

CHAPTER SIX

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

The five sites chosen for this study are located in remote and rural regions across the state of Western Australia. The regions range from the vast mining concerns of the Pilbara and coastal community of Port Hedland with a metropolitan population of 15,000 to the inland town of Meekatharra in the Midwest of the state with a population of about 2000 but covering 99 974 square kilometres of semi-desert. The sites consisted of four schools of the air (SOTA); Carnarvon SOTA, Port Hedland SOTA, Meekatharra SOTA, Kalgoorlie SOTA and the School of Isolated and Distance Education located in Leederville, Perth. The socioeconomic, educational and cultural fabric of each site was varied. SOTAs were chosen as they represented the phenomenon home tutor. Gender balance was impossible to achieve, as home tutors are predominantly mothers of the children.

Data were compared from all of the cases for common themes. Lee (1981) states that “in exploratory research, there is no simple qualitative definition of what constitutes an important cross-site pattern in the data. Findings from two or three sites can frequently be more significant than findings from the majority or all sites studied” (p.54). The patterns that emerged in this analysis have resulted from the synthesis and analysis of findings from all of the SOTAs and SIDE. Across the sites four primary themes were identified.

This chapter will focus on findings at the four SOTAs and SIDE with regard to the four themes: i) Factors contributing to successful management of the home tutor role; ii) Barriers to successful management of the home tutor role; iii) outcomes of successful management of the home tutor role; iv) values and beliefs about The Arts Curriculum.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF THE HOME TUTOR ROLE

The factors most commonly identified as contributing to successful management of the home tutor role at four schools of the air (SOTAs) were; i) routines; ii) support from teachers; iii) communication; iv) support within the family.

i) Routines

Development of routines was identified as a key factor contributing to successfully managing the role of home tutor at all SOTAs. The parents who were home tutors and teachers at SOTAs were advocates for establishing routines. Teachers at SOTAs recommended that home tutors developed routines for schooling. Home tutors both accepted and solicited help from teachers on this matter. New home tutors at all SOTAs were provided with documentation which described ways in which to begin schooling. Documentation included; how to set up a school room; detailed the time required to complete Sets; and provided strategies for keeping children motivated. Some SOTAs suggested developing a timetable of curriculum areas and gave specific time allocations to these. Home tutors had all developed a

routine for schooling. Many had taken the advice given to them from SOTAs and adapted this to suit their particular situation.

Many home tutors had established a school room which they indicated was essential to successful management of the home tutor role. The school room became for many a way in which to define schooling as an aspect of family life. As children in conventional urban schooling go to school, the school room became a place where both child and home tutor go to school. Each had a mutual understanding of what occurred in the school room. There were some home tutors who had not established a place for schooling. Some home tutors did not have space to devote to a school room and did not view the school room as critical to success in schooling.

Another routine that some home tutors claimed was a contributory factor to successful management of the home tutor role was developing and sticking to a timetable. These home tutors built work around on-air lessons and adhered to self-imposed time allocations for particular Set work. Other home tutors across all SOTAs who had chosen not to have a rigid timetable undertook Set work until it was completed and time spent on work varied according to completion of tasks. Many of the home tutors felt that establishing a timetable for schooling gave them more control over the difficult behaviour that children sometimes demonstrated. When children disliked certain tasks it was useful to have the boundaries that a timetable provided. Teachers found that most children needed the structure that a timetable provided and that home tutors benefited from the same limitations as well. At one SOTA a teacher indicated that it was useful for them to know the child's timetable as they could

be assured that work was being undertaken and that the home tutor was supervising schooling.

