THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES EXPERIENCED BY PARENT SUPERVISORS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

For a number of very remote students in Australia, distance education is regarded as the most effective means of providing access to primary school education. For these students isolation is experienced not only in relation to distance from a physical school, but also from a professionally trained educator and the instructional benefits this provides. In bridging the gap between the teacher and student the parent supervisor is vital. However little is known about their role and the challenges and opportunities it affords them in educating their children by this means. This paper reports on a research project that examined the role of parent supervisors in primary school distance education with the aim of understanding how they experience their role. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteer parent supervisors of New South Wales primary school distance education students to gain insight into their practices and the opportunities and challenges they face in their role. Interview transcripts were analysed using a three step data coding framework to explore the themes that emerged in their experiences. This revealed that while most parent supervisors do not have formal qualifications in education, they undertake many tasks akin to those of a teacher and experience similar challenges to new teachers. In particular, supervisors have a crucial role in implementing lessons, motivating and engaging their children in learning, preparing for the lessons, assisting with problems their children encounter and monitoring their children's progress. One of the main challenges parent supervisors experience is uncertainty, with many doubting their effectiveness in relation to technicalities in key learning areas and managing multi-age groupings. Parent supervisors report that the challenges are outweighed by the opportunities their role provides, particularly their close involvement with their children's learning and the sense of reward they gain from this. Through this research a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities parent supervisors encounter will enable planning for their role to be improved. It contributes to the broader understanding of rural education by bringing the experiences of an often overlooked cohort of educators into the research literature who are essential to education in rural Australia.

INTRODUCTION

For a number of children living in rural and remote regions of Australia, distance education is regarded as one of the most effective means of providing access to primary school education. In this mode of schooling, the teacher sends the student schoolwork to complete in their home. With the teacher and student in different locations, another adult is required to act as a supervisor of their learning, bridging the gap between the teacher and the student. This is a role usually undertaken by one of the child's parents, with this in most cases being their mother. Despite the essential nature of their role, little is known about the practices of parent supervisors and the opportunities and challenges this role brings them. In this paper I report on one aspect of a research project that aimed to gain an understanding of how parent supervisors experience their role. To do this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteer parent supervisors of New South Wales primary school distance education students to gain insight into their practices and the opportunities and challenges they face in their role. The interview transcripts were analysed using a three step data coding

framework to explore the themes that emerged in their experiences. Specifically, in this paper I focus on the theme of 'teaching' that emerged and note the similarities between both the practices and challenges of supervisors and those faced by new teachers in rural and remote regions of Australia. This understanding of their experiences will enable planning for the role to be improved. It will contribute to the effectiveness of the education of children who study by distance education through assisting an often overlooked cohort of educators who are essential to education in rural Australia.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In primary school distance education, the role of the supervisor has been largely unexplored. However, while little is known about the supervisor's role, the role itself has been identified as essential in the distance education process (Fitzpatrick, 1982; Lopes, O'Donoghue & O'Neill, 2011; Tynan & O'Neill, 2007). Through an analysis of the roles and relationships of supervisors and teachers, Fitzpatrick (1982) argued that supervisors are extensively involved in their children's education, having a breadth of knowledge that is essential to the teacher's planning process. This is supported by Tynan & O'Neill (2007) who portrayed the supervisor as being the person in charge and responsible for their children's education while describing the management of children's schooling by distance education. These views place great weight on the role, implying that many aspects of children's education are influenced by the input and decisions of the supervisor. Tomlinson, Coulter & Peacock (1985) extend on these viewpoints, concluding from an exploration of how primary school distance education students learn that supervisors perform tasks similar to those of a qualified teacher. Alston & Kent (2008) and Tynan & O'Neill (2007) also testify to this, arguing that the role involves tasks such as creating routines, managing lessons and assignments, organising mail to and from the school and getting children ready for lessons. This is indicative of some of the extensive duties supervisors undertake in the distance education process, suggesting that the role is significantly noteworthy in the distance education process.

