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**Student Support during Parental Deployment: A Qualitative
Investigation of the Defence School Transition Aide Program in
North Queensland**

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Master of Education
Post Graduate Certificate of Education
Diploma of Education
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the Doctor of Education**

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- Supervision: Dr Helen Boon and Assoc Prof Paul Pagliano
- Time release: The Defence Community Organisation approved study leave that enabled me to conduct data gathering interviews during work time throughout 2014.
- Financial: I was granted an Australian Post Graduate Award scholarship for the final two years of study.

Abstract

Parental deployment to a war zone brings many changes to family life. Deployment related changes in family roles and routines typically unsettle children and can interfere with their educational engagement and progress. Furthermore students with parents who are deployed are more vulnerable to increased levels of stress and anxiety, health problems, and behavioural disorders.

Research reports that teachers often struggle to support the increased emotional needs of students with a parent who is deployed. Furthermore qualitative studies exploring school programs and processes that are in place to promote positive student coping during a parental deployment are lacking. In Australian schools students with parents who are deployed are supported by Defence School Transition Aides (DSTAs) to manage the school-based challenges associated with a parental deployment to a war zone but little is documented on the nature of DSTAs' work in this area.

DSTAs' deployment related work varies in each school in relation to the school's size and sector, the number of enrolments from students from Australian Defence Force (ADF) families, and the number of students with a parents who are deployed. The aim of this naturalistic inquiry was to develop an understanding of specific school based practices, programs and strategies that encourage students' school engagement and contribute to a sense of student wellbeing during a parental deployment.

This study endeavoured to identify processes that encourage students to capitalise on their strengths and fully participate in their educational program during their parents' absence. Through semi-structured interviews this study investigated the perspectives of parents, teachers and DSTAs in relation to student support during a parental deployment. Fifteen parents, 17 teachers and 15 DSTAs, representing thirteen Townsville school communities were purposively selected to represent multiple perspectives of the research problem. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development was used to guide the study design and act as a lens through which to view the findings.

When conducting interviews during 2014 the researcher was working as the Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO) with the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) in Townsville, North Queensland and was familiar with the research setting and issues associated with the research problem. The researcher asked participants to discuss their perspectives of students' responses to a parental deployment, school based efforts to support students during

a parental deployment and aspects of the DSTAs' role that they felt eased students' challenges that related to their parents' deployment.

A naturalistic design was employed for the study. Qualitative data were sorted, collapsed, and categorised using grounded theory methods. The data analysis remained close to the data and produced a theoretical framework that was grounded in the data. An initial process of open coding identified in-vivo codes for each group of participants. The initial codes were refined into focussed codes. The data were further analysed using social science paradigms to allow themes to emerge from the data. The study's findings suggest that:

Defence School Transition Aides (DSTAs) bridge the cultural gap between Australian Defence Force (ADF) families and schools and assist students to adjust to deployment related family transitions by reducing cultural barriers between ADF families and schools, constructing cultural knowledge through professional relationships, and integrating knowledge and practice. Through their work DSTAs assist in building school capacity to provide additional student support throughout a parental deployment cycle.

The study's participants were well aware of the unique challenges and strengths of students from ADF families and also with DSTAs' practices that supported students throughout a parental deployment. Parents were reassured by the presence of readily available, school-based, culturally aware practitioners who understood their families' challenges and who were available to attend to their children's school-based needs. Teachers valued the practical support and cultural expertise offered by DSTAs that allowed them to further support their students' unique needs. Furthermore DSTAs added value to existing school processes from a position of cultural expertise. Working from within an ecological framework, DSTAs created professional relationships with students, parents, teachers and the ADF community. DSTAs' work generated a network of supportive school processes that increased the capacity of school communities to respond effectively to students' deployment related needs.

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Glossary of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Title
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADO	Australian Defence Organisation
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
CHKS	Californian Healthy Kids Survey
DCO	Defence Community Organisation
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DFA	Defence Families Australia
DSNSG	Defence Special Needs Support Group
DSTA	Defence School Transition Aide
ECD	Emotional Cycle of Deployment
INTERFET	International Force for East Timor
LTCOL	Lieutenant Colonel
MAJGEN	Major General
REDLO	Regional Education Liaison Officer

Chapter One

Background

1.1 Introduction

The international community closely followed the historical events surrounding the August 1999 referendum when the East Timorese people voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia. Violence erupted immediately after the election result was declared, and civilian casualties mounted rapidly. These historical events were particularly relevant to the Townsville Australian Defence Forces (ADF) community that was in wait to supply a battalion of soldiers to protect the East Timorese people from the atrocities undertaken by the pro-Indonesian militia. These events were of particular relevance to me as in 1999 I worked with the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) as a Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO) in Townsville. As a REDLO I worked with ADF families and schools to facilitate the best possible educational opportunities for children from ADF families.

