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Individual Perseverance: A theory of home tutors' management of schooling in isolated settings

Belinda Tynan[a]* and Marnie O'Neill[b]

[a]*University of New England, Australia;* [b]*The University of Western Australia, Australia*

This article reports a study of parents' management of the education of primary school-aged children in their care in remote and rural locations of Western Australia. It presents a theory of the ways in which these parents, in the role of home tutors, "manage" the schooling of their children in a distance education regime in isolated settings. The home tutors in this study were mothers in families isolated by physical distance from centres in Western Australia, which usually provide educational, medical, financial, and retail services. In this environment, at the time of data collection, schooling was supported by print, that is, "sets" of learning materials, and by a regular schedule of interactive lessons through Schools of the Air when atmospheric conditions permitted. The conditions of outback Western Australia "present some of the worst conditions for use of electronic equipment" (Tomlinson, *Schooling in rural Western Australia: The ministerial review of schooling in rural Western Australia*. Perth, Australia: Education Department of Western Australia, 1994, p. 91). Moreover, the nature of station life on isolated sheep or cattle properties (stations) is such that mothers frequently have multiple and sometimes conflicting roles (that is, cook, housekeeper, station hand, business partner, accountant, first aid officer, wife, mother, and teacher). This qualitative study was concerned with how parents "manage" their schoolroom work as "home tutors," using grounded theory techniques for gathering and analysing data. The term "manage" comes from the theoretical framework of symbolic interaction (Blumer, *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), and in this article refers specifically to the ways in which the home tutors juggle their multiple roles.

Background Context

Increased attention has been given to the education of children in remote and rural locations in Australia over the past decade (Collins, 1999; Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990, 1993, 1994; Department of Employment,

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*Corresponding author. Teaching and Learning Centre, University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales 2351, Australia. Tel: +61 2 6773 3196; Email: belinda.tynan@une.edu.au

Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998; Department of Primary Industries and Energy, 1998; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000; Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999). Recurrent issues that feature in the debate include availability, accessibility, affordability, and acceptability.

Although each of the Australian states and territories (New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, Western Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory) has developed distance education options at primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels for the past 100 years (White, 1962), issues regarding isolation have precluded a high level of satisfaction. Community atmosphere and cultural heterogeneity continue to challenge educators of people located in sparsely populated areas of Australia (Lowe, 1993).

In Western Australia Bowden (1993) identified a high level of dissatisfaction, despite intensive efforts to provide education for primary school students and their families in remote and isolated areas. It was noted that students often lacked adequate social interaction with their peers and teachers, and parents struggled with the curriculum content. Children who are geographically isolated in Western Australia have several options for schooling. Parents may choose between *home schooling*, boarding schools, or correspondence schooling with the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE), a subsidiary of the Department of Education, Western Australia (DEWA). SIDE provides correspondence materials for children from K-12 as part of the DEWA Distance Education strategy that covers the primary school curriculum requirements for the key learning areas. Home tutors are provided with "sets" of activities within the key learning areas. In the case of primary school-aged students, complementary School of the Air (SOTA) lessons are available. The responsibility for schooling, however, is ultimately the task of the parent and, given that the alternative of boarding schools or country hostels is financially prohibitive for some families, becoming the home tutor is the only choice.

SOTAs traditionally have delivered a range of curricula to students in zoned geographical locations. For children who participate in SOTA "air lessons" and receive correspondence materials from SIDE, parental support is essential for quality learning outcomes. However, many parents do not have specific training, experience, or expertise in curriculum areas and are anxious about whether they are doing the job well enough (Condon & Edmondson, 1998; Kopke, 1983).

