as SATE, inclusive education, mobile phone policies, behaviour policies, attendance policies and uniform policies.

Although school community members discussed many policies, when asked to identify a particular policy by name, many school community members were unclear about what policies were in place in their school. A Remote School teacher stated bluntly: *"I have no idea… I don't even know really what policies we actually have… I wouldn't actually be able to tell you a recent policy introduction that's happened."* A parent at Regional School also noted that they had never seen a school policy. She suggested that this lack of clarity was due to the policy laden institution: *"how many policies are there? Apart from the million."* Such a policy laden institution means that policies are constantly being changed or introduced. A Rural School teacher explained that it becomes hard to keep track of which policies are in place at a school. He said, *"policy changes so much, yet then the schools keep going in the different direction and things get left behind. Or dropped."*

In addition to not being able to identify specific policies, students, teachers and parents struggled to clarify specific policy aims. A Regional School teacher supposed this

was due to the existence of broad policy rhetoric and an apparent lack of actionable steps. She noted, *"there's a lot of grey area"* in policy documents, especially in relation to school context. In a discussion about a recent FNQ priority to do 'whatever it takes' to improve student outcomes, a Rural School parent noted unclear aims, explaining, *"it's such a broad statement…it's got no boundaries on it…'whatever it takes', that's an open cheque, you know?"* A seeming general confusion and lack of clarity has negative effects on views of policy. The Rural School principal said the very word *"policy"* has become synonymous with more work and unclear enactment processes. Instead of using the word policy, he has started to use the phrase 'standard of practice' in his school community as it has more positive connotations. He explained, *"people cite policy when they want to do things. When they want to use it in a negative sense. Whereas a standard of practice is probably a little bit more positive."* It was a common view among school community members that they wanted to identify and clarify policies better so they could work out how best to enact them in their school.

Once the policy and policy aims are identified, the principal at Regional School said he assigns tasks to relevant personnel. Further, appropriate resources and support are identified to help achieve contextualised enactment. He detailed this process when interviewed:

> *We'll incorporate [the policy] into an enquiry cycle, and then we'll allocate some people to look after the project, then we'll enact that there… and we work together as a leadership team. We'll sit together going, 'okay, so we're going to enact that. Who's going to be the team that's going to be part of this here? So, X, Y, Z will join this team. He'll go do some extra training, he'll come back and induct us – what part do we need to be part of this here – and then it'll roll out into the school.*

Although the principal was able to detail this process, teachers at Regional School said this process was not made clear to staff. When discussing the SATE curriculum, one teacher explained that she was not aware of who was responsible for the various elements of the policy enactment. She said: *"everyone was asking these questions and no one could answer them… and no one can still tell you what's going on."* Another Regional School teacher suggested, *"there needs to be transparency"* when referring to assigning responsibilities and defining roles in the enactment process. Transparency makes everyone aware of who is responsible for different aspects of policy enactment. Whether this is consistently achieved or not is not yet determinable.

School community members acknowledged that policy enactment is a time-consuming process and to do the policy justice, adequate time has to be taken. A Rural School student suggested that *"more time is needed to adjust to [policy]."* Another student agreed with her saying, *"yeah, don't just put it in place and expect it to be followed overnight."* In response to managing the timing of policy enactment, the Regional School principal concluded that identifying a timeframe in which to enact policies and having time to complete assigned tasks would improve policy enactment. He used the example of the online rollout of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) to discuss identifying appropriate timeframes for their school:

> *You'll get actually a timeframe, and then it's a school decision, or it could be the school will discuss that with the P&C, their parenting group, going 'okay, do we find this valuable right now that we actually want to bring this forward? Or do we want to hold it back until the beginning of next year until we roll out the strategic plan?*

According to school community members, identifying what will work means having a clear understanding of what the policies and policy aims are, who will be responsible for enacting the policy and when the policy will be enacted.

Translating for context. After the policies and enactment process are identified, school community members explained that they interpret and translate the policies to suit the school community. Although there were some policies that did not allow for adaptation or choice, school communities deemed most policies to be quite flexible in their enactment. The Remote School principal explained that they adopt parts of the policy that suit them and ignore parts that are not as pertinent to their context. He said,

> *we determine which [policies] we are going to grab and do with fidelity, and the [policies] that we know we just need to make sure they are happening without really happening… We're always adapting them and finding the best fit for how they work here…We can't necessarily just adopt something that's come straight from somewhere else. We're constantly adapting what comes out. So, I feel like our policies on things are frequently changing: be it behaviour, be it attendance, be it student engagement, be it the tuckshop. We're constantly changing to try and find the magic solution I guess around policies.*

A student at Regional School said they went through a similar process at their school. He said, *"we have an overall policy and then schools can make it different depending on the area and how they want it to work."* This process was deemed to be quite different from what happened in metropolitan schools. A Regional School teacher discussed this difference when referring to the 'whatever it takes' initiative:

> *whatever it takes for [Regional School] is different to whatever it takes for [Metropolitan School]. So, if that's the policy that's okay, but regional schools need the flexibility and you need people to go, 'This is how we're doing it at our school. You do what you're doing. That's what we'll do.' That's your instruction, we'll sort it out the way that it works for us.'*

The teacher added that this kind of flexibility improves policy engagement from students and teachers. The school community can determine what policy success will look like for their context. Another Rural School teacher believed that this process of translating policies to suit their context meant, *"policy will work better."*

To understand how the policy could best work for their school, Regional School community members asked a series of questions about the policy and their community. They engaged social and cultural meanings, incorporated strategic direction and made sure opinions of the school community were heard. The Regional School principal said:

> *We look at what priority [a policy] is in our strategic plan… either I will unpack [the policy] with [the teachers]; so, this is what it actually means, this is the writing. What does it actually mean? How does it affect you as a staff member in the school?*

At this stage of translation, school community members also translated the policy language to suit the language of their community. This translation occurred on two levels: translating vague policy jargon and translating language for the community. For the Remote School where a parent noted that English, *"is a second language, sometimes third,"* common community language needs to be considered so everyone can understand the policy and enactment process. One Remote School teacher suggested how this translation can occur:

> *I think that any kind of, you know, long lengthy documentation with complex vocabulary is not going to be engaged by EALD students or families or communities. So, I think making much more EALD friendly documentation posters…for students or families or communities in remote, indigenous locations, and you know, having that documentation in their languages would be even better.*

In addition to adapting policy to community language, school community members also translated vague policy jargon to language that was more appropriate for everyone in their context. The principal at Regional School commented: *"policy world is a crazy world.*

Sometimes the way a policy is written is very vague. And you need to understand the meaning before it… it's not just because Policy 6.14; they need to know the real terms." Transparent, definite and coherent policies and policy processes ensure that policy enactment can be made more suitable to the language and understanding of the particular school context.