Despite the established significance of their contributions to distance education, reflections on the value of the role of the supervisor were found to vary among distance education school staff and supervisors themselves. Fitzpatrick (1982) suggests that some school staff consider supervisors to be the defining influential factor in how successful a student will be in distance education. Lopes et al, (2011) supports this view, indicating that teachers consider the support of home supervisors to be vitally important. As well as stressing the significance of the role, these views indicate the magnitude of responsibility involved in supervising a student's education. In contrast to this, Taylor & Tomlinson (1984) identified that some staff members feel that home supervisors have no real teaching role. Instead they consider this to be the responsibility of the teacher. In a similar manner to school staff, supervisors also placed varying values on their role. Green (2006) and Tynan & O'Neill (2007) identified that supervisors experience a great deal of pressure in their role, and feel responsible for their children's progress. This suggests that supervisors recognise the importance of their role in their children's education. In opposition to this, while exploring one family's experience in distance education, Green (2006) also identified that while supervisors consider their role to be time consuming and important, they felt it was just another part of their day. This suggests that both supervisors and teachers often undervalue the contributions of supervisors, with the nature of what their role involves not fully understood.

The conflicting views about the contributions of supervisors may be further influenced by a lack of clarity in regards to responsibility for aspects of children's learning. Lee & Wilks (2007) established that some supervisors feel they have to complete all learning tasks as they are set out by the teacher, whereas others adjust them according to the needs and interests of their children. Tomlinson et al, (1985) claimed that some supervisors feel that it is necessary to adjust learning tasks to keep their children motivated and prevent them from losing interest. With the differences in approaches by supervisors, Lee & Wilks (2007) reasoned that some supervisors are not comfortable with making adjustments to tasks, as they feel it is the teacher's responsibility and they lack the knowledge to do so themselves. This suggests that while there is a need for supervisors to adjust set tasks, some feel unsure about doing so and lack the confidence to do so. This confusion among roles could be further contributed to by teachers' views of the supervisors' skills. In evaluating a trial of a training program

that was conducted with supervisors, Boylan (1996) concluded that teachers often overestimate the educational skills and knowledge of home supervisors.

While little is known about the role itself, the person who undertakes the role and the way this influences the role have been identified. In the majority of families, the role of supervisor is undertaken by one of the children's parents, with this generally being the children's mother (Alston & Kent, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 1982; Lee & Wilks, 2007; Tomlinson et al, 1985; Tynan & O'Neill, 2007). In a small number of families, a governess is hired to undertake the role (Alston & Kent, 2008; Tynan & O'Neill, 2007). Alston and Kent (2008) identify that while this is an option, it is not usually chosen because of the cost involved. In contrast to this, Tynan & O'Neill (2007) and Alston & Kent (2008) reason that despite the costs of employing a governess, some families choose this option as they do not feel they have the skills or time to educate their child themselves. This draws attention to the extensive bank of time and skills required when supervising children's learning, as well as highlighting a lack of confidence felt by parents.

When the duties of the supervisor are undertaken by a parent, they supervise their children's education in addition to numerous other roles and responsibilities in their life, with these influencing their approach to the role (Green, 2006; Lee & Wilks, 2007; Tynan & O'Neill, 2007). Tynan & O'Neill (2007) developed a theory that incorporates a description of how supervisors manage the multiple roles. They claim parents go through four stages- acknowledging, interacting, surviving, and teaching, with movement back and forth between the stages (Tynan & O' Neill, 2007). This is indicative of the depth of responsibilities in the supervisor's role, particularly with the description of the fourth stage 'teaching' likening the responsibilities of supervisors to those of teachers. Taylor & Tomlinson, (1984) analysed the multiple roles, arguing that an issue parents face is a lack of understanding from school staff about how these impact on their role as supervisor. This demonstrates that the complexity of the role and the time needed to engage in it is often underestimated. A further implication of the multiple roles parent supervisors undertake is the time they have available to dedicate to supervising their children's learning. Alston & Kent (2008) and Tomlinson, et al, (1985) claim that in some instances outside factors such as needing to work on their family's property results in supervisors being often unable to spend the time expected of them in the role. This indicates that the multiple commitments of supervisors and their influence on the role are often underestimated, yet significantly impact on their ability to undertake their role.