Since the introduction of correspondence schooling (1917 in Western Australia) (White, 1962), parents have played an increasingly significant role in the education of their children. An increased number of parents have taken on the role of supervisor in rural and remote locations of Western Australia since the introduction of "on-air" lessons in Meekatharra in 1959 (Calzoni, 1991). They have become in many instances the teacher that their children see daily in geographically remote locations. The "real" teacher (that is, a person with a recognized teacher education qualification, employed by the Department of Education and Training) is often a few hundred kilometres away at the nearest town. The role that parents undertake as the teacher—or, as they have been known since the 1983 National Conference on Distance Education, held at the National Centre for Research in Rural Education

(University of Western Australia) in Perth, Western Australia, *home tutor*—is one of full responsibility for the supervision of schooling in a range of curriculum areas and is far more complex than might first appear. Typically, as White (1962, pp. 90–91) puts it:

> 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.

Although there are differences between the Schools of the Air in WA, parents are expected to be the home tutor unless a governess is hired to act as the responsible supervisor and become the home tutor. As the responsible person delegated as "in charge" of the education of the child in remote and rural locations, the home tutor is expected to supervise the schooling and completion of correspondence materials as directed by the School of Isolated and Distance Education and their class teacher at the School of the Air. This delegation is a Department of Education and Training requirement of all persons in charge of a home-schooled child. Home tutors are encouraged to formalize schooling by setting up a dedicated space as the "school-room" and decorating it with educational artefacts (Tomlinson, Coulter, & Peacock, 1985), such as pictures, charts, educational materials, and games.

Review of the Literature

Little research has been undertaken in the field of distance education in the area of primary school-aged children and their home tutors. The field of distance education has been dominated by research in the areas of technology, increased interactivity, and design issues (see Berge & Mrozowski, 2001). Distance education encompasses a wider range of students who, through the use of new technologies, have become distance learners by default. Many of these students are not necessarily at a "geographical distance" from their teachers or learning organization, but rather are using flexible modes of delivery, such as email and the World Wide Web, in their study. There has been an increasing focus in the literature in recent years on the introduction, design, and evaluation of new technologies, including the proliferation of e-journals, which report much of this work (Brennan, McFadden, & Law, 2001).

Literature concerned with the development of policy on distance education in Australia since 1975 contains no less than 16 significant reports and inquiries on educational provision in rural and remote Australia. Despite the large body of information about distance education, very little has focused on how parents "manage" their role as home tutor. More recently, one report recommended research be undertaken to understand the role of the home tutor (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999).

The existing research base has a focus on areas such as curriculum development, learner characteristics, comparative country studies, and the use of new technologies,

for example, email and the World Wide Web. The research reported on distance education is primarily descriptive, often being case studies of implementation of strategies that have been successful with tertiary level students (see Berge & Mrozowski, 2001).

As a further example, between 1991 and 2001 only five articles in the journal *Distance Education* related specifically to secondary and primary school-aged children (see Edwards & Rennie, 1991; Falck, 1997; Fitzpatrick, 1982, 1984; Nyirenda, 1983). Only two of these papers draw attention to parental involvement and primary school-aged students. Fitzpatrick's (1982) research revolved around the Carnarvon School of the Air and examined the question of who "teaches" children in the Australian School of the Air. In a second article Fitzpatrick (1984) looked at the development, role, nature, and function of the distance education pressure group.

Another significant piece of research (although undertaken in the mid-1980s), reported directly on issues surrounding distance education in Western Australia (Tomlinson et al., 1985). It is one of a few sources that contain details of the role that parents undertake as home tutor. Tomlinson et al. observed that for many geographically isolated children in Australia most of their primary schooling is undertaken at home. None have schools at an accessible distance. Some have access to the SOTA programs and all rely on the regular delivery of correspondence materials from SIDE. The researchers draw attention to how the home tutors (parents and governesses) guide children through the materials provided (1985, p. 2):

> It may be assumed that the development of learning strategies depends very much upon the quality of parent input and upon the incidental or explicit teaching of those strategies through the materials developed by the distance teaching unit.

Tomlinson et al. (1985) implied that little was known of the remote learner, but acknowledged, like White (1962), that distance education depended on the involvement of parents as tutors.