As well as translating policy language, school communities also translate policies to suit the culture and size of the school. The principal at Regional School explained that there are some parts of policies that cannot be enacted in their community due to certain cultural practices and situations. In their community, 'sorry business' is the practice of mourning and bereaving a community member who has died. This practice holds a special and privileged place in the community and immediately overrides everyday education practices. Referring to a state-wide student suspension policy, he explained how cultural meanings were considered to translate policies to suit their community:

> *If there's sorry business, I can't take a kid home. It's not acceptable for me to turn up in their community and take them home, even if they have done something terribly wrong at school behaviour-wise. I can't, so I can't enact that straight away.*

Similarly, some policies were translated to suit the smaller size of the community. A Remote School teacher explained that when enacting a buddy class behaviour management strategy that forms a part of many schools' state mandated student code of conduct, context needs to be considered. The buddy class process sees a student removed from the classroom and sent to a different class for the lesson; however, is not always possible in a small school. She said,

> *it's an interesting context to put [policies] into place because you know, all in all the stuff that you would do doesn't work, and so, you know, you can't buddy class here because they know each other from grade 7 to grade 12. They're all family.*

Communicating the why. Once the policies are translated according to school community context, the translated policy is communicated to the school community. Effective communication is deemed important at all stages of the policy enactment process to allow the school community to understand the policy, policy aims and provide feedback. Effective communication provides a reason and a rationale as to why enacting a specific policy is done in a specific way. Clarifying the rationale, in its appeal to the logic for practice, is important. The Regional School principal spoke to the importance of communicating the why:

> *It's about understanding this policy came out of this, this is why, and now let's move forward as a community; so that's parents, kids and teachers understanding why that policy's there. And I think that's the most important thing. If they don't understand the why then they get caught up in policy world…I think that's a conduit as a principal that I need to make sure my teachers, my parents, my community are aware; and that's through education and message sharing that we understand why we're going this and why we're on the same page.*

In each school there are communication processes, which although not necessarily formalised, do occur. At Regional School, the Assistant Regional Director inducts the principal in policy training and knowledge which the principal then passes on to the school community. Teachers are informed of policies through face-to-face staff meetings and any changes to policies are communicated through email. Some teachers noted that they actively engage in policy communication, while others had a more hands off approach. A Regional School teacher said, *"I wait until I get information from my HOD. And when he's like, 'Hey, we're doing this now.' I'm like 'Cool, let's do it'. Like, I don't actively seek out policy."*

This communication process as similar in Rural School and Remote School. Discussing the enactment of the new senior curriculum, a Rural School teacher explained that

there was a long and effective communication process prior to the policy starting. He explained, *"over the couple of years leading up to it there were lots of sort of full staff meetings and sort of explanations and roll-outs."* Another teacher added, "*there was a lot fed into my Year 11s at the end of last year as well as the start of this year. We've had information sessions on it. We've had a few contacts from the universities as well."*

Although there were avenues for communicating policy information to principals and teachers, school community members from each school acknowledged communication practices could certainly improve for parents and students. A student at Regional School said she learned about policies from parades, from her teachers or *"the hard way"* when a policy was used to reprimand students. Students said their role was to follow the policies and despite principals wanting to explain the purpose behind the policy, they were rarely told the reason or rationale behind policies being introduced. A Rural School student explained: *"there's no, 'well, this is the reason for this and that, and you've got to understand where we're coming from because it's this,' and like, no we don't get it explained."* This lack of communication resulted in inconsistencies in understanding. A student from Rural school spoke about the confusion he had about a new safety policy that was introduced in his manual arts classroom:

> *We didn't really get told the rule. One day pretty much [the HOD] came down and just like pretty much went off at us kind of, because we weren't told about the rule and our teacher didn't really enforce it that much, because I don't think he really minded because it wasn't bad…We weren't really told about it… It just happened instantly instead of bringing it up like an idea so we knew, instead of just walking in there and not knowing.*

Similarly, A Regional School parent commented on the lack of information for parents around policy. She stated, *"I think most parents they send them kids to school, but they don't really know, like what happens here, like what's in the school."* According to a

Rural School parent, communication from the school changes when their children start secondary school. She explained that when her children were in primary school, she would hear information about policies by being involved in the school but now through the secondary school, it is harder to become involved. She said, *"I try and be involved in school. I was very involved in primary, but secondary not so much. It's just, yeah, seems to get busier. There's less opportunities to help, less opportunities to know what's going on."*

Parents said when they do receive communication, they learn about policies through newsletters, P&C meetings, information nights, emails, Facebook posts, letters sent home or *"the child whinges about it"* (Rural School parent). A Rural School parent explained how she receives communication. She said, *"I sort of know what's going on in the school because I'm on the school email list for teacher emails. So, I know when things are happening. If I wasn't on that I probably – unless I got involved in the P&C and that - I probably wouldn't know what was going on*." Some parents commented that they did not have time to read lengthy newsletters that detailed policies, and commented that attending information nights or P&C meetings is difficult due to time, work and distance driven to attend the meetings. A Rural School parent commented,

> *I don't have time to read the newsletters… Those short bits of communication that come out that you can just flick through and go, oh yep, dot points read them quickly an then you keep moving. Whereas I don't have time to sit down and read a 10-page document about what's going on at the school. I think just keep it simple.*

Despite parents wanting to keep communication simple, a Rural School teacher explained that communication in RRR areas is not always easy. She said:

> *There have been emails sent home with letters informing them of certain policies…but then not every parent has an email…I was handing out letters today for subject*

selection, 'Does mum or dad have an email?', 'Nup', 'Can you make sure they get this letter?

The principal of Remote School recognised that there was work to be done to improve communication within their community. Since becoming principal, he tries to inform students and parents more effectively because he said without communication, policies *"didn't go so well."* He sought to rectify that issue. He explained, *"that's been a big change in my time, making sure that these families know what's actually happening with their kids at school."* A Remote School parent said other parents can help to spread news of new policies too. She used the example of a new mobile phone policy causing students to not go to school. She said, *"the parent's going to say, 'how come you're not at school?' 'Oh, my teacher was going to take the phone off me.' We can go around and say to the parents too, like you know, no phone at school."*

Practicing policy. School community members noted several ways contextualised policies are evidenced through artefacts and practices. Evidence of policy was seen in the form of posters on classroom walls, policy notes in school diaries, staff handbooks, and language from students, staff and parents. A student from Rural School said the core policies and rules "*are pinned up in all the junior classrooms."* A Remote School teacher explained that it is important to have artefacts that reinforced the policy. She spoke about artefacts that reinforced a behaviour policy that was introduced at her school: *"It was introduced at a staff meeting. Flow charts explained it all."* She explained that these flowcharts became important: *"so that we all had a consistent process to follow."*

Consistency was considered a key element of practicing policy in all schools. A Rural School teacher explained that policy messages needed to be practiced repeatedly to gain traction and consistency. He said, *"if you're going up and pushing it, pushing it, pushing it, then people are more likely to take it up."* A Regional School student explained that the

school was gradual in how they practiced the follow up of policy. During the enactment of the sun safe hat policy, he said,

> *with the no hat rule, it was like if you had no hat, you couldn't play right? But at first people kept forgetting them and they were being a little bit strict, and then after three more weeks they started to get more strict, and then they enforced it a lot more.*

Teachers and parents commented that policies like these need to be practiced consistently after they are enforced to see how policies take their course. A Regional School parent said seeing as teachers enact policies to students, they needed to follow through with the policy consistently. She suggested,

> *the teacher needs to be more strict. So like, you know, she has the right – she or him has the right to demonstrate that. Because you know, they came up, they leave their home to come up here to teach. And if the student is not going to listen, like you know, you've got to at least put your foot down and be strong.*

Practicing policy in a consistent way takes time. It is a lengthy process that if considered carefully and enacted in a reasonable timeframe, can work for the school. One Remote School teacher remarked in relation to enacting a behaviour policy:

> *I feel like I'm optimistic about it, it's just going to take time. I just feel like once those polices are implemented to their fullest extent, then you know, we're in a better place than we were this time last year.*

Evaluating the Fit. Once contextualisation policies are practiced, school communities seek evidence of the impact the policy has in their context. Assessing the effectiveness of each policy at every stage of enactment was recognised as important by the school community. When looking for the impact of contextualised policies, the Rural School principal suggested that as policies are enacted to *"improve in an area or where we think there's a deficiency,"* they must then assess and evaluate if that area or deficiency had been

improved through the policy. Administrators then determined whether policy enactment met the desired policy aims. To make this determination, schools assessed and evaluated impact through normalised and standardised school data collection, observations, self-reflection, coaching feedback, opinion surveys and community forums. The Rural School principal spoke about feedback he had received through a school opinion survey that was sent to parents, students and teachers each year to give feedback on the school. He said,

> *it was interesting to see that they believed that communication wasn't as high as I thought it was. And I don't know if it's because we send out newsletters often and communication, but I think that's probably my next step…I think there's a missing gap in terms of our staff and our communication with parents. So, that's the one I think the parents are really wanting at the moment.*

School community members said that in addition to evaluating the policy enactment in a school setting, they wanted to feed back to policy makers, which would bring the enactment strategy full circle to the point of being heard. A Regional School teacher said that having their feedback heard would ideally provide policy makers and senior education staff an opportunity to understand what works in schools and what works in different contexts. She said, "*if we were given the opportunity to provide context to the policy makers, we might be able to come up with some sort of compromise that works or is at least more effective.*"

Chapter Summary

This chapter described student, parent, teacher and principal perspectives and experiences of enacting policies to suit RRR context. It explored these understandings through three central dimensions: enacting with people, enacting in place, and enacting with purpose. I described each of these dimensions and their properties with supporting data and presented a theoretical understanding of how RRR school community members enact policies

to suit their context through CPET. The next chapter will position these findings in the existing literature and link them to broader theories.

