

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BACKGROUND

An overview of the historical context of distance education is considered necessary for a deeper understanding of the educational issues that are current in the field (Simon, 1969). As a result, this chapter describes the history of the development of the education provision for children in geographically remote locations in Western Australia as a basis for understanding the role of the home tutor as a phenomenon in Western Australian distance education, and as a background to the empirical study reported in later chapters.

The chapter is in three major parts. First, an overview of the development of distance education in Western Australia since inception in 1918 is presented highlighting the role of the parent/home tutor (responsible supervisor). This overview is included in the background review as it is essential to providing a historical context for current initiatives. Second, an overview of contemporary policy regarding education in rural and remote Australia is outlined. Finally, consideration is given to new initiatives in distance education currently being implemented by the Department of Education Western Australia (DEWA).

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Australian public and independent education was initially based on the English education system brought to Australia by white immigrants (Higgins, 1994). It was an education founded in the traditions, values and cultures of the United Kingdom. A truly Australian education system has evolved from the acknowledgment that Australia has different factors to consider such as its own history, great distances, a sparse population and a harsh climate. Education in

Australia is not limited to conventional urban schools in the larger towns and cities as there has been a range of strategies for providing education to students in far reaching places. Consequently, distance education remains a significant aspect of the general educational provision of state governments. Rural education is maintained and organised by state governments who form, as Higgins puts it:

Centralised state bureaucracies supervise and administer the human, physical, and physical resources comprising educational service delivery. They also determine the curriculum. Australian rural education has been characterised by themes of free, secular and compulsory pragmatism and a consideration for efficiency and economy. (Higgins, 1994, p.48)

Distance education as organised by state governments encompasses a variety of strategies for achieving education in rural and remote areas. This has included, but is not limited to, the development of correspondence materials, SOTAs, introduction of new technologies and improved telecommunications, increased staffing and itinerant and visiting teachers.

#### *Schooling in Rural and Remote Western Australia*

Owing to the vast size of Western Australia, many geographically isolated students were unable to gain access to schooling in the Nineteenth Century (White, 1962). This was due to the unreasonable travelling time required for remote students to attend school. Further, many children were needed to assist with the day-to-day operations of farms and stations. Sending children to

boarding school was, for many families, an expensive option and so many children relied on their parents to provide them with their schooling (Varney, 1996, p.7).

During the period 1912-1915 rural education became a significant issue in Western Australia. Reu Da Vey (1912) described in a letter to the then Premier the general dissatisfaction with the resources available to families in remote and isolated areas. He identified as areas of concern the restricted curricula offerings, the costs associated with sending children to boarding school, and the state of the teaching service. The state government of the day reconsidered the issues and in 1918 a new correspondence scheme was officially publicised and implemented. By the end of the first year, 73 students between the ages of 5 and 16 were enrolled in a range of correspondence courses. To be eligible to gain access to correspondence materials, children had to live outside a three-mile radius of the nearest conventional school.

The main aim of the correspondence school was to provide access to schooling for geographically isolated students (Varney, 1996, p. 9). Although attendance at conventional schools was compulsory, correspondence schooling was never made compulsory:

It was felt at that time that though parents should be encouraged to enrol their children it would not be wise to enforce this in view of the fact that few families were involved and because of the importance of maintaining favourable relationships with the parents who were required to supervise children's work in the home. (White, 1962, p.9)

Education Department Files in Western Australia (Education Department, 1931, 1937) for 1931 and 1937 provide details of how correspondence tuition also became available to children other than those isolated by distance, including those who were unable to walk, were temporary ill, had various physical complaints or were children of itinerant workers. Whilst the correspondence school was initially for primary aged children, secondary courses were being developed as early as 1926 and were in huge demand (Education Department, 1931, 1937).

The emphasis on primary aged children shifted dramatically with the end of World War I to adolescents and adults with special needs. The Report of the Education Department of 1916 (Education Department, 1917) explained that this was mainly due to local educators being influenced by countries like England and France, which considered education beyond primary school, would contribute to the post war reconstruction. Small rural schools delivered the correspondence school courses as part of the conventional school system. There were many problems with this as many teachers and supervisors were lacking in qualifications and ability to provide guidance to students and to mark papers. In 1933 it was decided that the Correspondence School should take responsibility for the guidance and marking of all Junior Certificate work (White, 1962, p. 39). Teachers were nominated as supervisors, with inspectors providing guidance. Between 1936-1942 there was much criticism of the supervised courses. It was claimed that they were rigid and were taking the job of 'schooling' away from teachers in small schools. In 1936 a new curriculum was introduced and although teachers won the right to mark Junior Certificate papers, few chose to do so (White, 1962, p. 34 -47).

The number of students in small rural schools decreased after 1945. Reasons for this included the fact that the Education Department established more High Schools, that transport by bus was increasingly available to students, and that teachers were more qualified to teach material rather than relying on the correspondence course materials. By 1959 there were 586 children taking correspondence courses. This was a significant drop from the 2000 children reported in 1935 (White, 1962, p.17).

The first travelling teacher was appointed in 1946 and his/her role was to visit students in the remote and sparsely populated district of the Gascoyne in the north-western area of the state. Of interest is that the same teacher also travelled to Manila to teach Western Australian students isolated there after World War II. It was during this time that Summer School Camps were initiated. This made it possible for correspondence children to participate in a community school and visit the coastal beaches. The timetable encouraged the children to socialize and excursions to places of interest were included (Varney, 1996, p.12). It had been noted that children needed opportunities to meet with each other. Socialising is still viewed as important for children who are often located considerable distances apart from each other. Excursions and annual and sports camp schools are currently organized by SIDE in conjunction with Parents and Citizens Associations.