In situations where time for schoolwork is lacking, supervisors make decisions about the educational experiences their children engage in (Tynan & O'Neill, 2007), with this emphasising the importance of their role in the distance education learning process. Factors identified as influencing these choices are the time the subjects take, (Tomlinson et al, 1985) the perceived importance of subjects, or those that supervisors felt they don't have the skills in (Tynan & O' Neill, 2007). This further demonstrates that supervisors lack confidence in their ability to undertake their role, while also highlighting the extensive amount of duties they are required to undertake. A further consideration in decisions made by supervisors was their own educational background and school experiences (Alston & Kent, 2008; Green, 2006). Most supervisors do not have background training in the field of education (Lee & Wilks, 2007; Taylor & Tomlinson, 1984). Along with this, Taylor & Tomlinson, (1984) identified that little training is provided to supervisors to conduct their role. This suggests that the role and requirements of the supervisor are undervalued.

From a review of the literature, it can be ascertained that the supervisor's role in distance education is crucial, involving a number of different responsibilities that are juggled with a multitude of other daily tasks. Despite the complex nature and extent of the role, it appears to be significantly undervalued. It was noted that differing opinions, descriptions and values were placed on the supervisor's role, with a lack of understanding of the depth of supervisors contributions to the distance education process. While perspectives, approaches and influences on the supervisor's role have been explored, this has given a brief insight into the day-to-day experiences of supervisors. However, a deeper understanding of the practices and the opportunities and challenges parent supervisors face is needed to establish how they experience their role. This will also clarify some of the apparent confusion about what the role involves, by identifying the practices, challenges and opportunities parent supervisors face in their role.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To explore the research question 'how do parent supervisors of primary school aged distance education school students experience their role', I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with parent supervisors of primary school aged distance education school students. The interviews were conducted using Skype VoIP calling, to overcome the barrier of geographical isolation restricting access to participants (King & Horrocks, 2010). Potential participants were contacted and invited to participate with the assistance of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales (ICPA), a key support network for parents living in isolated regions of the state. The New South Wales ICPA extended an invitation to its members to participate, with parent supervisors of students studying by distance education being one of the key member groups supported by ICPA. All supervisors who volunteered to participate were included in the research sample. The research was conducted with the approval of the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee.

The ten parent supervisors who participated in this research were all mothers of the children involved in distance education from three different distance education primary schools in New South Wales. While they are all parents undertaking the role, throughout this paper, I have referred to them as supervisors. The supervisors had between one and five children, aged from one year to over eighteen. One of the ten supervisors had a background as a teacher in a distance education school, while the rest had no formal qualifications or experience in teaching. To protect privacy, pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper.

Questions in the interviews involved asking parent supervisors to describe their experiences and daily practices within the role. This method of data collection was chosen to give participants a means of describing their experiences from their own point of view (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Corbetta, 2003). It enabled flexibility for the interviews to focus on what participants saw as important in their experiences, with the interviews being guided by their responses and ideas (Tierney & Dilley, 2001). Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were given a copy of the basic interview guide questions to enable them to reflect on their experiences. Before conducting the study, the interview questions were piloted with a parent who previously had children undertaking distance education. This enabled the effectiveness of the questions in gaining the information to answer the research question to be trialled (Lynskey & Sussman, 2001).

The interviews were then transcribed with participants given the opportunity to confirm and validate their transcripts before they were analysed. Data was first coded manually, using a three step coding framework to explore the themes that emerged in their experiences. The three steps undertaken were from a grounded theory approach to data analysis, being open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Ezzy, 2002; Grbich, 2007). The open coding stage involved exploring and reflecting on the data to break down the information contained in the transcripts with key concepts and ideas in the data noted, categorised and compared (Babbie, 2007; Grbich, 2007). The second step of axial coding involved combining codes of data already created in the open coding stage. Connections were established between codes and integrated into categories to describe the practices of parent supervisors (Bryman, 2008; Grbich, 2007). The third step of selective coding involved identifying the central themes that were the focus of analysis in their experiences (Babbie, 2007). The use of this framework ensured data was coded until saturation point was reached, where no new categories, links or codes could be found to ensure thorough data analysis (Babbie, 2007). After data was coded manually, the key concepts and themes that emerged were verified using the data analysis program Leximancer (University of Queensland, 2005) to ensure the validity of the themes that were identified in the manual coding process.