Central to the research of Tomlinson et al. (1985) is the way in which pupils and their home tutors managed the distance education materials, correspondence lessons, SOTA lessons, and audiovisual learning aids. Their research stated that home tutors did not merely "supervise" study, but played an active part in all stages of the child's learning. The research recognized that the child depended upon a responsible adult to mediate between the materials and the child for effective learning. Although the sample was small (36 families of the SOTAs in Western Australia, Queensland, and Northern Territory), the principals of the SOTAs confirmed that the sample represented the typical families enrolled in distance education.

In a more recent Rural and Remote Forum conducted by the Queensland School Curriculum Council (1999) it was found that further research was required into the role of the home tutor. Although the brief overview of the relevant literature presented here acknowledges the important role that the home tutor plays, very little research attention has been given to parents who in effect are the "home-teacher" and how they manage this process. However, recently Green (2006) provided a

descriptive narrative portrait of the ways in which one family experienced their daily routine in and outside the schoolroom on a cattle property in Western Queensland.

The discussion here is based on a larger investigation about how parents as home tutors "manage" the schooling of their children. The theory derived from this study was gained from a qualitative study where data were gathered and analysed according to methods proposed by "grounded theorists." The theory that emerged is detailed in the next section.

Research Method and Design

This research was framed in symbolic interactionist terms of how parents "manage" their schoolroom work in the role of home tutor and focused on how parents understand the role of home tutor, how they act towards others in relation to it, and how their understandings and actions change over time. Central to this study was the notion of parents "managing" their schoolroom work as home tutor. A variety of frameworks exists to describe and explain the processes that represent the schoolroom work of parents. However, it would have been inconsistent with the theoretical approach chosen to underpin the present research by adopting a framework from the start of the study. Therefore, in the theory reported here the decision was made not to use an existing framework of parents' schoolroom work as home tutor, as this may have directed the research in a direction that did not capture the phenomenon as the home tutors experienced or constructed it.

Data were collected and analysed concurrently between 1999 and 2002, using grounded theory procedures. This involved ongoing interplay between data collection and analysis, with each phase of analysis guiding the next stage of data collection. Application of the Strauss and Corbin (1990) framework for inductively building theory through successive and cumulative rounds of data collection and analysis led to the identification and development of the substantive theory of "individual perseverance." Three main approaches were used to gather data: semistructured individual interviews, group interviews, and document analysis. Data were collected from SOTA and participant locations. Each SOTA was treated as a case study "site" and data were collected through group interviews of parents who volunteered to participate at *Seminar* (annual camp for home tutors) and through individual interviews with selected parents identified from the group interviews. In order to achieve triangulation, further data were collected from significant others (teachers of SOTA, curriculum writers, and teachers of SIDE), so as to provide rich and detailed perspectives on how parents go about managing their roles as home tutor.

In 2000–2001 there were approximately 500 parents undertaking the role of home tutor to their children at SOTAs across Western Australia. Some parents were responsible for more than one child and, in some cases, for more than three children. Most of the parents did not have a teaching qualification. Other parents had ushered through older children and this informed their experience of being a home tutor. Parents were usually the home tutor during the primary school years, after which many children moved to boarding school in the major cities of Western

Australia. Of all parents, 100 were involved in the study reported here. Although most of the participants in this study were mothers, there was one governess; but they are all still called home tutors. The participants had a range of backgrounds and experience, which allowed the researcher to sample broadly and thereby develop a dense theory.

The documents sought included support materials for parents, curriculum packages, and other SIDE and SOTA policy documents. Informal interviews and small-scale surveys were also used as data gathering techniques. The combination of these techniques supported investigation of the meanings that parents attributed to being a home tutor, the interactions of parents in the role of home tutor, and parents' interpretations in relation to these interactions. The variety of data collection techniques allowed the researcher to develop an "in-depth" view of how parents manage the role of home tutor.