The commander of the second battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel (LTCOL) Michael Slater, addressed the families of those ADF members who were about to deploy to East Timor. For the purposes of this study, deployment is defined as the assignment of military members to overseas military operations in a peacekeeping or combat zone for a period of several months or more (Stafford & Grady, 2003). LTCOL Slater explained that the details of what lay ahead for the soldiers were unclear however the gravity of the situation was made known to those present which included myself. The seriousness of the situation was more noticeable because approximately half of the audience was made up of children who would shortly be separated from their parent for six months. The international force for East Timor (INTERFET) led by Major General (MAJGEN) Peter Cosgrove arrived in East Timor on 30th September 1999 to establish and maintain peace and the ADF continued to provide military support to East Timor until June 2014.

Australia's military forces are internationally well regarded for their commitment, skill and training, and have played an increasing significant role as a trusted ally in coalition forces. In addition to continuous troop rotations to East Timor Prime Minister John Howard and successive prime ministers further committed ADF troops to the Middle East, in particular Iraq and Afghanistan, from 2002 onwards. Australian Defence Force (ADF) members joined coalition forces in support of the international military response to the events of 11th of September 2001. More recently ADF members have been deployed in support of the international military response against the rise of Islamic State. Over 26,000 ADF members

from across Australia were deployed between 1999 and 2014, many of them multiple times, adding to a total of over 75,000 ADF member deployments.

This study is set within the historical and political climate of the period 2001-2014. The year 2001 marks the introduction of the Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program into Australian schools and 2014 marks the completion of data collection for this study. I conducted the study in Townsville, a city with a population of 190,000 that is home to a major Australian Army base and an Australian Air Force base. Specifically I conducted this study in thirteen Townsville schools that between them enrolled a total of over 1200 students from ADF families. The remainder of this chapter provides relevant contextual information, the problem statement and background to the study process.

1.2 The Defence Community Organisation

The Defence Community Organisation (DCO) was established in 1996 and incorporated recommendations from the Hamilton report (1986). The Hamilton report (1986) gave a voice to the partners of ADF members who articulated many of the family challenges associated with the ADF lifestyle. Challenges associated with children's education were among the major issues raised by the Hamilton report. In particular, educational disruptions associated with school mobility and curriculum inconsistencies across states and territories proved difficult for ADF families.

The new Defence Community Organisation (DCO) amalgamated family support services previously provided from within the three ADF organisations of Army, Air Force and Navy, into a tri-service organisation. Staffed by multidisciplinary teams of social workers, family liaison officers, community development officers, regional education liaison officers and military support officers, DCO was established to provide support to ADF members and their families especially by assisting families to quickly integrate into their new communities as they moved around the country. Australian Defence Force (ADF) families relocate, on average, every three years. A DCO office was established in most Australian military centres, including Townsville, and DCO staff supported ADF families to capitalise on the opportunities available to them within their local communities.

The historical events of 1999 expanded the responsibilities of DCO staff to include support to the families of deployed ADF members. In response to continuous ADF deployments DCO implemented a range of additional family programs and policies to support the needs of families with deployed ADF members (Siebler, 2003). In addition the Townsville community

rallied around the local families of deployed ADF members. Community organisations such as churches, local businesses, community agencies and the local media supported Townsville based ADF families to manage their deployment related challenges.

1.3 Townsville

Townsville has long been referred to as a “garrison city” given its strong military connections and history. Strategically placed to the north of the Australian continent, Townsville’s military bases hold pivotal roles in the defence capability of the Australian government. Furthermore Welters and Delisle (2009) estimated that the Australian Defence Organisation (ADO), comprising Australian Defence Force members and Defence civilian employees, contributes 10 percent of the Townsville economy. Comprising 9 percent of the Townsville population ADO employees and their families also contribute significantly to the social fabric of the city.

Australian Defence Force (ADF) families are housed throughout Townsville but mainly live in newer housing areas. Students from ADF families are enrolled in many Townsville schools and make up to 25 percent of the population of some schools. Consequently the ADO’s presence features strongly in city planning for Townsville’s future infrastructure (Welters & Delisle, 2009).

Following the historical events of September 1999 the then Townsville Regional Director of Education Queensland, Gail Mackay, was concerned for the wellbeing of school staff and students who were potentially affected by the East Timor deployment. Ms Mackay established strong links between Education Queensland and the Townsville DCO office to provide referral links for school principals and guidance officers. These links were further strengthened in 2001 with the introduction of the Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program in Australian schools to support the mobility needs of students from ADF families.