RESULTS OF THE PROJECT

A predominant theme that emerged in the supervisors experiences was the significant teaching role that they undertake. As supervisors are not qualified teachers, there is little consideration of them as educators, yet their practices indicate that they undertake many of the responsibilities of a teacher. In considering this, while the challenges of parent supervisors have not been widely explored, there have been several studies conducted that identify the challenges and issues experienced by teachers

in rural and remote schools (Green, 2008; HREOC, 2000; Roberts, 2005; Sharplin, 2002). One of the main challenges facing teachers in rural and remote regions of Australia is being unprepared for teaching in these communities (Green, 2008; Sharplin, 2002). Most teachers are new and inexperienced in the profession, with it being their first teaching job (Roberts, 2005). Combined with this, teachers describe experiencing professional and personal isolation, lacking access to professional development and opportunities for networking with other teachers (Green, 2008; HREOC, 2000; Roberts, 2005). With the small number of staff in rural schools, new teachers have few people to ask for assistance and guidance when experiencing difficulty (HREOC, 2000; Roberts, 2005). In the classroom, some of the challenges the teachers identify are the difficulty of working with multi-age classes (Page, 2006), and with small number of staff, being required to take on teaching subject areas outside their area of expertise (HREOC, 2000). Teachers also take on more roles early in their career due to the small number of school staff resulting in workload pressures (Roberts, 2005).

THE PRACTICES OF PARENT SUPERVISORS

Within their teaching role, the practices of parent supervisors can be described in terms of seven main categories. These are organising and structuring their children's school learning, creating a learning environment, planning and preparing, assessing children's learning, motivating and engaging students, conducting lessons and engaging in relationships to enable them to teach their children effectively.

1. Organising and structuring school learning

Supervisors created a routine so that their children could work through the lesson packs sent to them by the teacher and get organised for satellite lessons or teleconferences with their teacher. Most supervisors tried to model school hours, with a set starting time for school and breaks for lunch and recess. Within this structure, the organisation of working through the key learning areas of their schoolwork varied. Approaches included working on each subject area for a set period of time, getting what the supervisors considered to be the most important subjects completed first, and working around their children's needs and interests. One supervisor Sarah reflected on the organisation of her week:

> "....my whole week revolves around prioritising and it's just sort of getting in and getting the important stuff done first and leaving the lighter stuff to the end of the week when the kids are fizzled out from the mental side of things, so I'll quite often get in and do the maths, the important stuff first, or what I class as the most important and then go from there to basically try and pace it at their level."

School learning was also structured around the number of children supervisors had enrolled in distance education, with supervisors utilising time when one child was undertaking a satellite lesson to work with their other children. While most supervisors aimed to model school hours, they also needed to structure their schooling around home responsibilities, attending to younger children and farm and work duties.

2. Creating a learning environment

Supervisors created a learning environment for their children to complete their schoolwork in. This was usually set up in a separate school building or a room within their house. It was considered by most to be where all school learning occurred. Naomi reflected on the purpose of having the separate schoolroom:

> "So our schoolroom is a very old set of shearer's huts, but it is holus bolus that is what our schoolroom is, it's nothing else so the kids know when they go in there it's time to learn. Well I hope that's what they're thinking!"

All school resources were kept here and it was where satellite lessons occurred from. Most schoolrooms were also set up with posters, displays of her children's work and awards from the teacher.

3.   Planning and preparing

Upon receiving the packaged work from the teachers, supervisors spent time preparing to implement the lessons with their children. They read through the lessons set by the teacher to ensure they could understand their requirements and how to deliver them to their children. They also planned to ensure that the schoolwork was at a level their children could understand, considering how they would need to adjust the work for their children's needs if necessary. This included adding extension work if they felt their children already had the level of skills and knowledge a lesson was aiming to help them develop. Supervisors also spent time finding extra resources that were needed for schoolwork or extension work.

4.   Assessing children's learning

On completion of the lessons they conducted with their children, supervisors assessed their children's level of understanding and provided feedback to the teacher on this. This was usually through a feedback sheet for the teacher, or in some instances recorded and sent by email to the teacher. While providing feedback wasn't essential, most acknowledged how it was important so teachers could further plan for the children's schoolwork. One supervisor Emma described how:

> "The more feedback you give, the more they can grasp your end of the situation and then it gives them the opportunity to reflect, put that into their reports and also prepare the next lot of work that comes in the next term."

This feedback also enabled teachers to work on areas the supervisors identified their children to be having difficulty with when conducting satellite lessons. Supervisors then packed up their children's completed schoolwork and posted or emailed it back to the teacher for them to further evaluate and provide their own assessment of the children's level of understanding.