#### *School of the Air (SOTA)*

A significant development for distance education occurred in 1957 when Mr Phillips, Head Teacher of the Carnarvon School, was instructed to develop air

lessons and materials using the Royal Flying Doctor (RFD) pedal radio network. The broadcasts were one solution for providing adequate instruction to children in the remote North West of Western Australia. A meeting had taken place of the School and Youth Broadcasts Advisory Committee in March of the same year. This committee recommended a wider introduction of the camp schools, an extension of short wave broadcasting and the use of RFD pedal radio network. An outline for future development with the RFD service envisaged that a station at the RFD base in Carnarvon be established and, if this were successful, development of others at Meekatharra, Port Hedland and Derby (Education Department, 1957).

The Carnarvon project began in March 1957 and services were extended to 11 children with access to two-way pedal sets. Although the student numbers were small, a further 43 were able to listen to the broadcasts but were unable to respond. It was decided that the broadcasts would emphasize guidance and appreciation rather than formal lessons. Parents found the approach personal and it enabled children to meet each other over the airwaves. However, there were some technical problems and considerable atmospheric interference that made broadcasting throughout the summer months mostly impossible (Education Department of Western Australia, 1957). To overcome this problem a decision, which was marginally successful was made to increase the power in the transmitter.

In 1958 the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), which detailed a wide range of sources regarding educative broadcasting, made available information concerning the Broken Hill, Alice Springs and Ceduna SOTAs. Meetings and discussions occurred between the ABC, the RFD service and

EDWA. The end result of negotiations was the development of education policy for a SOTA at Meekatharra. The policy detailed how the school was to be run and White (1962) describes:

The objectives of the school were firstly, within the administrative framework of the Correspondence school, to direct two way contact from a base in Meekatharra and to enable pupils to establish personal contact with the teacher and other children in a variety of teaching situations. Further the school was to allow a child on correspondence lessons to benefit from modern educational techniques and expand his [sic] experience against which to measure personal standards. Finally the radio was to promote group learning activities and the growth of a Parents and Citizens' Association, to guide supervisors in teaching techniques and to help discipline assignment completion. (p.72)

The Meekatharra SOTA was operational by September 1959. The radio lessons were initially based on the correspondence materials and were delivered between 8.30-10.30 am. The timing of broadcasts was chosen in order to avoid atmospheric disturbance.

Meekatharra SOTA submitted a detailed report in November 1959, which hailed the school as a success. Suggestions for improvement included an extension of the broadcasting time to include a more varied range of students' interests such as art and craftwork. In 1960 new SOTAs were established in Derby and Port Hedland. Kalgoorlie SOTA was initiated in 1962 and Carnarvon SOTA in 1968.

Essential to the success of the students who studied in this mode was the development of a set of guidelines for supervisors who would more than likely, be family members. The supervisors were required to:

See that any instructions of the correspondence teachers were carried out, that timetables were followed, that mail deliveries were made and to ensure that working conditions were comfortable. In addition, they tested oral work in subjects such as reading, spelling and storytelling, a brief report on these being included with sets returned to Perth. (White, 1962, p.90-91)

It seems there were many complaints, as supervisors found that the time required to supervise schooling effectively made it difficult to engage with other duties on the station. After 1946 a subsidy was provided to families and some engaged a governess or a hired farm worker. This convenience was still only available to the more affluent families and the job usually fell to the mother. This result was problematic as many of the supervisors had only a primary education themselves (Varney, 1996).

Correspondence materials had several purposes: to teach the student the content; to be easily understood by the supervisor and the student; as well as to encourage students to move towards working independently so that they would not be held back by their supervisor. The materials consisted of '*Sets*', which were made up of examples of work, a series of exercises for practice and short tests. By the time the annual test was given, students would have completed up to twenty sets. However, with the introduction of itinerant 'roving' teachers,

the subsidy was reduced and the Education Department of Western Australia undertook an increased responsibility for the education of students. This, along with petrol allowances and boarding school subsidies, enabled some support for the home supervisor.

Since the introduction of itinerant teachers in 1946, DEWA has been responsible for the schooling of all students to compulsory age in the state of Western Australia. Currently located in Leederville, Perth, SIDE is the centre for distance learning in Western Australia and is a sub-section of DEWA. SIDE resulted from the amalgamation and overhaul of the Distance Education Centre and the Five Schools of the Air in the mid 1990s. Essentially, the main purpose of centrally controlling distance education provision was for the benefit of children who could get access to a range of services from one central point. Previously, the Schools of the Air and the Distance Education Centre were separated so the new arrangement was to benefit both.

Today, the amalgamated Schools of Isolated and Distance Education are located on six campuses. In addition to the schools on the Leederville site which are counted as one site, there are the five Schools of the Air. A director presides over the school and manages a total of six campuses with a team of Principals (each SOTA has a principal) and administrative managers. Overall the school has a large and diverse student population ranging from Pre-primary to Year 12.

The implementation of policies and practices in distance education in Western Australia has resulted in a system of education for children located across the state. Developments in Western Australia have not always occurred in isolation. The schooling of primary-aged students through distance

education modes, rather than in conventional schools, is the reality of many families who live in rural and remote Australia. Since the inception of correspondence schooling, a number of reports have indicated a lack of provision and adequate resources. Since the Karmel Report (1971), rural and remote issues have been on the agenda for all Australians. The following section of this chapter will look at policy which has informed distance education provision.

## RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION: THE CONTEMPORARY POLICY CONTEXT

Multiple investigations into the national and state provision of education to students who cannot gain access to conventional schooling have been undertaken. A plethora of reports and commissions details the consistent under-provision in all Australian states and territories for such students. Increased resources, funding and strategic collaboration between educational providers and support sectors is often suggested and has had mixed success.