Chapter 7

Discussion

Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I interpret the findings from Chapter 6, which explored school community member perspectives of contextualising policies in RRR schools. I locate the findings within an evolving literature review. This evolving literature review expands on the primary literature review offered in Chapter 5 by looking particularly at existing theories, educational inquiries, reviews and research to demonstrate how the grounded theory that emerged from this study is consistent with current educational research and practices. Considering the study's relevance to existing literature also serves to highlight the unique contribution of this study to the education field. This chapter first reintroduces the grounded theory and then discusses the literature related to each of the theoretical dimensions in the same order they were presented in the previous chapter.

Contextualised Policy Enactment Theory

Contextualised Policy Enactment Theory (CPET) is what Glaser and Strauss (1967) define as a substantive theory: an explanatory theory that provides a real-world description of a social phenomenon or pattern. This substantive theory is relevant to the people and context it is posited to try and understand. Collected data is grounded in the expressions and experiences of the school community members who participated in this study and who enact policies to suit their RRR context.

Due to differing contexts and opposing interpretations of policy to suit individual school contexts, there is no one size fits all approach to policy enactment. However, according to Viennet and Pont, (2017), there is space for a systematic approach to enactment that caters for flexibility and adaptability to suit local contexts. CPET is a theoretical product of this research that is systematic, actionable and modifiable. It can contribute to policy

enactment at both the policy maker level and the school level in Queensland. The remaining section of this chapter discusses this point further and aligns the existing literature with the three dimensions of CPET: enacting with people, enacting in place, and enacting with purpose.

Enacting With People

School community members have valuable insight into the actualities of their context. Such context specific insight (referred to by school community members as insider knowledge) guides policy decisions and grounds policies in place and context. Data from this study show that school communities want the actualities of RRR contexts acknowledged in education policies. Therefore, RRR school communities can be afforded recognition as non-metropolitan communities with their own unique social, cultural and economic intricacies.

The literature promotes contextual insight from the experiences and perspectives of people in place. Researchers urge educators and policy makers to better recognise contextual actualities and acknowledge the agency of people from RRR communities (Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010; Green, 2008; Irvin, Meece et al., 2011). Through agency, school community members can make policy decisions that consider local needs, which facilitates a culture of enacting policies for and with their community.

The concept of human agency is defined by Campbell (2015) as a state that "enables individuals to make free or independent choices, to engage in autonomous actions, and to exercise judgment in the interests of others and oneself" (p. 42). Agency in a collective sense means groups and whole communities act autonomously in the interests of their community (Biesta et al., 2015; Campbell, 2015). In this study, two types of agency are evidenced: institutional agency, pertaining to the school community at large and individual agency, pertaining to the individuals in schools.

Institutional agency in schools is a newer concept in Australian education. Since the 19th century, Australia maintained an industrial model of school education that reflected the centralised 19th and 20th century aspiration to deliver mass education to all (Gonski, 2018). Lingard et al., (2002) explained that these educational systems were classical bureaucracies with authority structures stretching downwards from the Minister for Education through director generals, regional directors, principals and teachers. Such types of systems offered little to no input from the school communities, particularly excluding students and parents (Lingard et al., 2002b). The Karmel Report, released in 1973, reviewed these managerial educational structures. The recommendations from the report called for a "social democratic version of devolution" (Karmel, 1973) and scrutinised top-down management processes (Lingard et al., 2002b). The Karmel report (1973) argued that improved educational outcomes require individual agency for teachers, school leaders, parents and students. It stated,

> responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of pupils they teach and, at a senior level, with students themselves (Karmel, 1973, p. 11).

Karmel's report sparked a change in Australian schooling, where it became widely recognised that progressive and effective educational change requires greater individual and institutional agency (Lingard et al., 2001; Lingard et al., 2002b; Patrinos & Fasih, 2009); Stevenson, 2001). School community members in this study acknowledged that the answer to educational problems in schools lies with the people who are directly involved and impacted. Together, members of the school community can manage schools collaboratively in a way that is responsive to their specific school context (Fullan, 2001; Stevenson, 2001).

Recently, the Queensland Department of Education (2018) has advocated for community agency in schools. Departmental documents such as the *Parent and Community Engagement Framework* state,

> schools should leverage their position in the community to work together with other community members… Community members and organisations offer unique knowledge, expertise and perspectives… Community involvement in school decision-making encourages greater ownership and ensures local needs are reflected. (Department of Education, 2018, p. 9-11).

Involving the school community in school based decision making culminates in collaborative action towards a common goal (Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Epstein, 2016; Hartley, 2007; Kösterelioğlu, 2017). In the literature, this devolution of leadership to include school community members is known by many socially constructed terms that are used interchangeably in the literature (see Lingard et al., 2002b; Mokoena & Machaisa, 2018; Rizvi, 1994). These terms include distributed leadership, (see Tian et al., 2016) school based management, (see Brown & Hunter, 1998; Gammage, 2008; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995), shared leadership (see Kösterelioğlu, 2017; Miškolci, 2017; Urick, 2016) and shared decision making (see Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Hulpia et al., 2012; Patrinos & Fasih, 2009) .

When enacting policies to suit individual context, data from this study show that authority is devolved from regional directors and principals and is shared ideally between members of the school community who have an interest in the success of their school. This process of decision making aligns closely with definitions of shared decision making (SDM) from the literature. According to research from Bellibas and Liu (2017), SDM is a process that provides opportunities for all school community members to problem solve, act and manage schools and the individuals within them. It is a democratic and contextualized decision making process, culminating in collaborative action towards common goals

(Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Epstein, 2016; Harris, 20013; Hartley, 2007; Kocolowski, 2010; Kösterelioğlu, 2017). It presupposes that authority is devolved from principals and agency is shared between school community members (students, parents, teachers, administration and district offices) who have an interest in the success of a school in fulfilling its mission (Paine & McCann, 2009).

Although not referred to directly by school community members in this study, the concept of SDM was shared frequently during interviews as a method of gaining insider knowledge from the school community and individual community groups. As evidenced in this study, SDM occurs in school communities through meetings, surveys, forums, school councils, student councils and P&C groups. These methods of SDM see school community members with a range of knowledge and skills participate directly in two-way meaningful communication and decision making regarding policy and policy enactment (Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Hulpia et al., 2012; Mascall et al., 2008; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995; Patrinos & Fasih, 2009). The Queensland Department of Education (2018) values this open, two-way communication between the school community and school personnel, explaining that this can "ensure both parent and school knowledge is used to inform practice" (p. 4). However, this study demonstrated that the genuineness of two-way communication is scrutinised.