5.   Motivating and engaging students

Supervisors implemented strategies that they felt motivated their children and encouraged them to complete their schoolwork. This was necessary across all year levels, particularly when children worked more independently of supervisors on their schoolwork. The main strategy used by supervisors for motivating students was a system of rewards. This generally involved children receiving privileges such as opportunities to play their favourite games, or getting new toys for completing their schoolwork. Supervisors also motivated children to complete their schoolwork by placing time limits on activities and encouraging children to beat the time limit. Having a positive attitude in the schoolroom and using praise to encourage students to engage with their schoolwork was also important. Other strategies used by supervisors to engage their children in schoolwork were altering the lessons set by the teacher to target the students learning styles and incorporating games to engage students with their schoolwork.

6.   Conducting lessons

The largest part of the supervisor's role in the early years of their children's schooling involved working through lessons with their children. In the early years of primary school, the teacher sent the supervisor a written script telling them almost word for word how to work through the lessons with their children. While some supervisors worked through the lessons according these scripts, most found that they needed to adjust them in some way to meet their children's individual needs. One participant Anna, reflected on the necessity of this:

> "If you just did what they sent, I think it's pretty good, but sometimes it gets a bit confusing. Sometimes they do, usually in the maths tracks units there's a game of some description to do with them and I find sometimes that it confuses him. So that's where a lot of the time I use something that I've found, or on Mathletics or something I look on there first, something that's related to what the unit that we're doing."

There were many different strategies used to adjust lessons. One of the main ways supervisors did this was in consideration with their children's learning styles and interests. An example of this was incorporating ball games with spelling activities and counting by jumping on the trampoline to engage kinaesthetic learners. Supervisors also noted how they changed activities to make them more meaningful and relevant to their children. Mary, a supervisor living on a farming station gave an example of how she utilised opportunities within everyday life experiences to help her children learn to count:

> "With kindergarten we had to prove that we could count from one to a hundred, I could tick that off without even doing that in the classroom because I know that we'd completed it while driving along or mustering in the paddock or whatever."

Supervisors also adjusted work to the level of their children's capabilities. If students were not understanding the examples given in the lesson guides, they would give other examples or provide extension work if it was considered too easy for the student.

When children were in the upper years of primary school and had developed a higher level of literacy skills, they worked more independently on lessons. The supervisor was less involved in conducting the lessons; instead they set the learning tasks for their children, motivated them to work through it and provided assistance when the children were having difficulty.

7.   Relationships

Within their role, supervisors engaged in relationships with a number of people around them to assist them to undertake their teaching role. In particular they had a cyclical relationship with the distance education teacher. Supervisors relied on the distance education teacher to provide guidelines to structure the lessons they conducted with their children. The supervisor then implemented these lessons and provided feedback to the teacher for further planning. Supervisors also relied on teachers for behaviour reinforcement, assistance when they had difficulties with lessons and for training opportunities for their role. The majority of supervisors also tried to establish a supervisor-student relationship with their children, similar to what they felt that of a teacher-student relationship should involve. One participant Anna described this as:

> "….the difference between being mum and being the teacher, you just about need different hats. Like when he sits down I'll say good morning Peter even though I've seen him the two hours it's taken me to get him to the school desk…."

Supervisors also developed relationships with other supervisors from their attendance at mini-schools and camps, using these to share strategies for their role and emotional support. In addition, supervisors also contacted other people with experience in the field of education for assistance, such as tutors from the Volunteer for Isolated Students Education (VISE) program and friends who were teachers.

THE CHALLENGES OF PARENT SUPERVISORS

From exploring the challenges encountered by parent supervisors, there were considerable similarities between the challenges they experience and those of new teachers. Like many new teachers, one of the main challenges supervisors describe was feeling uncertain. Many were not sure about the expectations of them in their role and felt they lacked knowledge and experience to undertake the role. Having no training as a teacher and receiving little training for the role was considered to be a disadvantage in their role. Supervisors often doubted the effectiveness of their practices, particularly in the early years of their role. In reflecting on her early experiences in her role, Kate a supervisor of five children described her self-doubt and uncertainty:

> "….you always probably second guess yourself or not quite sure if the kids are up to standard, 'cause you don't have anything to compare it to. You don't know, you've never been in a classroom, you don't know if they're going along alright…."