Since 1975, there seems to have been limited progress in the quality and quantity of educational provision in rural and remote Australia. Further, each report containing worthy recommendations has failed to produce the desired availability, accessibility, affordability and acceptability, as outlined by the most recent of reports *The National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2000a) (HREOC). HREOC pointed out that it was necessary to conduct such an inquiry, as education had become a human rights concern of regional and remote Australia

(p.1). Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Sidoti, stated in his launch of the HREOC *Recommendations* (Sidoti, 2000) that he hoped the report would:

convince governments that education is not a privilege for rural children - it is a human right and an essential ingredient in the emotional, intellectual and social development of every child. I hope our reports give strength, ammunition, and clear proposals to those in the community who have always carried the torch for rural education and will continue to do so. (He urged) all Government and private education providers to give our children in rural and remote areas a better chance in life by implementing the findings of the National Inquiry. (Sidoti, Griffith, NSW, 3 August 2000)

The following policy review is organised in chronological order and commences with the Commonwealth Schools Commission *Report for the Triennium 1976-78* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1975) and concludes with the *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* (HREOC, 2000a) undertaken by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission with a focus on Western Australia. It is impossible to include all documents so each document has been chosen for its acknowledged importance and impact on the development of policy and research in rural and remote education. The inclusion of one document over another has been fraught with difficulties, especially in ensuring that the list is manageable and encompasses the issues. Selection of the documents is an attempt to construct a list

representative of the most recent and historically significant publications and policy reviews.

The Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC - since abolished) *Report for the Triennium 1976-78* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1975) “identified country students as an educationally disadvantaged group with special needs and funding requirements” (p.vii). In 1977, on the advice of the CSC, the Commonwealth government introduced the Disadvantaged Country Areas Program (DCAP) as one solution to address the educational disadvantages of poverty, isolation and remoteness. In 1983/4 the Country Areas Program (CAP) was established for a similar purpose. Griffith (2000) stated that the funding formula for the Country Areas Program failed to allocate resources on “the basis of relative access disadvantage although the program exists only for this purpose” (p.10). Griffith went on to comment that the Commonwealth had been aware of the issue for 15 years and refused to fix the problem, at which point he noted that the policy must be deliberate, as it rewards politically influential areas of Australia (p.10).

The CSC released a further report *Quality and Equality* in 1985 (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1985). Issues such as gaining access to and a broadening of the curriculum were highlighted in this report. The Commonwealth Government accepted the recommendations of the CSC with the publication of the 1986 *Commonwealth Programs and Policy Development for Schools Report* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1986a). The new focus was to be on schooling in rural Australia. This was also consistent with Government concern with educational services in rural Australia and was

detailed in the *Economic and Rural Policy* document released in April 1986 (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1986b).

In 1987 the CSC report *Schooling in Rural Australia* was released (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988). The main thrust of *this report* was to provide detailed and explicit information to the then Hon J. S. Dawkins, Minister for Employment, Education and Training for improving the quality and quantity of the schooling for rural students. *Schooling in Rural Australia* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988) has been cited frequently in other investigations and commissions. It was a major study that identified two broad themes: student access to schooling and the quality of teaching in rural schools. It reported on the challenge of providing quality education services and of reducing the difficulties for families and students in rural locations. The quality of teaching in rural schools and the comprehensiveness of the curriculum were further concerns. It was noted that the curriculum offerings at the senior secondary level were inadequate, and providing students with a balanced educational program with scope for personal, social and cultural development was critical (CSC, 1988, p. 210).

Attention has been drawn to the significant staff attrition rates in rural schools and a general shortage of teachers with suitable curriculum experience; “it was noted that there is a general lack of opportunities for students in rural schools to study languages, music and other culturally relevant subjects” (CSC, 1988, p.211). The shortage of suitable teachers impacted negatively upon rural school programs and the choices made available to students. One solution recommended developing a curriculum that would be locally and culturally significant to the students. The CSC proposed that the use of innovative and

flexible approaches, including the use of new technologies, might result in a broader curriculum. The review resulted in ten recommendations. In summary, it was suggested that the Commonwealth provide resources for an Accommodation Support Scheme (ASS) and determine ways of making the Assistance for Isolated Children's Scheme (AIC) more effective. It was also suggested that rural schools curriculum development become a priority area and that funding should be directed towards subject areas which were difficult to staff. Further financial help would be required to establish a task force to consider teacher in-service materials and develop appropriate new technologies such as satellite links. Other recommendations supported the notion of increased resources to the Country Areas program (CAP), particularly to support regional initiatives aimed at improving school retention rates (CSC, 1988).

The result was that individual state education departments responded individually and in a variety of ways rather than adopt a national collective approach to addressing the recommendations. As an example, in Western Australia telematics was introduced to provide LOTE (Languages Other Than English). Although Recommendation 8 encouraged collaboration among the States, Territories and the Commonwealth for making technology more effective in rural schooling this did not occur.

In 1989 the Commonwealth government released *A Fair Go* (Dawkins, 1989), which outlined initiatives for improving education and training opportunities for people who lived in rural and remote locations in Australia. *A Fair Go* had three benchmark objectives with specific desirable outcomes. These were:

- To increase non-metropolitan retention rates to Year 12 in line with national objective of 65%;
- To increase the transfer rates of students from school to post-high school education to levels comparable to those in metropolitan areas so that more non-metropolitan students transfer to technical and further education (TAFE) and higher education; and
- To increase overall participation of all students and especially indigenous students in education and training so that the proportions of the non-metropolitan work force in post-high school qualifications approaches the national average. (Dawkins, 1989, p.1)

During 1990 the Commonwealth government acknowledged again the gaps in delivery of public services to rural people. The Commonwealth government, in partnership with state governments, promised to provide rural Australia with a full range of services in a cost-effective manner and comparable to the major cities. The National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) published *Toward a National Education and Training Strategy for Rural Australians* after reviewing national rural affairs (National Board of Employment Training and Training, 1991).