Engaging in meaningful two-way communication is a growing concept in school communities that challenges members of the school community to step into 'unfamiliar administrative areas' and change their perceptions of traditional roles in decision making (Rauls, 2003; Stevenson, 2001). To achieve these roles, school community members acknowledge the importance of building capacity in the school community. The literature suggests that stakeholders undertake SDM knowledge and skillset training. Conflict management, group decision making, consensus building and leadership training would allow stakeholders to effectively participate in democratic SDM. This professional development

needs to be an ongoing, schoolwide activity that caters to all stakeholders and supports school community members to change their role in policy enactment. These changes are detailed below with reference to how decisions are made when enacting policies to suit context.

Policy makers have a responsibility to prioritise SDM and set clear policies and goals in schools that support decision-making by all school community members (Epstein, 2016). Existing studies suggest external governance such as school regional offices maintaining strict control over final decisions regarding policy (Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995; Rauls, 2003). School community members gave evidence of this control and noted that policies were being done to them rather than with them. They wanted regional offices and policy makers to value their opinions and make a commitment to value the RRR voice.

Principals lead and devolve responsibility in SDM (Kösterelioğlu, 2017; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995). They disperse power and promote a schoolwide commitment to growth while encouraging the school community to participate in the decision-making process. They also provide the appropriate resources and training to do so (Kösterelioğlu, 2017; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995). Principals build relationships between the community based on trust and support as opposed to relationships characterised by control and hierarchy (Ehrich, 2000). Within RRR communities, the principal is highly visible as a dependable member of the school community so their values, attitudes and behaviours need to reflect SDM (Halsey, 2018; Wildy et al., 2014). Principals in this study were committed to capitalising on the wealth of knowledge and skills in their community to provide more contextualized policy responses. Although they acknowledged the authoritative position they held in the school community, they were acutely aware of the need to encourage the school community to be involved in SDM regarding policy enactment.

Clement (2014) and Fullan (2016) explain that teachers are integral to SDM as they have practical understanding the required education change and student needs. Teachers in

the study wanted to be part of the conversation around policy and felt they offered valuable insight into policy enactment in their school. However, it was important for teachers to feel the SDM process was worthwhile. They acknowledged the need for time and resources to be a productive part of the SDM process.

Students provide first hand perspectives about how their education can be improved and make decisions that affect their learning (Kellett, 2010; Mitra, 2009; Simmons et al., 2014). Authentic and sustained student participation in SDM allows students to contribute to solving education problems in the school and gives them the opportunity to be partners in their own learning (Callingham, 2013; Gonski, 2018; Hart, 2013; Shier, 2001; Simmons et al., 2014). However, this study found that the knowledge and input of students was not always afforded the same value as teacher and principal perceptions. Some avenues of student participation in SDM were deemed inconsequential. Research suggests that tokenistic input from students in SDM is due to traditional decision making roles in schools, the perceived gap in knowledge and the potential for academic blame (Mokoena, 2017). School community members were conscious of this inconsistency when seeking input from the school community and sought to rectify it by including students more in the SDM process. This shift is advantageous for schools. When students are involved in SDM and feel supported in their needs, they gain social skills, leadership abilities, cohesion, higher levels of motivation and bonding with the context in which they are participating (Fullan, 2016; Simmons et al., 2014).

Parents provide knowledge of their children's education and valuable insight into local demands (Epstein, 2016). Parents make decisions in the interest of children rather than the staff and play a vital role in expressing how they value the school and education (Halsey, 2018; Nir & Ben Ami, 2005; Patrinos & Fasih, 2009). In RRR communities, parental participation is synonymous with community participation as most members of the

community have a family member that is active in the school (Patrinos & Fasih, 2009). However, as was evidenced in this study, navigating and negotiating school systems are difficult for parents. Therefore, the inclusion of parents in decision making can often be challenging (Reid & Valle, 2004). Parents are sometimes turned into ‘passive pawns’ in the decision making process and participation becomes symbolic and insignificant (Ng & Yuen, 2015, p. 256). School community members in this study cited this being an issue in their school by noting tokenistic stakeholder participation in P&C groups. Fullan (2016) explains that teachers and principals need to reach out to parents and the community to explain that they are an untapped resource of knowledge that is unique to their children. Research shows that when parents are involved in decision making, the gap between home and school is bridged and parents become part of the policy solution (Fullan, 2016).

The restructuring of school decision making processes to include the school community in these ways means they can feel more comfortable exchanging ideas about adapting and enacting mandated change (Clement, 2014; Hargreaves, 2004). Together, these school community groups take responsibility for positively impacting student outcomes, policy making, policy enactment and collaborative decision making (Abulencia, 2012; Mokoena & Machaisa, 2018; Patrinos & Fasih, 2009; Stevenson, 2001).

Despite its advantages, using SDM has limitations that need to be considered when enacting policies. SDM literature asserts that barriers to effective SDM include micropolitics, resource allocation and ambiguous scope (Brown & Hunter, 1998; Mokoena & Machaisa, 2018; Rauls, 2003; Salim, 2016). Socio-economic, political and cultural differences also act as barriers to SDM as they change the way groups interact, particularly in small RRR communities (Epstein, 2016; Hammad, 2010). Flessa (2009) explains that micropolitics are the study of how things really work within schools, including power relationships, conflict

and policy processing. Negative micropolitical culture develops among communities due to lack of trust.

When school community members become agents of change and are involved in shared decision-making practices regarding policy, trust is required. School community members explained that trust needs to be multidirectional when enacting policies. Similarly, research suggests that in agency relationships between schools and policy makers, trust manifests at two levels: from the top down and the bottom up (Hammad, 2010; Ng & Yuen, 2015). On one hand, authoritative groups such as senior education staff and policy makers need to trust schools to fulfil policy agendas (Brown & Hunter, 1998; Patrinos & Fasih, 2009). On the other hand, students, parents, teachers and principals need to trust leaders as facilitators in the decision making process (Hammad, 2010). The Department of Education acknowledge the impact of multidirectional trust: "reciprocal trust and ownership of decisions assists in successful implementation" (Department of Education, 2018, p. 11).

School community members characterised trust in these relationships as feelings of respect and comfortability when asking questions. Research from Bryk and Schneider (2002) further describes trust in school community relationships using four components: respect, competence, personal regard for others and integrity. Their study concluded that school relationships that exhibited these characteristics report greater educational outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Agency theory offers a framework for analysing trust in these relationships further. This theory explains how one party (the 'principal') delegates responsibility to another party (the 'agent') to make decisions on their behalf (Ambrosini et al., 2015; Nikula & Kivistö, 2017; Shapiro, 2005). Traditionally, agency theory involved exchanging money for the completion of a task (Cuevas-Rodríguez et al., 2012; Shapiro, 2005). However, current modern approaches to agency theory focus on the principal and agent engaging in a

behaviour-based or outcome-based contract in which the principal uses incentives and monitoring to ensure the agent completes an agreed upon task. For RRR schools enacting policies, governments act as principals engaging RRR schools as agents to divide the complex task of policy enactment and to bridge physical distance between metropolitan policy centres and RRR areas. On a macro level, agency relationships also exist between school principals who engage teachers, students, parents and the community in the enactment process.

Once principals delegate authority to agents, agency theory assumes that goal conflicts and information asymmetries occur (Kivistö, 2008; Shapiro, 2005). Goal conflicts refer to differences between principal and agent goals and interests, which result in different courses of action (Kivistö, 2008). Information asymmetries refer to the agent possessing more or better information than the principals about the details of the task to be completed (Nikula & Kivistö, 2017). Understanding goal conflicts and information asymmetries that exist allows relevant parties to analyse trust in policy enactment agency relationships. As with all agency relationships, the government to RRR school relationship and the principal to school community relationship are prone to explicit and implicit goal conflicts and information asymmetries which may result in agency problems and potential issues of trust (Ferris, 1992).