A more encompassing factor that was attributed to successful management of the home tutor role was development of routines for management of other aspects of life in general. It was observed that home tutors were often very busy in a range of other duties and roles. They were more often than not mothers of the child/ren being schooled and participated collaboratively with their husbands in other work. Many home tutors maintained the accounts of a business, or assisted with shearing or mustering, were mother and wife and maintained a house that often swelled with workers during seasonal busy times. Home tutors often recommended to newer home tutors that they allocate certain 'jobs' to respective family members as a way of managing other aspects of life beyond the school room. This was observed to include certain chores for children such as washing the dishes or hanging out the washing. Other home tutors felt that children had, an equal responsibility to get ready for school and insisted that they be in the school room by a certain time with teeth cleaned, hair brushed and books ready for the school day. Many home tutor husbands took an active role and prepared meals. They also looked after younger or other children when necessary. It was observed that this was not consistent across the SOTAs and where large properties were being managed fathers rarely had time to look after children. Home tutors found that they were often interrupted during the school day. At times they had visitors, telephone calls and business issues to deal with which made continuity an issue. They often told other family members that once they entered the school room they were not be interrupted unless it was absolutely necessary. At all

SOTAs interruptions to schooling were often unavoidable and children were required to work during muster or shearing. Home tutors planned to manage these absences by undertaking extra work or insisting that children attend air lessons while out and about on the property through the two-way radio in the car.

ii) Support from teachers

Home tutor support was identified as a key factor at all schools. While SOTAs generally created a school-wide supportive atmosphere and developed school plans with home tutor contributions, teachers tended to identify needs and foster participation at the schoolroom level. Teachers played a key role in encouraging home tutors and provided realistic and practical advice about schooling. They were instrumental in creating a supportive atmosphere, in conveying approval and agreement, in fostering two-way communication and in considering parents' needs. Teachers' empathy and interest in the children led to a formal contract of reciprocal aid between SOTAs and the home schoolroom. At one SOTA, teachers felt it was important to visit children at their homes to understand the conditions under which schooling took place. Often the visit was seen as the most important link between the teacher and home tutor as it provided insight into the practices employed by the home tutors during schooling. However, the intensity of teacher support varied from SOTA to SOTA. At some SOTAs, teachers visited several times a year, while at others one visit sufficed. However, all teachers acknowledged the importance of home visits and actively engaged in preparing for the time to be spent with home tutors and their families regardless of number of home visits.

Attendance at the annual Seminar was considered another factor contributing to successful management of the home tutor role. At most SOTAs, home tutors prioritised the event. The Seminar was held at each of the SOTAs and provided an opportunity for home tutors and teachers to learn about numerous issues such as new curriculum developments or strategies for enhancing learning and management of difficult behaviours. At some SOTAs home tutors and teachers only met at the Seminar. The Seminar also provided an opportunity for home tutors and teachers to discuss current needs of schooling.

Another factor identified was the development of significant relationships amongst home tutors and teachers. The unique nature of schooling in rural and remote locations, the significant level of isolation of some families and low family: teacher ratio contributed to the forming of friendships beyond the usual kinds of relationships formed between families and teachers at more conventional urban schools. Some teachers across the SOTAs felt that they were not just teachers but were friends of the families.

On-air lessons were found to be a further factor contributing to successful management of the home tutor role. All home tutors at SOTAs acknowledged the 'on-air' lessons as being an important part of the school day. Some home tutors particularly relied on the on-air lessons as a means of connecting with the wider community of learners and home tutors. Others were pleased at the complementary nature of air lessons to the correspondence materials as it allowed them to ask questions and clarify set tasks. Some home tutors found that air lessons varied in usefulness and they did not always attend. Many home tutors only attended air lessons they thought were

important, consequently the predominant attendance was for 'literacy' curriculum areas. Some teachers at SOTAs felt that home tutor support for on-air lessons was an important driving force behind their commitment and attachment to schooling. All teachers were in general agreement that poor home tutor attendance at on-air lessons made it difficult to know where the children were up to in their schooling and what support the home tutor might need.