*Toward a National Education and Training Strategy for Rural Australians* (National Board of Employment Training and Training, 1991) detailed the outcomes of, and conclusions drawn from, the Working Party's monitoring and review of education and training provision for rural Australians towards the objectives stated earlier. The Working Party also had responsibility

for examining the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Country Areas Program (CAP) in Schools which resulted in extra funding in 1990.

The report did not focus on compulsory schooling as it was felt that the proposed initiatives of the report *Schooling in Rural Australia* remained valid (CSC, 1988, p. 2). In undertaking its review, the Working Party was concerned with the issue of social justice and with ensuring that each and every Australian had “equitable access to education and training opportunities for rural Australians, to ensure their - and therefore Australia's - social, cultural and economic futures are soundly based” (p.15).

The report also defined *rural* and *remote* in accordance with the suggestions of the Commonwealth Interdepartmental Working Group; the definition is still being used by several other government groups and is adjusted or modified as required. The definitions become most significant when allocating funding to rural and remote contexts. The classification of rural, remote and metropolitan regions in each state and territory is based on geographical areas and defined fully in the publication *Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Regions Classification* (Department of Primary Industry and Enterprise, 1990). It has since been shown that the classifications were often muddled and did not truly reflect the differences between rural and remote populations which resulted in inequitable resourcing and poor decision making processes (Griffith, 2000).

It was suggested in *Toward a National Education and Training Strategy for Rural Australians* (National Board of Employment Training and Training, 1991) that socio-economic factors, demographic groupings and location contributed significantly to creating a 'double-disadvantage' for young people

in non-metropolitan locations when accessing suitable senior secondary and post-compulsory schooling (p.xiii). Identification of factors other than geographical location is an ongoing theme and has also been identified by (Tomlinson, 1994).

The theme of equitability prevails throughout the various reviews and commissions. Unequal opportunities prevailed for students who could not get access to those out-of-school resources that their counterparts in more urban locations could. It was stated in *Toward a National Education and Training Strategy for Rural Australians* (NBEET, 1991) that:

- a) non-metropolitan people are entitled to equitable access to education and training at a personal cost comparable to that of metropolitan people, and b) Non-metropolitan communities are entitled to quality assurance in program development, provision and delivery. (p.xv).

The same report outlined a cooperative Commonwealth-State action plan with priorities in four areas focusing on the most poorly serviced rural and remote regions/communities (NBEET, 1991, p.xv). It was found that efforts to solve problems of participation and access had only been marginally effective and that Federal, state and local councils often worked in isolation, “developing policies and programs which are not integrated into a broader strategy or perhaps even undermine programs of other agencies” (NBEET, 1991, p.xiii). The Working Party stated in this document “with some concern that although a number of reports have put substantial recommendations to both Commonwealth and State governments that very few have been

implemented” (NBEET, 1991, p.30). A considerable number of submissions to the Working Party also “drew attention to the plethora of reports on rural education and training needs and the relative absence of concerted, coordinated action” (1991, p.30).

Familiar themes emerged from the consultation paper *National Strategy for Equity in Schooling* (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1993) (DEET). This paper contained comprehensive details of rural students and rural education regarding a range of policy matters for rural Australia. Developed by the Australian Council Schools Working Party, issues regarding quality and quantity of educational provision are stated and confirmed as the central issues for national government consideration.

The Ministerial Review of Schooling in Western Australia established in 1993 and chaired by Derrick Tomlinson, reviewed aspects of Schooling in Rural Western Australia under the direction of the then Minister for Education, Norman Moore. The main concern of the review was with the level of achievement of students; anecdotal evidence suggested that rural children were less prepared than metropolitan children in all levels of their education (Tomlinson, 1994, p.6). The committee observed that the following features of rural life mitigated against competitive academic excellence:

- inexperienced teachers
- lack of equivalent peer competition and support
- limited TEE options compared with some city schools
- restricted facilities - libraries and other educational resources

- competing lifestyles/seasonal work regimes/difficult (climatic) study conditions/considerable time spent travelling to and from school
- different priorities, reflecting a valuing of the rural environment and lifestyle
- different attitudes and aspirations towards academic pursuits

The review based much of its findings on the limited information available which included the Tertiary Examination Entrance (TEE) scores of students who selected TEE subjects. The review was bound by the terms of reference and had limited funding available for investigation, which also limited the potential and scope of the investigation. Little data were available on students who may have undertaken studies through the technical college system (TAFE), universities or other providers. However, the existing TEE results did provide a starting point for the review to begin asking questions about student achievement in rural and remote schools in Western Australia.

A decision was made by the review not to limit the enquiry to secondary education since the greater proportion of students in rural and remote areas attended primary school. Many of the students were enrolled through SIDE. The review became concerned with the following questions: *When do differences begin to emerge? Are the differences only to be found in secondary schooling, or are there differences discernible in the achievement of rural and metropolitan primary school pupils?* (Tomlinson, 1994, p.8).

Tomlinson (1994) found it necessary to re-state and redefine the definitions of *rural* and *remote*. For the population of Western Australia, the

terms referred to all schools located outside the metropolitan area of Perth. The terms had previously referred to a standard classification developed by the Department of Primary Industry and Energy (DPIE) that differentiates places essentially through the time travelled by road from Perth. Those destinations a few hours from Perth would be rural and those considerably more than this would be remote (p.3). A further five types of localities were defined:

Metropolitan (populations of 100,000 or more), small rural cities (population more than 25,000), other rural, remote towns and other remote areas. The division between rural and remote is based on an index of remoteness, which combines population density and distance from the nearest provincial city [that is a city with a population of 25,000 or more]. (DPIE, 1991, p.3)

Tomlinson (1994) also reported that Western Australia had a centralised education system similar to the other states and territories, with the capacity to devise and implement its own charter regarding schooling for children in rural and remote Western Australia. The charter stated that:

Regardless whether children attend schools in suburban Perth, rural towns, or isolated communities, they enjoy comparable quality of teaching and equitable learning resources proportional to school enrolments. From that proposition follows a belief, all other things being equal, children of similar abilities should achieve similar levels of school learning. (p.37)

The data on student achievement examined by the review revealed that all other things were *not* equal. While there seemed to be no disadvantage in attending a rural school, the data suggested social and economic characteristics of the child's family and geographical location had significantly more impact on the educational outcome. Tomlinson (1994) stated that for success in schooling, a commitment to and support for school learning from all stakeholders was necessary (p.34).