Data analysis involved open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) "to break down, examine, compare, conceptualize and categorize data" (p. 61). Coding *opened up* the inquiry to reveal the meaning and motives of the interviewees (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). Categories emerging from the data were then developed and integrated into theory. Data were verified and the emerging theory tested with the participants during the analysis process. This was undertaken through follow-up telephone interviews, conversations, participation and attendance at camp seminars, and visits to home tutor locations. The resulting theory was checked with participants throughout the data reduction phases. This is consistent with the methodology that underpins this study.

Research Setting

The Schools of Isolated and Distance Education are located on six campuses. In addition to the preparatory (P-5), middle (grades 6–10), and postcompulsory (Wolcott, 1975) schools on the Leederville site, there are five SOTAs located at Kalgoorlie, Port Headland, Meekatharra, Carnarvon, and the Kimberley (Derby). A director leads the school. This study was undertaken with the families of the five SOTAs. The research occurred at a time of intense media discussion of the recommendations of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2000), regarding education for children located in rural and remote locations. In Western Australia *Country Roads* (Rural and Remote Education Advisory Service, 2000), the strategic plan for developing rural and remote education in Western Australia, was also released in 2000. At that time DEWA was in the process of implementing various aspects of the curriculum framework for all children in Western Australia.

Theory as Story Line

The central finding of this study was the development of the theory of "individual perseverance," which explains how parents manage their schoolroom work as home tutors. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), one way in which to present the

theory analytically and with a high degree of conceptualization is through the presentation of a "story line." The storyline below presents the theory of "individual perseverance" as a simple statement of the interrelationships between the categories, processes, and concepts that comprise the theory of "individual perseverance."

When geographically isolated parents, who have had no specific training as "teachers," take on the role of home tutor, they manage the schooling of their children through the process of "individual perseverance." This overarching process consists of categories and processes. There are four categories of processes of "individual perseverance": acknowledging, interacting, surviving, and teaching. The first category (acknowledging) comprises processes whereby parents accept that the role of home tutor is one amongst many that they undertake in busy station life. They identify what the role requires of them and give the role meaning (agreeing). Parents accept the role (choosing) and take on the role (engaging). They establish a schoolroom and undertake to teach.

The second category (interacting) comprises processes whereby parents develop positive and healthy relationships as parent and home tutor with the child (defining). They ensure that the impact on relationships within the family are maintained (valuing) and seek suitable responses from other adults (usually other parents or teachers at SOTA) about the complexity of the role (understanding).

The third category (surviving) is the central or "core" phenomenon of "individual perseverance" and comprises processes whereby parents acknowledge the impossibility of managing other aspects of their life, such as cooking, keeping the books, and maintaining the household (forgiving). They justify their need for finding personal "time out" as necessary for undertaking the role effectively. Parents also identify the need for understanding and sharing of experiences from others and for others in similar situations (supporting).

The fourth category (teaching) comprises processes whereby parents develop ways in which to manage schooling through developing schoolroom routines and plans (consistency) for their children and the family. They are engaged with rewarding good work and negotiating appropriate behaviours (motivating). Parents choose work from the "sets" and adjust the tasks where appropriate to meet individual needs of children (selecting). Home tutors make decisions about the importance of various learning experiences and tend to focus on literacy areas. They tend to select learning experiences that are considered to be essential. Specialist curriculum areas such as the arts and physical education are often left out although they are highly valued. Home tutors also encourage the child to be independent learners and develop ways in which to ensure this occurs (strategizing).

Parents generally proceed through the four categories of "individual perseverance" in a "cyclic" manner. They move back and forth, acknowledging, interacting, surviving, and teaching. The extent of "individual perseverance" varies from one parent to the next. As an example, some parents have developed more strategies for managing their own "survival" than others. However, all parents indicated a need to develop strategies. Furthermore, the immediacy of the role forced parents to respond to and develop ways in which to manage schooling. For parents who undertook the role of home tutor the impact of this extended to all aspects of their life in rural and remote locations.