Goal conflicts between policy makers and RRR school communities are the very topic being explored as RRR schools endeavour to take uniform policies and adapt them to suit their individual context. Enacting policies within context sees RRR school communities depart from the goals of government and policy makers. Although their mutual goal is to improve student outcomes through effective policy enactment, there is a goal conflict between the two parties as to how exactly this is achieved. According to school community members, policy makers aim to enact policies across all schools in the region or state to

achieve a one-size fits all outcome that aids the betterment of the future economy and improves the market of the region (Kimber & Ehrich, 2011; Lingard et al., 2012). Alternatively, RRR schools aim to prioritise and enact policies to suit their specific geographic and demographic context. As policy enactment is a productive and creative process, the distance between government and school goals can be significant (Ball et al., 2012). School communities aim to contextualise policies for their contexts and expect a level of autonomy to achieve this goal. The resulting goal conflict is a confrontation between collective utilitarian claims for one-size-fits-all policy enactment and individualised, cultural claims for contextualised policy enactment (Kivistö, 2008). A universal model of implementation is not feasible as issues arise that governments and policy makers may not foresee (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Viennet and Pont (2017) therefore argue whether effective policy enactment means the policy remains faithful to government intent, or if unexpected benefits can be considered a success (McLaughlin, 2006).

Information asymmetries see RRR schools as agents that possess more or better knowledge and information than the government regarding policy enactment in their context. Understanding the intricacies of RRR school contexts and how policies can be enacted within those contexts requires specific knowledge and expertise (Halsey, 2018; Wildy et al., 2014). School community members spoke about their insider knowledge of the intricacies of RRR living. They wanted to share their knowledge of rurality so they could trust the government to develop policies collaboratively. In doing so, policies could suit their individual students' needs and broader school context (Roberts, 2013; Roberts, 2019).

Together, explicit and implicit goal conflicts and information asymmetries cause an agency problem whereby RRR schools do not adhere to the guidelines outlined in governmental policies. Instead, they adapt policies to suit their context which sometimes works against the interests of the government and policy makers (Kivistö, 2008). Despite not

defining this issue as an ‘agency problem,’ school community members expressed frustration and resentment of policies, policy makers and the policy enactment process. They specifically noted a disconnect between what they wanted and what policy makers wanted.

Kivistö (2008) explains that when an agency problem such as this occurs, opportunistic behaviour can manifest in several ways. In this study, opportunistic behaviour included shirking of policies by individuals and schools, pursuit of prestige in comparison to other schools and regions, distortion of monitoring information and outcomes, and cross-subsidisation of funding from one policy to another policy or project within the school. School community members noted ways in which they enacted some policies but not others, distorted information to ‘tick a box’ and used funding to facilitate resources rather than policy enactment. Kivistö (2008) explains that these manifestations of opportunism reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of policy enactment. Therefore, these goal conflicts and information asymmetries need to be understood and mitigated through trusting and collaborative relationships geared towards supporting policy enactment processes that are suited to the school’s context.

Enacting in Place

This study reveals the diversity and uniqueness of place in schools. According to Reid et al., (2010), place refers to the physical location of the school as well as the social, cultural and economic intricacies of the school community. Although this definition reflects an understanding of place, literature recommends that studies steer clear of broad, blanket definitions of place and instead select definitions that are appropriate for the study and reflect the context (Chigbu, 2013; Roberts & Green, 2013). In this study, place is intertwined with rurality and RRR context as each school is in a RRR location. In these contexts, place is a sense of home that is characterised by the shared identity of people who live there.

Distinct places create different conditions for education and policy enactment (Halsey, 2018). Research states that when place is not considered in policy, it can exacerbate social injustices that already exist between RRR and metropolitan areas (Roberts & Green, 2013). Nationally, the Gonski report (Gonski, 2018), the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey, 2018) and the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019) acknowledge the need to provide high-quality education to all students in Australia. However, in policy, this often translates to mean everyone achieves a level of sameness (Roberts & Green, 2013). Dalley-Trim & Alloway (2010) argue that these assumptions are misguided as rurality is not recognised and is therefore unable to represent itself.

Without considering place and context, comparisons tend to be made between schools. School community members in this study made multiple comparisons between their school and schools in metropolitan areas as well as in other RRR areas in the region. They focused on what is absent or unavailable from their school, paying particular attention to human and physical resources such as staff and curriculum resources. The narrative that compares rural and metropolitan education is problematic as it fails to consider the actualities of place and space which results in "geographical blindness" (Roberts & Green, 2013, p. 766). Such comparisons make distance and space something to control and overcome, which contributes to the comparative disadvantage experienced in these areas (Roberts & Green, 2013, p.766). Reid et al. (2010) identify this as "a deficit model of rural schooling," where RRR regions are "problematic" due to gaps between metropolitan and rural education (p. 267).

Where deficit framing focuses on what is absent and unavailable from RRR schools, proactive framing recognises the value of what is present in RRR education (Halsey et al., 2010). Moriarty et al. (2003) urges educators and researchers to engage in proactive framing,

challenging the orthodoxy that conceives RRR education in deficit terms. Using proactive framing, schools take into account existing contextual conditions such as staff, training, community values and relationships when making interventions born out of policy (Grootenboer & Hardy, 2017; Halsey et al., 2010). School community members note that this is no easy task, citing the challenges they face in RRR places as 'wicked' and 'too hard.' Understandably, tackling these problems in addition to the already crowded responsibilities of teaching, leading and parenting is overwhelming. However, something needs to change.

Fullan (2005) calls the challenges faced by RRR school communities, "adaptive problems," as they do not have easy answers and take time to solve but are achievable (p. 53). Adaptive problems require a shared sense of willingness to improve, which can serve as a catalyst for change (Clarke & Wildy, 2011). Sharing the willingness to improve requires policy makers recognise the diversity in size, resources, social relationships and access to facilities offered in RRR areas (Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010; Irvin et al., 2011). In doing so, the focus remains on specific rural issues and contextual actualities, advancing "spatial justice" and highlighting place in policy (Braun et al., 2011; Ball et al., 2012; Miller, 2018; Soja, 2010).

When place is included in policy, policies represent the specific locations they serve to improve. As opposed to placeless, "spatially-blind" or "place-neutral" policies, place-based policies acknowledge that the context for each place offers different opportunities for advancing the community that lives there (Barca et al., 2012; Beer et al., 2020).

Place-based policy has gained traction in the era of globalisation (Beer et al., 2020). Globalisation has forced the rise of social and economic injustices so the process of embedding policy in place has become an international priority (Beer et al., 2020). Beer et al., (2020) argue that when policies ignore local context in the name of impartiality and rationality, they ignore the dynamics through which individual and community lives are

lived. Place-based policies are better positioned to break down policy silos and address the unique local factors that affect policy (Victorian Council of Social Services [VCOSS], 2016). They disrupt dominant social ideologies, which can improve RRR educational outcomes (Downes & Roberts, 2018).

Rannie et al. (2018) developed a framework that sought to understand ways to approach place-based policy. The researchers explained that developing place-based policy requires policy makers to listen to community perspectives, develop an outcomes-focused measurement framework, obtain funding for community and services users, and obtain funding for community capacity building. Building capacity, shared governance and asking communities to draw on their local knowledge furthers discussions from the previous dimension: enacting with people (Beer et al., 2020; VCOSS, 2016). As place-based policies rely on insight from the people who live in the communities, SDM and agency theory act as methods to achieve effective place-based policy and policy enactment.

Enacting With Purpose

Policies are best enacted when they are enacted with purpose. During purposeful policy enactment, school communities engage in a sense making process where they identify, translate, communicate, practice and evaluate policies through the school's contextual actualities. This strategy is consistent with the literature. According to current research, school communities read, write and talk about policies and policy enactment strategies according to their own context (Braun et al., 2011).