The suggestion that geographic location itself is not an educational disadvantage is sensitive to the difficulties associated with ensuring quality and equitable education in rural and remote locations. Similar issues were reported in *Toward a National Education and Training Strategy for Rural Australians* (NBEET, 1991). In Western Australia, it was suggested that there was a relationship between socio-economic characteristics of communities and the placement of schools that contributed to the educational disadvantage (Tomlinson, 1994, p.35). Tomlinson argued that resources were not the same for the schooling of rural and remote students schooling as compared with urban schooling. He also exposed assumptions about school resources like educationally supportive parents, opportunities to study at home, access to help, and a range of language, social and cultural experiences which reinforce school learning being equally available. He stated:

they are not, the assumption that they are and the heavy dependence upon them in school learning in a system noted for its uniformity of resource

provision can only be counterproductive to equality of outcomes.  
(Tomlinson, 1994, p.38)

Strategies that the Education Department of Western Australia had implemented over the previous two decades (since the Karmel Report, 1971) attempted to identify the problems of the educationally disadvantaged and provided additional support through programs such as the Priority Schools Program (PSP) and the Priority Country Areas Program (PCAP). Tomlinson (1994) revealed, however, that they had only been marginally successful, if at all, in bridging the gap of inequality (p.34).

It was noted by Tomlinson (1994) that in the 21 years since the Karmel Report of 1971 the Education Department of Western Australia remained locked into the same and similar policy strategies where a greater level of flexibility was needed in almost all aspects of rural education. He went on to say:

There is no doubt that it costs more to operate a country school, with expenses ranging from professional development, to freight, to communication costs being considerably higher. Flexibility in the system ensures that the individual needs of schools be discussed and addressed.  
(Tomlinson, 1994, p.47)

Tomlinson (1994) also recognised the unique role SOTA played in Western Australia. It was observed that SOTAs encouraged the development of new teaching strategies and noted the important social role that camps, mustering

and other such events have on the bringing together of students and their families, often located many thousand of kilometres from each other. There was some concern over the recruitment of teachers for SOTAs and it was recommended that “teachers for distance education and SOTAs be selected on criteria that recognise their commitment to, and their suitability for, distance teaching”(Tomlinson, 1984, p.92). In 1995 Merit Selection was introduced in Western Australia. No longer would teachers be placed in inappropriate positions; they would be required to show how they met selection criteria. Professional development for teachers and home tutors was discussed as essential for accountability and despite difficulties with access to professional development and the high cost of on-line professional development (PD), training was planned for home tutors (p.95).

The Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER) conducted an enquiry into curriculum provision in secondary schools on the request of DEET. The project was funded through CAP. MacKenzie (1996) provided details of this project in the publication *Curriculum Provision in Rural Secondary Schools*. The study aimed to assist school and other administrators by contributing to the information known of rural secondary schools. The project produced four main outcomes (See Fig. 2.1).

The curriculum project used two significant databases in order to reach its conclusions - Teaching Return (1992), which contained data collected from schools about teachers’ class teaching in Queensland. In Victoria information was collected directly from secondary students and maintained by the Victorian Education Department. Briefly, the project revealed that rural and remote schools in Victoria and Queensland provided curricula that were comparable to

urban schools. However, the operating costs were likely to be higher and schools needed to consider transporting students to larger centres where choice might be greater.

**Figure. 2.1: Outcomes: Curriculum Provision in Schools (1996)**

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1. A set of procedures for using centrally held data to describe and analyse the nature of curriculum provision for rural students at Years 10, 11 and 12
2. Measures of the relativities between urban and rural schools in the in-schools costs of providing junior and senior curricula
3. An analysis of the extent to which rural secondary curricula presently provide coverage of key learning areas for their students.
4. An investigation of whether influences of student gender and social background factors on students' patterns of curriculum participation operate differentially in urban and rural schools

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Source: Adapted from, McKenzie, P., Harrold, R. & Sturman, A. (1996). *Curriculum Provision in Rural Secondary Schools*. (ACER Research Monograph No. 48). Melbourne: ACER.

In 1998 the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) released *Differential Access to Higher Education: The Measurement of Socio-economic Status, Rurality and Isolation* (DEETYA, 1998). Under the chair, Professor John Western, the report examined and evaluated alternative and pragmatic ways in which to identify students from low socio-economic, rural and isolated groups.

In April 1999 *Partnerships 21* (South Australian Government Partnerships 21, 1999) was released as a key strategy for “introducing flexibility and adaptability of local needs and expectations into education provision in South Australian government schools” (HREOC, 2000a, p.13). The South Australia Department of Education, Training and Employment, through the newly conceived Country Services Directorate, invited the

community to submit views to the consultancy ‘Education-Country Call’. The following major themes emerged from the meetings, electronic submissions and calls to a telephone hotline:

- improving access and choice (including transport)
- staffing (including country incentives)
- the availability and quality of appropriate services
- improving outcomes
- training and development

In the Northern Territory the former Senator Bob Collins was commissioned to review indigenous education in the Territory (HREOCa p.13). *Learning Lessons* released in 1999 and was received favourably by the Northern Territory Government (Collins, 1999). Among the many recommendations, Collins proposed in Recommendation 98 that “two-way learning” programs be established in schools where the local community felt it was appropriate.