Theory as Interconnected Propositions

This theory can also be presented as a series of coherent interconnected propositions. These are (1) propositions relating to the overall theory of "individual perseverance," (2) propositions relating to the processes of "individual perseverance," and (3) propositions relating to understanding the categories and processes of "individual perseverance" within the context of the day-to-day management of schooling.

Propositions Relating to the Overall Theory of "Individual Perseverance"

Proposition 1A. Parents "manage" their role as home tutors in rural and remote locations through "individual perseverance." In its most general sense "individual perseverance" involves parents balancing multiple roles but choosing the role of "teacher" as the primary concern. Parents tend to actively engage in the role of home tutor. Parents are prone to manage the challenges of family relationships through distinguishing the role of teacher as only one aspect of home life. "Individual perseverance" also involves parents in developing strategies such as establishing routines, developing relationships with the teacher and other home tutors, and developing teaching strategies that are best suited to their child. These strategies contribute to their own survival in multiple roles.

Proposition 1B. When teaching, parents appeared to select particular curriculum learning areas above others based on their perceived value and importance among all curriculum areas. While parents acknowledged the importance of breadth and depth in curriculum experiences, they tended to focus on reading, handwriting, and mathematics. These areas were mostly scheduled during morning on-air lessons by SOTAs to support the work found in the print-based materials. Parents selected among other curriculum areas learning experiences for their child. The arts, physical education, and science were more likely to be left out or overlooked by parents who had little time or experience to support endeavours in these areas. "Individual perseverance" in relation to curriculum involved parents in managing the learning of their child and this included choosing what would and would not be learned.

Propositions Relating to the Processes of "Individual Perseverance"

The theory of "individual perseverance" is comprised of four categories. Each category is made up of a series of specific but interrelated processes. These categories and processes are presented in Table 1.

Proposition 2A. The theory of "individual perseverance" is comprised of four categories. The four categories (acknowledging, interacting, survival, and teaching) are comprised of a series of processes. The first category of "acknowledging" contains

Table 1.   Categories and processes of "individual perseverance"

Categories	Processes	Description of processes
Acknowledging	Resolving	Accepting that being the home tutor is one role among many others
	Choosing	Making decisions about the role of home tutor by parents
	Engaging	Actively engaging in the role of home tutor—establishing a school setting ready for teaching
Interacting	Defining	Developing positive working relationships as the home tutor in contrast to other roles
	Understanding	Seeking understanding from family members and others of the role
Surviving	Forgiving	Acknowledging impossibility of being "everything" to "everyone"
	Rationalizing	Justifying actions
	Supporting	Seeking support from others in the same situation and providing that same support to others
Teaching	Consistency	Developing routines for the family and children
	Motivating (rewarding and negotiating)	Managing behaviour and expectations regarding quality of work with child
	Selecting	Choosing and adjusting work for the child (or children)
	Strategizing	Fostering independence through various learning strategies

details of the processes through which the parent takes on the role of home tutor and establishes school routines. Through the processes contained within the category of "interacting," the parent sought understanding and support for the role of home tutor in contrast to other responsibilities, such as bookkeeping, which ordinarily made up what they do. The parent tended to manage a variety of overlapping roles, which required subtle adjustments in order to be effective in the role of home tutor. The third and core category of "survival" refers to processes through which the parent developed ways in which to manage the stress associated with being the home tutor. In the fourth category, "teaching" refers to processes whereby the parent developed strategies for effective learning in the schoolroom.

Proposition 2B.   The four categories of "individual perseverance" (acknowledging, interacting, surviving, and teaching) each consist of a number of processes. The first and third categories contain three processes, the second category two processes, and the final category comprises four. The first category, "acknowledging," contains the processes of "resolving," "choosing," and "engaging," while the second category, "interacting," consists of the processes of "defining" and "understanding." The processes of "forgiving," "rationalizing," and "supporting" make up the core category of "surviving," and the final category, "teaching," consists of the processes of "consistency," "motivating," "selecting," and "strategizing."