Viennet and Pont (2017) determined that a policy enactment strategy is a key determinant of effective policy enactment. A policy enactment strategy is brief, action-oriented, and flexible to accommodate a school's contextual actualities (Fullan, 2016). The strategy includes task allocation and accountability, objectives and tools, resources, timing and communication, and engagement with education stakeholders (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

This study determined that school community members use a five-stage policy enactment strategy that suited their school and the policy: identifying what will work, translating for context, communicating the why, practicing policy and evaluating the fit.

Identifying what will work is the most crucial stage of the enactment strategy as it provides direction and an action-oriented approach to enactment. In this stage, school community members wade through a policy-laden institution to identify which policies work for them. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the scale of policies introduced each year is vast. In addition to state mandated policies, between 2008 and 2014, Viennet and Pont (2017) found 38 national reforms introduced in Australia, often at the same time (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Such a policy-laden institution requires school community members to identify the best policies to enhance and improve their specific school context. To make this decision, school community members consider the people the policy aims to serve and the place in which the policy is being enacted.

Once policies are identified and deemed of high value for the school community, school community members identify responsible persons to which policy tasks could be allocated along with identified resources needed to achieve these tasks. Viennet and Pont (2017) explain that when allocating tasks, school community members determine who is responsible for enacting which part of the enactment plan based on their disposition to the policy. They indicate that some policy documents identify which key stakeholders should be involved in the policy enactment, and their responsibilities are detailed. However, this study showed that in RRR schools, this process could change due to the smaller personnel on staff.

When identifying policy roles and responsibilities, Ball et al. (2011) explain that school community members take on various positions concerning policy, which includes positions of acceptance, avoidance and irrelevance. They define the roles, actions and engagements in the policy enactment process by referring to school community members as

policy actors (see Table 2). These policy actor roles sometimes combine several aspects of policy work (Ball et al., 2012; Fullan, 2016).

Table 2: Policy actors and their responsibilities adapted from Ball et al. (2011).

Policy actors	**Policy work**
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring/supporting and facilitating
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Production of texts, artifacts and events
Critics	Union representatives, monitoring of management and maintaining counter-discourses
Receivers	Coping, defending and dependency

In this study, some policy actor roles were more prominent than others. External senior school staff were identified as outsiders and transactors to the schools. They worked with principals to introduce the policy and provide an overview of policy aims. Outsiders and transactors also hold schools and staff accountable for their policy performance, which sometimes hinders policy performance as it diverts time and effort away from the policy work (Ball et al., 2011).

School community members identified principals as narrators and entrepreneurs. They were seen as agents of change responsible for explaining, deciding and announcing

what must be done for new policies. Ball et al. (2011) explains that principals play a crucial role in giving meaning to policy within the school: "part of the role of headteachers and the work of entrepreneurs is to join up disparate policies into an institutional narrative, a story about how the school works and what it does" (p. 626).

Teachers were identified as either enthusiasts, translators, critics or receivers of policy or a combination of these roles. Ball et al. (2011) explains that policies that enable teachers to engage with students and develop themselves through productive policy work enthuses them. This enthusiasm then encourages them to translate policies into policy practice, producing actions and artefacts and encouraging others to do the same (Ball et al., 2011). Although teachers held enthusiasm for some policies and policy processes, many school community members in the study critiqued policies. Critics question the impact policies have on the work and wellbeing of school community members. Ball et al. (2011) indicates that policy critics provide alternative interpretations of policy despite disrupting policy progress. Critics find issues in the policy or policy enactment process and often approach the principal with these issues, which can be part of the general interpretation of policy (Ball et al., 2011).

Students, parents and some newer teachers identified themselves as policy receivers who were looking for guidance and direction during enactment and generally complied with policies. Receivers perceive policies to be part of the broader school and do not see it impacting their day-to-day except when it impacts them directly (Ball et al., 2011). School community members who could not name policies in interviews or saw policies as a rule to be followed were policy receivers. They used verbs such as 'enforced' and 'expected' when discussing policy, which indicated their compliance. Ball et al. (2011) explain that policy receivers depend on senior staff, policy artefacts and texts when enacting policy. Therefore, receivers require support in the way of capacity building and adequate supplies including physical and temporal resources (Fullan, 2016).

Viennet and Pont (2017) state that temporal resources, such as timing and pace set for enactment, determines how the whole strategy unfolds. If policies are enacted too quickly with too few resources, school community members may not be willing or able to enact the policy. Although, if policies are enacted too slowly, the implementation process can lose momentum and drain resources such as funding, technology, knowledge and capacity (Viennet & Pont, 2017). In RRR areas where resources are limited, school community members recognise that well-timed enactment is crucial. According to research from Fullan (2016) policy enactment strategies take at least two years to achieve.

With the policy, policy actors and resources for enactment identified, schools begin to ask themselves a series of questions: what does this policy mean to us? What do we have to do? Do we need to adopt this policy? (Ball et al., 2012). They began decoding the policy and policy language by adapting the policy to fit the school (Ball et al., 2012). Ball et al. (2012) explains the decoding process:

> this decoding is done in relation to the culture and history of the institution and the policy biographies of the key actors. It is a process of meaning-making, which relates the smaller to the bigger picture; that is, institutional priorities and possibilities to political necessities. These situated interpretations are set over and against what else is in play, what consequences might ensue from responding or not responding. Interpretations are set within the schools' position in relation to policy (performance levels, league tale position, ratings) and the degree and type of imperative attached to any policy and the contextual limitations of budget, staff etc." (p. 44).

The decoding process is known in the literature to be an element of actor-network theory. Actor-network theory is described by Law (1992) as a theory of agency and sociology of translation. It explains the agency and power of RRR school community members and how they can reshape policy. Actor-network theory suggests that an original command, (in this

case, policy) is translated as people seek to pursue their objectives. It draws parallel with agency theory discussed earlier in this chapter as it assumes that individuals will redefine the original goal to align with their objectives. Where the two differ is that agency theory assumes a problem of resistance is created between the principal (the government) and the agent (school communities) when goals and interests do not align. On the other hand, actor-network theory assumes that rather than resisting or accepting government artefacts, such as policies, individuals engage with and transform them to adapt their own practices. This process known as translation (Herbert-Cheshire, 2003).

Actor-network theorists and researchers explain translation in greater depth by stating that translation is "a continuous process through which individuals transform the knowledge, truths and effects of power each time they encounter them" (Herbert-Cheshire, 2003, p. 456). Latour (1986) explains that these individuals "slowly turn it into something completely different as they sought to achieve their own goals" (p. 268). From the perspective of translation, adapting policies to suit a school's context becomes the norm as policy actors continuously accommodate, reshape and occasionally reject the policy and its aims to find a policy meaning that best suits their school (Herbert-Cheshire, 2003). Crump (1992) explains,

> policies are capable of more than one interpretation. In an organisation the size of education, policy is open to interpretation in all parts of the system: there are gaps, spaces and contradictions; policy is filtered, interpreted and recontextualised; it is opposed, contested and resisted; interpretations are constantly shifting (p. 420).

In this study, policies were translated to meet the objectives and demands of the school. School community members asked themselves, does this policy address an unmet need? Is it a priority concerning other unmet needs? Asking these questions gives the policy meaning for the school community (Fullan, 2016).

Finding meaning in policy is essential for school communities translating policies as policy enactment often involves ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty (Fullan, 2016). Yanow's (2000) model of interpretive policy analysis seeks to identify how schools can determine the meaning of a policy for their school community by identifying policy artefacts that have meaning for the community, interpreting the specific meanings being communicated in the policy artefacts, determining points of conflict and identifying intervention strategies to mediate differences (Yanow, 2000). This meaning making process occurs in meetings, staff briefings and working groups where school community members interpret and translate policies, assigning the policy value for their school (Ball et al., 2012).