During 1999, the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) initiated the Rural and Remote Forum. Specifically the *Rural and Remote Forum* sought to address two questions:

1. In respect of Council curriculum materials and tests, what are the unique needs of students, teachers and parents in rural and remote communities?
2. In respect of curriculum materials and tests currently being developed, what steps, if any, are already being taken by council in

satisfying these needs? (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999)

Data identified 26 needs/issues from the Rural and Remote Consultative Network. Strategies to address these were identified and a further round of focus groups was organised. From these 5 recommendations resulted. Recommendation 4 highlighted the need for the QSCC to:

consider ways in which the rural and remote key interest groups and the Council can work together to devise strategies that will assist the council and the key interest groups to:

- i) Enhance curriculum and test experiences for students; and
- ii) Further satisfy rural and remote needs. (QSCC, 1999, p.x)

Areas for research emerged from the Rural and Remote Forum. These included research about *access to research* about rural and remote education; the role of multimedia in education; gender construction and children at risk; materials that are reviewed to meet childrens needs: and the role of the home tutor. Other suggestions were made regarding research into curriculum development and test improvements. Of note is the acknowledgement that more needs to be known about the role of the home tutor.

On March 13, 2000 the *Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services* was tabled in Federal Parliament. The Committee report contained details of the inquiry into the infrastructure and development of Australia's regional areas. The paper

discussed and provided recommendations regarding the ‘social infrastructure’ and identified teachers as ‘social soft infrastructure’.

In the same month March, 2000, the report of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *Katu Kalpa* was tabled. The Committee’s responsibility was to inquire into the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians. *Katu Kalpa* (Senate Employment Workplace Relations Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000) recommended that policies and strategies be put in place in order to take “full account of the cultural history, identity, diversity and continuing educational disadvantage of Indigenous people” (Rec. 6).

In May 2000, HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2000a, 2000b) initiated a National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education following the 1998 Commission's *Bush Talks* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1998) that revealed Australians’ concerns with the standard and quality of education in remote and rural areas. The terms of reference for the inquiry included:

- the availability and accessibility of both primary and secondary schooling
- the quality of educational services, including technological support whether the education available to children with disabilities, Indigenous children and children from diverse cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds complies with their human rights (p.1).

The inquiry posed two key questions in order to develop recommendations:

- What is necessary to ensure that, by the age of 18, each child in Australia has received the education he or she requires to participate to his or her full potential in the social, political and cultural life of the community?
- Are we as a national community prepared to do whatever is necessary to ensure adequate education for every child in rural and remote Australia?

The inquiry concluded that, “substantial additional resources are required to ensure equity and effectiveness in rural and remote education” (HREOC, 2000a).

*School Communities*, a further publication of the National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education by HREOC, July 2000 (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2000c), focused on “indigenous involvement in schools” and included “examples that all parents and communities will find useful” (p.3). The publication provided a selection of successful schools, communities and committees in which parents and teachers could find pragmatic suggestions for use in schools.

The many reports and policy documents have provided a fairly consistent picture of the issues facing rural and remote education provision in Australia. Similar issues have been identified and the same recommendations have been made many times over, with inconsistent responses at both national and state

levels. While resources are ‘poured’ into the recommendations it is difficult to explain why the outcome has not been perceived as improving rural and remote education provision. There is, perhaps, a case to be made that one reason why national and state agencies have failed to target accurately the needs of rural and remote students is that the information collected has not been substantiated well enough:

In the current climate of limited resources and greater accountability for government expenditure, there is an ever increasing need for the accurate targeting of needs groups and the development of performance indicators to measure the success or failure of administrative and policy decisions. National and state resource allocation mechanisms are often poorly targeted due either to the lack of accurate methods of identifying needs groups or, the more cynical reason, ensuring that most resources go to those areas of Australia that wield the greatest political power. Most programs allocate resources and report on outcomes by relying on crude data sets or definitions which often use broad classifications for the want of precise and objective methods for quantifying relative need. This broad, imprecise approach is evident in regard to classifying remote and rural, or more precisely, service access disadvantaged areas of Australia. The national classifications promoted by the Commonwealth Departments such as Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Country Areas Program; Primary Industries and Energy’s Rural, Remote Metropolitan classification and more lately the Health and Aged Care

Services' Access/Remoteness Index of Australia are all examples of this type of approach. (Griffith, 2000)

## INITIATIVES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The following 'report-card' provides a picture of rural and remote education in Western Australia. The HREOC (2000d) used the same report card as the starting point for understanding the state of rural and remote education in Western Australia. Details of that report, which provides for a more localised understanding of the context in which this project was undertaken, follow.

Western Australia (WA) is approximately 2,529,880 square kilometres in size. This equates to 33.3% of Australia's total landmass. The population of WA in 1997-1998 was 1,798,000, just 10% of the total Australian population. Excluding Special Schools a total of 87,000 or 33% of all WA government school students are educated in rural or remote WA. Further, 14,000 Catholic school students representing 40% of all Catholic school students are also located in rural and remote conditions. There are 664 primary schools and a further 165 combined primary and secondary schools. There are 6 Distance Education Centres with 760 full-time rural and remote students. The number of schools in Remote and Rural WA is shown in Table 2.1. The total Commonwealth and State government expenditure per student in WA schools in the 1997-1998 academic year was \$5,632.

**Table 2.1: Number of Schools in Remote and Rural Western Australia**

<b>Rural and remote schools</b>	<b>Number of schools</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Government	342	29
Non Government	133	51
Remote community schools	(Govt) 28	100
Aboriginal Independent Community	(Non-govt) 14	86
Special schools	9	14

Source: Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (2000d).