Propositions Relating to Understanding the Categories and Processes of "Individual Perseverance" within the Context of the Day-to-Day Management of Schooling

The third set of propositions relates to how the categories and processes of "individual perseverance" can be understood within the context of the day-to-day management of schooling by parents as home tutors.

Proposition 3A.   The four categories of "individual perseverance" tended to overlap and parents moved back and forth between them. The processes found in the first and second categories seemed to occur prior to the core category of "surviving." The final category, "teaching," impacted on family life, so parents tended to engage in the second category, "interacting," in developing positive family relationships and seeking support from outside of the family.

Home tutors tended to move between the four categories, although new home tutors initially engaged with processes found in the first category of "acknowledging." All home tutors passed through the first two categories before experiencing the processes of the core category of "surviving." Once home tutors had enrolled in a SOTA, received printed correspondence materials, and had undertaken to accept the responsibility of schooling they prioritized schooling among other "jobs." They then established a schoolroom with equipment for schooling.

Families usually discussed schooling and began to organize other aspects of their general lives. As schooling was being undertaken home tutors felt the impact of the role on their lives and sought support from the teacher and other home tutors. They establish a "life line" to other home tutors. It becomes increasingly important that support for the role is had from the family and particularly from husbands and partners. Routines are soon established to manage busy station life. Many home tutors attempted being "super mums" and this caused stress for both newer and more experienced home tutors.

All home tutors moved into the fourth category quickly and engaged in teaching. They had the immediacy of having to manage printed materials and on-air lessons. They made decisions about how and what work their child would complete, with increasing confidence as they gained experience. One home tutor reflected as follows:

> I think it is a confidence thing too because as a parent you feel that it is your responsibility to make sure that your child is educated and the buck stops with you. When you do first start off, particularly if you are not a qualified teacher, you might be a very intelligent person and you might be highly literate and all the rest but because teaching is not your thing it takes a little while to gain the confidence to be able to say to yourself, well this is not necessary, so we will scratch that and do this or whatever. You do get over that lack of confidence and after a year or two you can actually work out for yourself what is necessary, what is not, what is best for your child, and what is not.

There is a considerable amount of pressure on home tutors to complete the materials; certainly if they did not undertake to supervise all of the tasks, they might be

missing out on some critical learning opportunities for their child. Decisions to leave things out of the "sets" increased the tensions for home tutors.

Home tutors as a group suffered from intense feelings of inadequacy and during those times sought the support of other home tutors as a first point of call. They did so because they felt home tutors understood "the best what they are going through." Home tutors were resilient and accepting of their roles and had a good sense of humour. They enjoyed the times when they could all meet up and share similar understandings. As one group of home tutors put it:

> most of us are full-time cooks. Most of us at various times are part-time station hands [laughter]. You are doing all the schooling and most of the housework. Mothers may be wise women but probably mad women! [laughter]

Camaraderie is very important for being successful in the role of home tutor. There was much evidence to suggest that the networks developed among home tutors were also critical in supporting learning. Although teachers were often excluded from this level of interaction, this was not always the case.

Proposition 3B.   Parents focused on maintaining their lives and viewed the role of home tutor as a job among many that required "individual perseverance" in order to survive the impact on the family.

Home tutors are busy people who live and work in rural and remote locations and manage a range of roles that have distinct duties. By necessity they need to divide their time carefully in order to manage all that they do. They are predominantly mothers and undertake many of the perceived traditional roles in life in general. They manage the house, but are not limited to this and some "keep the books" or participate in shearing and mustering. They undertake the role of home tutor as another "job" among what they do. They cannot disregard the responsibility of this "job" (although some choose to manage the role by hiring a governess). Those who do undertake the role "individually persevere" among the many roles and feel that they must become a successful home tutor as the education of their child depends on it. Home tutors are single-minded about achieving a good result for their child. At the same time they care about the relationships they have with all family members.