Translating policies effectively requires effective communication, which is an ongoing element of the policy enactment strategy. In policy enactment, the purpose of communication is "making sure the key message and logic of the policy are transmitted correctly to actors, build consensus around the objectives, tools and other means to achieve the policy goals" (Viennet and Pont (2017, p. 38).

Clear and open communication builds support for the policy and hinders the number of obstacles or opposition to policy enactment (Viennet & Pont, 2017). School community members can be informed of the purpose and meaning behind policies. This needs to be consistent across school community groups. In this study, school community members explained that parents and students do not often receive effective communication about policies. This gap in communication is exacerbated by the geographical distance between schools and communities in RRR areas. School community members also noted that policy language is not understood by all involved in the enactment process.

Research states that policy enactment requires the support of all involved; therefore, language needs to be precise (Viennet & Pont, 2017). The Department of Education (2018) Parent and Community Engagement Framework states "schools have a responsibility to help

parents understand the 'language of learning'" (p.12). Having a common language allows all members of the school community to effectively communicate with each other, advancing the enactment of policies.

Determining the effectiveness of a policy and the enactment strategy requires schools to evaluate the fit of the policy. Policy enactment is essentially immeasurable as it relies on uncontrollable variables such as contextual factors. However, some researchers have proposed definitions for successful policy enactment. Ingram and Sneider (1990) define successful enactment as progress on problems, increased knowledge and increased support. Although they acknowledge that the impact of policy and the enactment process is challenging to measure, Viennet and Pont (2017) note that resources could be wasted without evaluation, and confidence in policymakers and the education system could be lost.

Viennet and Pont (2017) propose monitoring and accountability to determine the success of the policy and policy enactment strategy and to keep stakeholders accountable. They note that these accountability mechanisms can have a positive impact, resulting in more effective and qualitative enactment; however, accountability mechanisms can also negatively influence the enactment process. School community members discussed monitoring and accountability measures present in their schools such as observations, self-reflection and coaching feedback. They noted that these techniques were used to monitor how the policy was being practiced and to keep enactment processes consistent.

Perryman et al. (2017) explain that monitoring and accountability measures rework the teacher as a policy subject. They refer to Foucault's governmentality, explaining that teachers, in particular, are forced to articulate themselves and their teaching practice within the policy world. Perryman et al. (2017) explains that this is a stressful process that is now normalised as being symbolic of a 'good teacher.' Perryman's research evidenced this as teachers in the study found observations and feedback a welcomed opportunity to learn and

improve their policy practice. In this sense, Perryman et al. (2017) stated that “policies can thus be enacted at ground level, perceived now as belonging to everyone and part of ‘obvious good practice’” (p. 750).

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the findings from this study and placed them in the context of current literature. In doing so, this chapter demonstrated how CPET is consistent with current educational theories, literature and practices. The next chapter highlights how these findings are unique to the educational field and evaluates the theoretical contribution of this study to education. The following chapter also discusses limitations faced by this study and concludes by making recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

Chapter 8

Recommendations and Conclusion

Chapter Outline

This final chapter outlines the theoretical contribution to education knowledge. I determine the credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness of this study, determining it as a worthwhile piece of research. I then outline the limitations of this study and offer recommendations for policy, practice and research. This chapter also summarises and concludes the thesis.

Theoretical Contribution to Regional, Rural and Remote Education

Grounded theory aims to provide new understandings of social processes in the real world. This study aimed to generate a grounded theory that explained school community members' perspectives of how policies can be adapted to suit their contexts. The resulting theory that emerged from data collection and analysis was CPET. When developing a theory, it is important to evaluate the theory to determine its usefulness. Charmaz (2014) suggests assessing constructivist grounded theory studies according to their credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness to see how it achieves this aim (Charmaz, 2014). She states, "these criteria address the implicit actions and meanings in the studied phenomenon and help you analyse how it is constructed. The criteria account for the empirical study and development of the theory" (p. 338). Charmaz (2014) poses the following questions to ask of research that uses grounded theory:

Credibility:

- Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic?
- Are the data sufficient to merit your claims? Consider the range, number, and depth of observations contained in the data.

- Have you made systematic comparisons between observations and between categories?
- Do the categories cover a wide range of empirical observations?
- Are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis?
- Has your research provided enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment – and agree with your claims?

Originality:

- Are your categories fresh? Do they offer new insights?
- Does your analysis provide a new conceptual rendering of the data?
- What is the social and theoretical significance of this work?
- How does your grounded theory challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices?

Resonance:

- Do the categories portray the fullness of the studied experience?
- Have you revealed both liminal and unstable taken-for-granted meanings?
- Have you drawn links between larger collectives or institutions and individual lives when the data so indicate?
- Does your grounded theory make sense to your participants or people who share their circumstances? Does your analysis offer them deeper insights about their lives and worlds?

Usefulness:

- Does your analysis offer interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds?
- Do your analytic categories suggest any generic processes? If so, have you examined these generic processes for tacit implications?

- Can the analysis spark further research in other substantive areas?
- How does your work contribute to knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world?

This section will use Charmaz's questions to guide an evaluation of how the grounded theory, CPET, offers a theoretical contribution to education.

Credibility. This study was completed in an RRR setting in FNQ and sought to examine the perspectives of the school community. Purposive sampling of students, parents, teachers and principals provided intimate familiarity with RRR settings and the policy enactment process from a variety of perspectives. A range of data sources, including group and individual interviews and observations with participants from each RRR geographical setting, provided a breadth of data. This process also allowed systematic comparisons to be made between data sources, geographical settings and school community perspectives. My involvement in the topic supported this range of empirical observations through personal experience and extensive primary and emerging literature reviews of the topic and findings. I used my personal and professional skills to gain a comprehensive understanding of this topic. Fellow educators, mentors and supervisors have overseen this study, and my work has been subject to peer review through university seminars, government ethics requests, national and international conference presentations and publications in peer-reviewed journals.

Originality. The data presented within this study provided a new conceptual framework of the contextual factors that inform policy enactment in RRR schools. The findings provide evidence of how RRR school communities balance these factors to enact policies that are suited to their context. The grounded theory presented in the study contributes to the limited knowledge of RRR community perceptions and experiences of policy enactment. In addition, the study contributes to the limited knowledge of student and

parent perceptions and experiences of policy enactment. The findings extend current policy enactment practices and refine current national and state priorities to enhance RRR education.

Resonance. For this research to be appropriately grounded in the data, it needed to portray the fullness of the policy enactment experience in RRR areas. Upon writing the findings chapter, I approached RRR school community members to authenticate key findings and ensure they could make sense of the research outcomes. The data and relevant categories were confirmed with participants to ensure validity of the meanings I ascribed to their experiences.

Usefulness. As a researcher and educator in this research project, my main priority was to produce a practical output for schools to use in their everyday practice. The outcomes of this research have the potential to change the way policies are enacted in RRR schools. This theory can also be transferrable to other contexts where schools are looking to best suit a policy to the actualities of their context. This study provides valuable insight into the new topic of policy enactment in RRR settings and is a valuable contribution to the education field.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, this study faced limitations. In this study, it was essential to recognise and hypothesise these limitations to develop counter-strategies to overcome them. First, given the geographic, cultural, social and demographic diversity of RRR areas in Australia, this study does not cover all RRR context-specificities. This study provides an insight into some of the RRR communities in FNQ, which is not generalisable. However, the study provides insight into the broader process of contextualising policy enactment and may resonate with school communities in other contexts.

Second, there was a risk that my professional experience as an educator in RRR schools may influence my interpretation of the data. To counter researcher bias, I consciously

reflected and recorded my biases as an educator who was frustrated with the policy enactment process in regional and remote schools in FNQ. Although it was impossible to eliminate these subjectivities, acknowledging biases allowed me to avoid clouding data collection and analysis. I attempted to maintain neutrality when conducting this research and allowed the findings to become apparent through the participants' subjectivity instead of my own. In some cases, my professional experience proved helpful in understanding the actualities of RRR contexts.