The stated priorities of the Education Department of WA for 1997-1998 for rural and remote students and school communities included the following:

- To provide quality education and training.
- To ensure cross-sector partnership approach to the provision of education and training.
- To ensure access to quality education and training professionals.
- To meet the educational needs of students at risk.

- To recognise and support cultural diversity including Aboriginal cultural perspectives.
- To enhance the value placed on education and training by the WA community.
- To resource education and training appropriately.

During 1999 HREOC initiated a National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education and held public meetings across the continent. In Western Australia they were held in Billuna 14 May 1999, Kununurra 17 May 1999, Halls Creek 18 May 1999, Derby 19 May 1999, Fitzroy Crossing 19 May 1999, Broome 20 May 1999, Sth Hedland 21 May 1999 and Perth 24 May 1999.

The Perth Hearing provided an opportunity for members of the Western Australian community who were considered to have a state wide perspective, particularly in relation to educational administration or policy, to report to the HREOC. The witnesses who gave evidence in Perth comprised a comprehensive and impressive list of 'who's who' in rural and remote education in Western Australia. The witnesses also represented a range of stakeholders.

Ms Helen Newland in her presentation on behalf of Isolated Children's Parents Association (ICPA) outlined the parents' perspective on the education of their children in rural and remote Western Australia. The ICPA has considerable sway as a lobby group to the national and state governments. The statement from ICPA was broad and echoes themes found in many reports, reviews and commissions. To HREOC they stated that it was important to meet the needs of their children regardless of geographical isolation and at whatever

the cost in order for the education provision to be better than ‘second best’. On behalf of ICPA Ms Newland stated:

Distance education today is a demanding role for the home tutor, usually the mother. It is essentially the job of a teacher, without the training or remuneration, and usually included with the other daily tasks of an isolated mother, bookkeeping, cooking, helping on the property, etcetera.

ICPA sees a genuine need for commitment to rural and remote education for rural and remote communities. There needs to be a partnership between the education system and communities to ensure the educational needs of all children are met, including those at risk. Education in rural and remote schools needs to be valued and not seen as second-rate. Attitudes need to change and the education in these areas needs to be appropriately resourced and funds allocated to meet students’ needs, despite geographic isolation. If because of distance costs are higher, then so be it if this is what is needed to achieve the desired outcome.

Every child deserves to have access to an appropriate education, whatever their needs, to ensure they reach their full educational potential, no matter where they live. Home tutors, usually the mother, who supervise their children’s daily schooling through distance education, usually in primary schooling, also deserve recognition for their untiring and selfless contribution to attaining this outcome, because without their input, the whole structure would collapse. (Newland, 1999)

The level of frustration of parents is keenly observed and articulated. Without their ongoing commitment and support of the existing structures, the system would not work. Whether intended or not, there is some hint that the partnership with community is not as strong as it could be and that the plight of the ‘women’ who become the teachers is a significant one and worthy of more recognition than it currently gets.

On 27 April, 2000 *Country Roads: Pathways to Better Education and Training in Rural and Remote Western Australia 2000-2003* [hereafter *Country Roads*] (Rural and Remote Education Advisory Service, 2000) was released as the “new State Government plan for education and training in Western Australia's rural and remote areas” (p.i). The document was the result of substantial consultation with the many stakeholders of rural and remote education in Western Australia. The primary purpose of the plan was to act as a guide so that stakeholders worked together, collaborating, sharing ideas and reducing unnecessary duplication. The underlying propositions of the plan were as follows:

- All Western Australians of compulsory school age have the right to gain access to a quality education
- All Western Australians of pre-compulsory school age should have access to appropriate programs
- All Western Australians of post-compulsory school age should have access to quality education and training

- Access to quality education and training services is essential to sustain and enhance the quality of life and economic development of rural and remote Western Australia. (RREAC, 2000, p.1)

*Country Roads* (RREAC, 2000) contained limited details of the issues that arose as concerns for the rural and remote children of Western Australia. There was some concern about “attracting and retaining experienced staff, being able to provide a curriculum that is broad enough to meet all local needs and delivering support services for staff and students” (RREAC, p.i). *Country Roads* acknowledged that students have lagged behind their ‘city counterparts’ in the areas of participation and achievement. Education opportunities for Aboriginal students were particularly criticised.

Other concerns that were also stated in *Country Roads* but can also be found in the previously mentioned Daube (1993), HREOC (2000a;b;c) and Tomlinson (1994). These were identified in the following areas:

- More subject choice for Year 11 and 12 students
- Improved support services for students who need extra assistance in their learning
- Lower staff turnover rates and more experienced staff
- Better access to professional development for staff
- Higher participation rates in post-compulsory education and training
- Student achievement levels that are comparable with those of city students

- Further ways to reduce the costs of travel and boarding for students who cannot study locally
- Technology infrastructure to support alternative ways of delivering education and training. (*Country Roads*, 2000, p.3-4)

In order to meet the needs of rural and remote students seven priorities were developed (see Figure. 2.2.). The seven priorities were listed and arranged under three distinct headings in *Country Roads*; first, "Where are we going?" second "How will we get there?" and finally, "How will we know we have arrived?" There was an impressive list of strategies under each priority totalling in all 50.

**Figure 2.2: Country Roads (2000) Seven Priorities.**

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Priority 1: To ensure that students who live in rural and remote areas are able to participate in quality education and training to achieve their potential.

Priority 2: To ensure a broad cross-sectoral partnership approach to the provision of education and training in rural and remote Western Australia.

Priority 3: To ensure that rural and remote communities have access to and are able to retain quality education and training professionals.

Priority 4: To ensure that the educational needs of students at risk in rural and remote areas are met.

Priority 5: To ensure that cultural diversity, including Aboriginal and cultural perspectives, is recognised and supported by rural and remote education and training programs.

Priority 6: To ensure continual enhancement of the value placed on rural and remote education and training by the Western Australian community.