While supervisors had their children's teacher to ask for help, some identified barriers to this. This included embarrassment in asking for help as they felt they should know what they were doing. One participant Helen reflected on the challenges she faced in asking for help:

> *"If you have any problems you're supposed to ring them. I always found that a bit of an issue because of the cost, if you were insecure, if you rang up every time you had a problem you'd be spending a lot of money and there was no 1300 number for the school, so back then it does make you feel more isolated."*

Some also felt that while the teachers were helpful, they, along with others, did not quite understand the challenges their role posed, with this contributing to the sense of personal isolation they experienced.

With their key role in undertaking lessons with their children, supervisors described difficulty in developing effective strategies to conduct lessons. Recognising and engaging different learning styles, particularly more active learning styles, and adjusting the lessons set by the teacher to make learning relevant and meaningful to the student was difficult. Developing strategies to engage their students in lessons when they were considered boring or irrelevant was also challenging. Supervisors felt that they lacked the knowledge of the key learning areas they were teaching their children. This was particularly an issue with the areas of mathematics and English, with supervisors often reflecting on their own subject knowledge the way Naomi describes:

> *"I do find this a bit with maths, because we do what they call maths tracks which is a bit of a sore point with a lot of parents. Sometimes I have a bit of trouble understanding it because maths was never my strong point to start with…."*

Supervisors also experienced difficulty in balancing time between teaching multiple children at once. This was particularly during the early years of schooling when the children required more time and assistance from the supervisor.

The workload required of supervisors was also considered to be a challenge. With the workload of the role considered by many to be like that of a full time job, supervisors also had to fit in other responsibilities in their life including attending to work and farm responsibilities and also caring for younger children. With this issue, supervisors reported experiencing time pressures and tiredness, being concerned about getting everything done that they needed to in the day.

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF PARENT SUPERVISORS

While parent supervisors reported that their role involved considerably more challenges then opportunities, they felt that the opportunities it did provide made the challenges seem worthwhile. The main opportunity supervisors identified within their role was being able to be extensively involved in their children's schooling. In particular, they enjoyed observing the process of their children learning and developing new skills and all the important milestones that occurred such as learning to read. Supervisors also gained satisfaction and pride in knowing that they had a key role in helping their children learn new skills and gain new knowledge. One participant, Naomi reflected on these opportunities:

> *"I know it sounds terrible or silly, you get to see them achieve a lot more as opposed to what you would if you actually sent them to school. 'Cause sometimes you feel like you're not getting anywhere with anything with the kids then all of a sudden out of the blue they'll be reading to you really well or they can do spelling, they can complete them without any help, and they just start recognising things, like when they're first learning to read and write."*

A small number of supervisors considered their role to allow them to provide additional learning opportunities for their children as they felt their parental relationship provided them with the advantage of knowing their children better than a school teacher. A small number of supervisors also identified the opportunity to incorporate more everyday learning experiences as they integrated their children's school learning into everyday life experiences. Their role also provided the opportunity to

develop strong relationships, both with their children and other supervisors, with support networks among supervisors identified to be particularly important in their role.

CONCLUSION

From an exploration of the experiences of parent supervisors it can be seen that they undertake many duties of a qualified classroom teacher. With this acknowledgement, their role, like that of a teacher, is vital for their children's educational opportunities and outcomes. Further to this, in undertaking their role, supervisors experience their role in a comparable manner to that of a new teacher in a rural and remote school, facing similar challenges. These challenges include difficulty in developing strategies for managing multi-age groupings, teaching in areas outside their expertise, workload and time pressures, professional and personal isolation and difficulty in asking for assistance with their roles. However, while there are these distinct similarities, unlike teachers, parent supervisors undertake their role without any training in the field of education. With these considerations, I argue that supervisors should be viewed in a comparable manner to teachers when planning for their role to enable them to undertake their role in the most effective manner possible. Roberts, (2005) acknowledged that teachers in rural and remote schools need to receive adequate support to enable them to conduct their responsibilities to the best of their ability. As supervisors have a similar educational role to that of a teacher, they too should be provided with support to enable them to provide the best quality education for their children. This support needs to be tailored to the individual needs and educational setting of the supervisors and their children, with the exact nature of this support being an area for further investigation. This understanding of their role and experiences will enable planning to be improved for the role of an often overlooked cohort educators who are essential to education in rural Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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