Third, each RRR school that was studied had an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Working with the community in each step of the research process was essential when developing relationships and ensuring accurate representation in the study. This was advantaged by an existing link between me and the schools.

Fourth, a limitation of interviewing methods is that participants may have responded to interview questions with socially desirable responses. I interviewed a range of participants within each participant group and encouraged them to speak freely about policy contextualisation in their school. Within the interviews, I was conscious of acknowledging participant bias where they may have responded to questions in ways they thought I wanted to hear. When reporting the findings, I was careful to report positive aspects of contextualised policy enactment in RRR schools in addition to negative aspects.

Finally, as an emerging researcher there are expected limitations in my application of grounded theory. I constantly referred to the literature and my supervisors for support in applying grounded theory. I validated findings as aforementioned using participant checking and self-reflection to enhance the validity of my study.

Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Further Research

In choosing to develop a grounded theory, I hoped to incite action and change in the current education system. I hope the findings in this thesis contribute to discussions regarding

policy enactment in RRR settings, the influence of context on enactment and the nature of what can be adapted in policies. I have identified several recommendations that will assist policymakers, educators and the school community to achieve contextualised policy enactment in their schools. Recommendations from this study exist on three levels: policy and policy makers, practice and further research.

Policy and policy makers.

- Develop policies that acknowledge variation in place:
  - Consult communities across the state to understand community definitions of place and differentiate between metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas.
  - Use varying data benchmarks so as to not promote a one-size fits all approach.
  - Provide forums (both online and in community) for RRR communities to provide feedback on policies, aiming to lessen the gap between policy and practice and promote two-way communication between policy makers and receivers.
- Insist that adequate and consistent human, physical and financial resources are granted to RRR schools to ensure effective policy enactment. Particularly teaching staff, curriculum resources and NBN.
- Develop meaningful collaborative partnerships with school communities based on a shared sense of accountability and mutual trust that devolves the responsibility of policy enactment to schools.

Practice.

- Develop a shared understanding of place specific to the school community and context.

    - Acknowledge the diversity of students' culture, language, socio-economic status and their choice of pathways: particularly pathways that keep students in the community.
    - Determine the contextual factors (situated, material, professional and external) in which the school operates and the ways they impact policy enactment.
- Optimise opportunities for student, parent, teacher and principal agency in the policy enactment process and ensure this opportunity is supported with appropriate resources such as training and time.
    - Develop shared norms for SDM process including collaboration, trust, respect, competence, personal regard for others and integrity.
    - Provide training to improve understanding and effective participation in shared decision making about policies and policy enactment. Training includes knowledge and skillset training such as conflict management, group decision making, consensus building and leadership training.
    - Assess the availability of physical, human and financial resources to aid enactment and consider ways to use these resources effectively without needing more.
- Build the capacity and capability of educators in RRR areas:
    - Offer incentives to teachers and leaders coming to RRR areas to encourage employment, attract capable staff and retain teachers in the community. Examples of incentives may include targeted salary and condition packages, thorough teacher induction periods, improved availability of quality accommodation, cost of living allowances, access to essential human services and partner employment.

    - Offer well-established and ongoing professional development opportunities to optimise educators' capability in their role. Such opportunities should develop educators' knowledge and skills surrounding policy understanding, policy enactment, local cultural awareness and contextual influences. Training should focus on challenges associated with living in an RRR area (including the geographical and social implications), teaching diverse student populations and building relationships with RRR communities. PD should be offered locally or via internet platforms to reduce travel costs and time for attending.

- Detail a straightforward policy enactment process that includes identification, translation, communication, practice and evaluation phases. Such processes should provide a clear action-oriented plan as to how the policy will come into effect. Ensure this process is supported with adequate resources and flexible to accommodate the intricacies of a school's contextual actualities.
    - Identification – Identify the policy to be enacted and identify policy goals that add value and meaning to the local context. Determine who is responsible for enacting the policy and the specific tasks they are required to complete. Ascertain what resources are needed to enact the policy in a way that meets policy goals.
    - Translation – Determine the meaning of the policy to the school community and translate or adapt the policy to meet this meaning. Translate policy language in a way that all members of the school community will understand.
    - Communication – Explain the policy's purpose for the school community and make sure the key message and reasoning for enacting the policy are communicated. Communicate how the policy will be enacted in ways that suit the school community.

- Practice – use artefacts that are deemed valuable in the school context. Be consistent with policy practice and ensure an adequate timeframe is set to practice the policy.
- Evaluation – Ascertain how the policy can be deemed successful in the school community. Determine what data will be collected, how and by whom. Identify how this data can be fed back to policymakers.

Areas for future research. Completing this study revealed gaps in current research. Further research about RRR contexts must eventuate from rural educators and researchers who understand the complexities of RRR communities.

- Test CPET from the perspectives of other stakeholders in different Australia schools.
- Determine the appropriateness of the resources available when enacting policies.
- Measure the direct and indirect contribution and impact of school community perspectives in policy design and enactment.
- Explore the experiences and perspectives of metropolitan school communities and policy enactment in their context.
- Investigate the transferability of this grounded theory to other RRR contexts to inform local action.
- Explore the impact of place-based education as a pedagogy and practice in RRR school communities.
- Explore the effectiveness of funding in RRR areas. Evaluate how funding affects RRR student and school outcomes. Identify any economic injustice occurring in RRR areas.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis and provides an opportunity to reflect on the PhD candidature. My research was motivated by my frustrations as an educator who tried to enact

policies that suited RRR contexts. There were few studies about RRR perspectives and no studies about RRR student and parent perspectives on policies. Therefore, this study set out to explore the experiences and perspectives of the RRR communities that enact policies. I recognised that my frustrations formed my social justice worldview, and I based my research design on these frustrations.

I wanted to explore people's subjective experiences in RRR schools, so I used qualitative research to explore the social determinants of policy enactment. I engaged with case study methodology to explore each of the regional, rural and remote cases in-depth; however, I later reasoned that grounded theory best allowed me to understand the underlying process of adapting policies to suit RRR contexts. Constructivist grounded theory allowed me to forefront the voices of people in RRR communities while preserving the subjects' experiences and knowledge.

In this study, I aimed to work closely with all school community members to ensure an adequate understanding was delivered and to provide them with a voice. Asking the school community for their perspectives and experiences was an integral part of this research: not just as a grounded theory researcher but also as a rural researcher. I worked closely with each of the RRR communities to forefront their experiences and form trusting relationships. I conducted my research through focus group interviews, individual interviews and observations. School community members who participated offered their experiences about living, working, learning and enacting policies in an RRR setting. They brought a wealth and breadth of experiences and knowledge to the research space which were analysed using grounded theory analysis methods. These included initial and focused coding, categorising, memo writing, constant comparison and theoretical sensitivity.

This grounded theory methodology enabled me to develop CPET: a theory that explained the phenomenon of suiting policies to RRR contexts from RRR perspectives. A

theoretical model was developed that identified three key dimensions of CPET: enacting with people, enacting in place, and enacting with purpose. I presented these findings to the communities I had collected data from and was delighted to hear that the school community members felt these findings reflected their experiences of adapting policy enactment to suit RRR contexts in FNQ.

CPET confirms that context is an essential consideration in policy. Policies that are developed in the state or territory's capital cannot be expected to be enacted uniformly across all schools, some of which are 2,500 kilometres away. Where standardisation makes it difficult for policies to be successfully adapted and enacted to suit RRR schools, contextualised policy enactment enables schools to enact policies with fidelity in ways that engage RRR meanings and meet the needs of their community. Enacting policies to suit individual school contexts drives sustainability and equality of education in Australia. The collective and unique voices of school community members across the country offer solutions to effectively progress policy enactment in every context.

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