Many home tutors found the home tutor role impacted negatively on how they were perceived by people such as their partners, children, and other home tutors. They often felt inadequate and disparaging about the role. There were expectations from the teacher to meet and often husbands and partners placed demands on them that made life stressful. Generally home tutors would like:

> Not [to] have to worry about what someone is doing outside, somebody is ringing, I have got other things I really should be doing, my husband is giving me a hard time because I did not go out and I am supposed to do that sort of thing.

The potential for role conflict always exists for home tutors. The extent to which the role of home tutor is understood by other household members is often the key to

reducing role conflict. If home tutors can establish good relationships within the family and with teachers, schooling seems to be more successful.

Proposition 3C. Parents engaged in the processes of "individual perseverance" through moving back and forth between the categories as issues arose in their role of home tutor. In other words, regardless of the general category of "individual perseverance" in which they operated at any particular point, they might utilize the full gamut of processes to deal with new and challenging aspects of their role.

There is no distinction between the categories once parents have engaged with the role of home tutor; home tutors continually redefine and understand what they do:

> the thing is we are teaching as parents not as teachers. The general perception is that … well community perception is that when your kids have reached age five or six parents are no longer recognized as teachers. You send them to a qualified person and we are— we are it and a lot of us, particularly when you are confronted with a program in the materials that it assumes a fairly high level of literacy in the home tutor and you look at it and unless you are fairly highly literate it is scary. You think, well if I will follow it exactly I cannot go wrong, can I, unless, of course, your child does not pick up a concept or might be a little bit slow picking up a concept and you immediately think what sort of parent am I. Either my child cannot learn or I cannot teach it. There is a big guilt factor involved in everything. To avoid the guilt factor you tend to follow it exactly like a prescription.

Home tutors moved between the categories of "acknowledging," "interacting," "surviving," and "teaching" in order to ensure that the schooling is the best they can offer, and often questioned what they were doing. They needed to understand their role in order to be able to act within it. They sought support from other home tutors, their families, and teachers for a range of reasons. Home tutors wanted to know about teaching, the materials, and how to manage behaviour, as three examples. When teaching they established routines in order to prioritize aspects of learning, and often selected what learning would be undertaken and how. They developed teaching and learning strategies in the schoolroom, which were juggled alongside the reality of general life, including looking after other siblings and contributing to station life.

Proposition 3D. The extent of "individual perseverance" varied among parents. They managed the role of home tutor in relation to their unique situations, and all responded to the role in relation to the other roles they managed as part of busy station life. A response for some was to engage a governess.

Parents made choices about how schooling would be undertaken. For all parents at the SOTAs schooling was a priority. However, each family had unique circumstances that needed to be addressed. For some home tutors, engaging a governess was the only choice. For other home tutors, this option was not possible as the cost of an extra employee was burdensome and by default someone had to undertake the role. The commitment of home tutors varied across the SOTAs. Some home tutors went beyond what may be viewed by other home tutors as required schooling and provided extensive experiences for their children. They also engaged more with the teacher and

sought frequent feedback and support. In all, home tutors have responsibility for schooling and how they choose to exercise this responsibility is unique to each.

Proposition 3E.   What parents do as the home tutor is informed by previous experiences and interactions with other home tutors and teachers. The correspondence materials sent from their teachers also guide them. However, they at times tended to rationalize their decision making in relation to what they "individually" perceived as being of value.

Many home tutors made decisions about schooling based on their own experiences, values, and beliefs. They focused on what they believed to be the "essentials" for schooling. While they valued a school experience that had a breadth of curriculum areas they tended to focus on literacy areas rather than the arts or physical education. As a group home tutors indicated that:

> A lot of people who teach their own children do value the arts and think it's a really great thing to expose your children but it falls back on you to be the one that has to deliver whatever it is that you want to do. I don't really have the skills or the time as I have to get through the "sets" first.