iii) Communication

Effective communication was considered a major factor that contributed to successful management of the home tutor role. Home tutors all felt it was important to develop a network of contacts within the school community. To enable this home tutors in some SOTAs found it helpful to have clear guidelines of how communication occurred within their school. A few SOTAs had documentation which described the processes of communication which included how the school operated, avenues for home tutors direct engagement with governance issues, courtesy rules for interactions with the teachers, ways of communication such as using the HF Radio, telephone, E-mail and school correspondence. Home tutors all reported varied experiences of communication with SOTAs. Some home tutors found that they had a conflict of expectations between themselves and their school teacher and others indicated that communication became difficult if the teacher was not understanding and knowledgeable about their child's learning needs. At the SOTAs where the home tutor had established a good relationship with the teacher it was observed that schooling was enhanced. At one SOTA the complete breakdown of relationships amongst the teachers and parents made communication frustrating

and the consequence was a loss of rapport within the entire SOTA community. In general, a feeling of mutual respect and consideration between teachers and home tutors was implicit in discussions.

All SOTAs encouraged home tutors to network amongst themselves and this was seen to contribute to successful management of the home tutor role. Home tutors rated their relationships with other home tutors highly and valued the advice provided by other home tutors. Teachers at SOTAs appreciated the fact that home tutors had a common experience and could provide each other with useful strategies in management of the role. Some teachers cautioned the total reliance on other home tutors as advice may not always be appropriate and home tutor networks could fuel misunderstandings and therefore make the teachers' jobs more difficult. These teachers felt the first point of clarification should be with the teacher. All home tutors felt that it was often easier to ring a neighbour about issues in the school room as they preferred the advice of friend than perhaps the perceived judgement of their teacher. Home tutors could seek uncritical help in order to cope. Other home tutors had indicated a lack of trust in the advice of the teacher and had developed a very good network of other home tutors.

Teachers indicated that they were often disappointed that home tutors didn't contact them when difficulties arose and that it did not matter what the query was. Teachers often found out from other teachers and home tutors when issues arose which complicated contact with families who required support. At all schools the point was made that developing effective relationships between home tutors and teachers was critical to successful management of the home tutor role

iv) Support from within the family

Support within the family was identified as a factor either contributing to the successful management of the home tutor role, or as a barrier. Home tutors who did not have adequate support from family members found the role almost impossible to undertake. Teachers at all SOTAs discussed with families the expectations of the role, but many home tutors acknowledged that it was not until they started schooling that they realised the enormous responsibility attached to it. Some home tutors had little support for what they undertook and were required to maintain all other aspects of their life equally. For many home tutors there was no-one else to do the cleaning or the accounting and so they just had to get on with it.

Many more experienced home tutors found that this was how it had started and they thought you could just add schooling to the list of things you already do. Home tutors who were schooling siblings and had been established in schooling for some time had adjusted what they did as the time and energy required would not allow them to keep up with other business. Many home tutors admitted that they often had significant periods of stress as they unsuccessfully tried to manage everything. One home tutor indicated that she was trying to get her kids onto tasks that allowed her to put the washing on the line and another who tried to do the bookwork while her kids were attending the air lessons. Both found that they were unable to concentrate on the schoolroom effectively and that the outcome was a poor job in all areas. These home tutors had come to the self-realization that they were not super-human beings.

Teachers at all SOTAs were full of admiration for how home tutors managed but knew that they often tried to do too much as they were always complaining about not having enough time to fit everything in. Some teachers found it difficult to give advice about how home tutors could more effectively manage other aspects of their lives. At some SOTAs, however, relationships between teachers and home tutors were often very close and it was possible to make practical suggestions about enlisting support from the family without being perceived as critical or interfering.

Husbands and partners of home tutors were a vital first point of support. Many home tutors recognised that without their support it was more difficult. For these home tutors making sure that partners understood what was required in schooling was important. Other home tutors indicated they felt affirmed and acknowledged for the value that was placed on schooling. If husbands or partners mobilized as more willing participants, home tutors and children had perceived increased value in what was being undertaken. Some home tutors said that it was useful for husbands to participate in some of the schooling just to see what was involved. Many of the SOTAs teachers indicated that where husbands took an active part in schooling the home tutor experienced less stress.