Priority 7: To ensure that all rural and remote education and training services are appropriately resourced.

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Source: Adapted from, Western Australian Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council, *Country Roads: Pathways to Better Education and Training in Rural and Remote Western Australia 2000-2003* (27 April 2000). Perth: Western Australia Education Department Services

*Country Roads* (RREAC, 2000) provided some evidence that West Australians had much to be positive about and listed the achievements of the current State Government in providing computers; access to Internet based courses for teachers; software tracking of students; development of sophisticated technology; strategic Western Australian partnerships and special projects. However, there was also acknowledgment that West Australians were entitled to be sceptical, especially given the recent number of commissions and reports that have detailed consistently since 1975, the concerns of Rural and Remote education in Australia and in Western Australia. *Country Roads* will need to provide evidence of how it will be evaluated and whether it will achieve the desired outcomes. This is something of which Mr Browne (Director General of EDWA) (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2000e) is acutely aware and in reference to the evaluation of *Country Roads* he stated:

One of the pieces of feedback we had from rural and remote people in the consultation was that they saw great danger in strategic plans becoming ends in themselves. In other words, a plan for action sometimes became a substitute for action. For that not to occur and for the strategic plan to have more than a moral force it must be monitored. ( Mr Peter Browne, HREOC Hearing, 24 May 1999)

*Country Roads* stated little more than *Schooling in Western Australia* (Tomlinson, 1994), the *Report of the Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice*

(Daube, 1993) and the *Bush Talks Report* (HREOC, 1999), except perhaps that there was a plan to monitor the implementation of its proposals. Further, the many reports included highlight the very same issues that have been facing rural and remote Australia since 1975, and others would argue from the earlier Karmel Report (1971).

Keen observers may well ask whether *Country Roads* will be the plan to assess ‘where are we going?’ And provide the resources to ‘get there’ and evaluate whether ‘they have arrived’. Mr Browne, in his submission to the National Enquiry (HREOC, 2000e) contended that in order for the strategic plan to work it would have to be monitored effectively and that education providers would need to look beyond what they had done and evaluate whether the outcome was achieved on this, he stated:

Getting agencies to maintain and share the data will be a huge challenge for any kind of monitoring in Western Australia but also nationally. We have to appreciate that obviously many of the providers are in competition with each other and they have public relations agendas, which are quite important, because they will actually determine the level of their customer share if it’s not handled sensitively.

We have to move away from what’s being done to what’s being achieved. There is always a tendency amongst providers to talk about what they have done rather than to present data about what has actually changed. We have to make sure that the voice of rural people is included in whatever monitoring we put in place. Finally, there should be some form of independent analysis of the data that’s collated.

In summary and looking at Western Australia's situation and perhaps what this Commission is seeking to do nationally when it looks at solutions to some of these issues, change will only occur if you plan for it strategically. Strategic planning will only be effective if you monitor it. Monitoring will only be effective if it includes some independent analysis, and none of these things will happen if the community is not involved at every stage, and that's my submission. (Mr Peter Browne, HREOC Hearing, 24 May 1999)

The implementation of policies and practices in distance education in Western Australia has not occurred in isolation from other states in Australia. The reports identified mostly detailed a lack of suitable provision and adequate resourcing. The following section of this chapter will look at the new state curriculum for Western Australia. This is important as it impacts directly on the way in which the home tutor will now have to work in the schoolroom.

## THE NEW CURRICULUM

With the introduction of the *Curriculum Framework* (CCWA, 1998) and the expectation that all schools will implement it by 2005, it is timely to reflect upon the importance given to the new curriculum for all students, including those who learn through distance education programs. The Framework is grounded on seven key principles and features a shift from objectives-based teaching and learning to a focus on individual achievement through an outcome-based approach. There is an emphasis on an encompassing and holistic view of the curriculum, including an explicit acknowledgment of

core values such as social and civic responsibility. The Framework has a developmental approach that includes flexibility, inclusivity, integration, breadth and balance. Other principles include collaboration and partnerships. Of significance in the document to those students not located in conventional school settings is the acknowledgment that irrespective of school setting, with access to a wide and empowering range of knowledge, skills and values “that education is the shared responsibility of students, teachers and parents” and “that a collaborative approach to planning by all concerned and collective responsibility for students' achievement of the intended outcomes” (CCWA, 1998, p.17).

The *Curriculum Framework* contains student outcome statements for the designated eight learning areas. These Key Learning Areas (KLAs) are: The Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Languages other than English, Mathematics, Science, Society and the Environment and Technology and Enterprise. The outcome statements prescribe what any student in a K-12 Western Australian school, government or otherwise, should know, understand, value and be able to do (CCWA, 1998).

Each learning area has specific outcomes unique to the discipline area that provide a “structure (framework) for defining learning outcomes” (CCWA, 1998, p.15). The KLAs outcomes, individually and collectively, are designed to meet the requirements of the Overarching Learning Outcomes Statements of which there are thirteen.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter started with a brief overview of the historical development of correspondence schooling in Australia and located the study within the Western Australia context. What followed was an overview of numerous policy, reports, commissions and investigations, which highlighted the main issues for rural and remote education provision.

The concerns of regional Australia have been brought to the attention of a national audience more than ever over the past few years. The emphasis on the plight of regional Australia is evidenced at the highest political levels with the number of reports commissioned about rural issues rising and consequently fanned in the national and state media. Indeed, since 1998, many more reports than previously witnessed have been commissioned at national and state levels in an attempt to respond to the political ‘backlash’ that has resulted from disgruntled and disillusioned rural Australians. The reports regardless of their own purpose provide acknowledgment, strategies for improvement and certainly most contain recommendations for significant stakeholders. The following chapter complements the political context developed previously and provides a review of the relevant literature regarding distance education and the home tutor.