Generally all home tutors felt duty-bound to complete the printed materials and they counted these as being more important than other curriculum areas such as the arts or physical education. They completed the materials supplied by SIDE and adjusted them as required. They often left out work that they felt took too much time and effort. The arts, unfortunately, are often left out. Home tutors justify and rationalize their decisions based on not having enough time. One home tutor indicated that she had been meaning for years to teach her children how to play guitar:

> But I just haven't done it. And last year they started learning recorder over the air and it was fantastic, but they could do so much more, but then it's up to me to have the time to do it, or to make the time to do it.

This example is not uncommon and home tutors were often regretful for not "getting around to" the arts especially when they could often observe the benefits. They indicated that, "until you actually do it you don't really realize how much of a difference it makes. And you know when you've got to confess that yes it does improve your children's schooling, it really hurts." There were some practical difficulties as well. It was hard for teachers and home tutors to undertake the arts and physical education programs through the distance education materials and the on-air lessons. Poor reception could be frustrating for many home tutors who needed the support of an on-air lesson. One home tutor said:

> When we had music last year, it was very ambitious, and I can appreciate what was trying to be taught over the air, but it just didn't work, because the reception's not good. Harris [pseudonym] didn't have a clue what we were teaching. And like, like I appreciate it was difficult over the air, but …

Home tutors at times had to balance the schooling of several children; some were happy to include a breadth of curriculum but did not feel that it was fair of the teachers

to expect them to have to engage with extra work in order to do so. The on-air lessons could be used as times to work with other children. Home tutors tended to become frustrated when the teacher was not realistic about schooling. They tended to organize themselves to meet the demands of schooling and some used the on-air lessons to focus on other schooling needs. In these situations home tutors were making their own decisions about what was important and how they managed "getting it all in for all the kids." Others felt that the arts seemed to take far too much preparation time for the amount of curriculum time devoted to them. For instance, one mother said:

> I don't think in a music curriculum which comes presented to us as a half-hour air session once a week, that there should be a page to two pages of reading for the home tutor, to keep up with what the child has to hand in at the end of the term. Because if you have three students in a home situation and you tend to use air sessions as a time where you can go and work with another student.

Conclusion

In this article the theory of "individual perseverance" was presented as three sets of coherently interconnected propositions. The three sets of propositions conceptualize the ways in which parents as home tutors without specific training as teachers manage the schooling of their children in rural and remote locations. These were (1) propositions relating to the overall theory of "individual perseverance," (2) propositions relating to the processes of "individual perseverance," and (3) propositions relating how the categories and processes of "individual perseverance" can be understood within the context of parents as home tutors.

The theory of "individual perseverance" is an elaborated demonstration of the strategies that parents as home tutors employ in the reflexive processes of their own learning in the role. The complexity of the processes identified through this theory demonstrate the ways in which home tutors manage the competing and conflicting demands on their time and resources as they attempt to deliver a successful learning experience to their children in the context of their other roles and responsibilities. As argued at the National Conference on Rural Education held at the National Centre for Research in Rural Education (University of Western Australia) in Perth, Western Australia (1983), the role of the home tutor goes far beyond mere supervision of lessons delivered by other agencies. The home tutor is central to the successful management, delivery, and mediation of schooling for children in isolated circumstances. The study on which this article is based gives voice to a previously under-researched and under-recognized group, and contributes to development of theory surrounding the education of school-aged children through distance education.

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Notes on Contributors

Dr Belinda Tynan is leader, Academic Unit, Teaching and Learning Centre, at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia. She has a keen interest in issues surrounding distance education of rural and remote children.

Associate Professor Marnie O'Neill is in the Faculty of Education, University of Western Australia. She has a keen interest in issues surrounding distance education of rural and remote children.

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