Teachers and home tutors at all SOTAs indicated that children themselves could contribute to successful management of the home tutor role. For many children, being schooled by a parent in these circumstances was not unusual. Many of the SOTA children have observed other siblings undertaking schooling in this way and had absorbed the ways in which schooling takes place. In most cases they moved into similar routines as their siblings. This

process of induction alleviated the necessity to establish new routines as they were in many cases already in place.

Summary

Based on the examples of these SOTAs, it is evident that several factors in combination contribute to successful management of the home tutor role. Where home tutors had developed routines and processes for schooling they managed what was required of them to their benefit. Several other factors, including support from teachers and from within the family contributed to the general tone of managing the role of home tutor.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF THE home tutor ROLE

The factors most commonly identified as barriers to successful management of the home tutor role at four SOTAs were; i) inadequacy and apprehension; ii) ineffective infrastructure; iii) lack of time.

i) Inadequacy and apprehension

Most teachers viewed home tutor feelings of inadequacy and apprehension for what was required in schooling as a barrier to children's schooling. Home tutors who had not attained a high level of education themselves found the correspondence materials and teachers intimidating. The problem exacerbated as children moved through the year levels, and home tutors felt that they needed more specific knowledge in order to be useful to their children. Teachers addressed this by providing more specific and localised support, especially in developing clear understandings of Set tasks.

Home tutors could also be apprehensive about taking on the role of home tutor. They became worried that they would not be able to teach their child, that they would not know enough, that their children would have missed out something and about the level of commitment required. Even home tutors who were comfortable with the role could at times feel uneasy and concerned about schooling or the way in which relationships within the family are developing. Other home tutors and teachers, to a lesser extent, played a significant role in providing reassurance to build confidence and dissipate apprehension.

ii) Ineffective infrastructure

All of the SOTAs experienced significant problems with the telecommunications infrastructure. Inadequate infrastructure caused home tutors enormous stress as they often could not gain to access technological communication at reasonable cost. With the major telecommunications company now answering to shareholders, the commitment to ongoing development of infrastructure was diminished. Teachers at most SOTAs reported they were limited in how they could integrate the use of new technologies, as many families did not have adequate communications access. At most SOTAs home tutors were particularly disappointed with the lack of progress in developing telecommunications. Some home tutors were using the new 'Satellite' options but many indicated that even with the subsidy was costly and they just could not afford it. Home tutors at all SOTAs thought they were entitled to the same access as their urban counterparts and felt disillusioned with progress in this area. Many felt that it disadvantaged their

children, as they could not participate in schooling in ways in which children at more conventional schools did.

iii) Lack of time

Lack of time on the part of home tutors was viewed as a significant barrier to successful management of the home tutor role. Work and family commitments could contribute to the pressures on home tutors time. Many home tutors complained that they did not have enough time to manage all of their daily commitments. Although most of the home tutors prioritised schooling over other objectives they were not always able include the entire curriculum. Generally home tutors completed the Set work first and other schooling demands were sidestepped. Key Learning Areas such as the Arts, Physical Education and Science were often abandoned in favour of mathematics and literacy.

SOTA teachers all felt this was a pity, as many of the curriculum areas that home tutors did not engage with provided breadth in the curriculum. Many teachers knew that home tutors were busy and could appreciate why decisions were made not to do certain things. Other teachers, however, indicated that areas such as the Arts, Physical Education and Science that were said to be valued by home tutors did not receive support when they were provided. It was observed that there was a range of reasons for this. Besides not having enough time a significant number of 'home teachers' did not feel that they were creative or had the skills to support their child in the Arts. Curriculum writers found that the limitations imposed by the lack of time made it difficult to know how best to write a balanced curriculum to meet children's learning requirements. Many children missed out on curriculum experiences with

unfortunate consequences for their learning due to home tutors' lack of time. While all home tutors appreciated the value of other curriculum areas finding the time could be difficult.

Summary

'Home tutors say that they do not have enough time which is seen as one of the significant barriers to managing the role of home tutor. Conflicting aspects of home tutors' circumstances could mean that they often needed to accomplish business commitments and could not complete all of the required work; and therefore they tended to complete only work they thought was necessary. This barrier may be reduced through further discussion with the teacher and consideration of how home tutors decide on what is more valuable. Home tutor apprehension was also considered a significant barrier and might be better addressed with support provided to new home tutors particularly at the beginning of managing the role. SOTAs in particular suffered from inadequate infrastructure support and this was the subject of many encounters.

PERCEIVED OUTCOMES OF SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF THE HOME TUTOR ROLE

The factors most commonly identified as perceived outcomes of successful management of the home tutor role at four SOTAs were: i) home tutors and children; ii) teachers.

i) Home tutors and children

home tutors mentioned several benefits of undertaking the role of home tutor. home tutors who were successful in the role were well informed and supported by teachers, other home tutors and their families. This created a sense of community and was unifying for all home tutors. Friendships were fierce and

essential amongst the home tutors as they provided to each other the support they needed when issues arose.

Teachers at all SOTAs recognised this as being a very important factor and encouraged home tutors to create networks for support as they recognised that at times home tutors did not want to contact them. However, many SOTA teachers had developed friendships with families that went beyond the required teacher-student relationships and felt that where this had occurred the outcomes for the children were enhanced. They indicated that home tutors would trust them and 'try things out'. Other SOTA teachers had found home tutors were at times reluctant to trust them and were suspicious of what they suggested.

Teachers and home tutors agreed that where they had developed friendships a common understanding was developed. Teachers could identify with what the home tutor was trying to accomplish, not just within the schoolroom but more generally as well. Many home tutors thought that their child got better attention when they became friends with the teacher. Some viewed the teacher as providing moral support that motivated them to keep going and enhanced the educational experience for their children. Many home tutors found that the closeness of the schooling meant that they were able to observe the school more closely and become aware of issues of concern more easily. They were in all better informed and could bring identified concerns to the attention of teachers or administrators of the school more quickly.

Another benefit of undertaking the role of home tutor was the acknowledgement from home tutors that schooling could be more controlled than schooling in more conventional settings. Home tutors could provide a better ratio of attention. Their child was not one student amongst many

students and so learning could be more focussed to the direct needs of the child. home tutors were usually in a small class group so attention from the teacher was more personal and directed in meaningful ways. This was especially so where home tutors respected and had developed friendships with the teacher.

ii) Teachers

Teachers at all SOTAs agreed that the stress was different for teachers at SOTAs than in conventional schools. Many teachers felt that their urban counterparts did not fully understand the kind of teaching they undertook and made unfair remarks about their role. All SOTA teachers indicated that they worked long hours and often started at 7.30 am. Many lived in remote locations and did not have their own families surrounding them.

At some SOTAs interactions could be fraught, but where teachers found relationships were healthy teaching was a delight. Many teachers were in awe of their home tutors and some could not imagine how they would cope in similar situations.

Many SOTA teachers said that there were rewards to be had in being a teacher at a SOTA. They were able to spend more time with the children and provide individual support programs that catered to their needs. Teaching through on-air broadcasts was unique and it was often through encouragement from the home tutors that their own skills and confidence developed so that they could become more effective. Some SOTA teachers said that it was a great leveller as they were all teachers, the home tutors as well, and that essentially they all learned together and that created the community that they all had become. Teachers, who were part of the community or family as some

SOTAs called it, were relaxed and committed to creating the best teaching they could and undertook more responsibility to do so.

Summary

The main perceived outcomes of successful management the role of home tutor included: developing friendships amongst other home tutors and teachers; mutual understandings of home tutors circumstances; a community that learns together has good morale; respect of mutual responsibilities between teacher and home tutor. In essence, the overall outcome was better educative outcomes for children.

CONCLUSION

The three themes presented in this chapter are simple and obvious, yet they are highly complex. These were i) factors contributing to successful management of the home tutor role; ii) barriers to successful management of the home tutor role; iii) outcomes of successful management of the home tutor role. The themes were discussed using further subheadings and can be understood within the context of parents as home tutors. The following chapter provides an overview and discussion of the theory of 'individual perseverance' which has emerged from the cases and cross-cases analysis.