1.4 The Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is a mobile workforce and throughout their schooling children from ADF families often attend four or more schools (DCO & DEST, 2002). In 2001 DCO initiated a study, in partnership with the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), to investigate the impact of school mobility on children’s education. This study resulted in the report *Changing schools: Its impact on learning* (DCO & DEST, 2002). The DCO and DEST study identified that the social and emotional impacts of student mobility were having a significant impact on students’ educational outcomes thus confirming Hamilton’s (1986) findings. The Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program was established in July 2001 in

response to a recommendation from the DCO and DEST study. The DSTA program initiative met the ADO's priority "to implement people focused programs in family support, transition management and rehabilitation" (DCO, 2007). The DSTA program is endorsed by senior military leaders, Defence Families Australia (DFA), the Defence Special Needs Support Group (DSNSG) and, state and territory education systems.

While the DSTA program was established initially as a program to support students when they changed schools a national review of the DSTA program conducted in 2007 (DCO, 2007) found that ADF families identified deployment as a more difficult educational issue to manage than relocation. As a result of a recommendation from the DSTA program review (2007) the DSTA duty statement was expanded to include *supporting students during parental absence*. The 2011 DSTA program review (DCO, 2011) reported that ADF families continued to find deployment the most difficult aspect of ADF family life to manage.

Funded by the Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) the DSTA program assists school principals to employ a DSTA as a member of their student services team. The DSTA is normally supervised by the schools' principal or deputy principal and the purpose of the DSTA role is to support students from ADF families during times of transition such as school mobility and parental absence. Motivated by annual funding applications and reporting requirements attached to the DSTA program Australian schools employing a DSTA maintain accurate records of the arrivals and departures of ADF families in their school. From these data, it is estimated that the DSTA program supports over 11,000 students from ADF families in approximately 200 Australian schools. The majority of DSTAs have a Certificate III in Education Support however a small number have other relevant qualifications. Based on social, emotional and transition support, the DSTA practice model is flexible and responsive to school and family needs.

The specific organisation of DSTA work varies within each school and program delivery is adapted to complement the specific characteristics of the school: the school size and sector, the number of ADF student enrolments, individual student needs and available opportunities to work in cooperation with other school based programs. DSTAs offer proactive and responsive support to students and work closely with principals, teachers and parents to contribute to a school environment that is responsive to students' needs. DSTAs also work with students individually, in small and large groups, and facilitate whole school projects. DSTAs communicate with parents through school newsletters encouraging them to share deployment related family information with the school. Working from a dedicated physical location in the school ensures DSTAs are easily accessible to students, parents and teachers.

Thus DSTAs are integrated into the school community and spend the majority of their time working face to face with students, parents and teachers both inside and outside classrooms while maintaining a flexible timetable that gives them the capacity to respond to situations at short notice.

To supplement supervision arrangements by a member of the school administration team, the Defence Community Organisation's (DCO) Regional Education Liaison Officers (REDLOs) offer school principals additional guidance, professional development and networking opportunities for DSTAs. REDLOs assist principals to facilitate tailored professional development for DSTAs so that DSTAs maintain knowledge of local military activities including deployments. REDLOs work closely with the principal of each school to maintain the integrity, including quality assurance, of the program. The DSTA recruitment process normally includes a REDLO as a member of the selection panel to ensure the successful applicant demonstrates the potential to understand the needs of students from ADF families and has the capacity to represent their needs in the school community. As sole operators within their school it is vital for DSTAs to maintain professional networks with other DSTAs in their local area as well as with local DCO staff.

1.5 Problem Statement

The DSTA program review conducted by DCO in 2011 surveyed school principals, ADF families and ADF commanders, and returned a high satisfaction rating for DSTA support to students during deployment. Sixty-five percent of parent respondents indicated that the DSTA program had improved their experience of deployment. Over 70 percent of parent respondents indicated that DSTAs monitor their children's wellbeing however the review did not document the specific details of processes employed by DSTAs in their work. Therefore while DSTA work receives high satisfaction ratings from schools, parents and ADF commanders (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2011), little is documented to describe DSTAs' work.

The large increase in overseas ADF deployments since 1999 affects Australian schools to a large degree however the knowledge base for supporting students from ADF families during parental deployment is limited. The Regional Education Liaison Officers (REDLOs) support schools to understand the issues associated with deployment and since the introduction of the DSTA program the DSTAs themselves have also contributed to students', teachers' and parents', deployment related knowledge. This dissertation reports on research that explored the perspectives of parents, teachers and DSTAs about the nature of DSTA work and how it supported students during a parental military deployment.

1.6 Study Design

In order to capture the nuances of DSTA work that supports students during a parental deployment this study was designed as a naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A naturalistic inquiry was selected to allow the findings to remain grounded in the data and to speak for themselves without manipulation by the researcher. While Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human was used as a lens through which to view the findings and emergent themes of this study it was not used to influence the study's outcomes.

While naturalistic studies have a characteristic pattern of development it is difficult to define the study's progress in a definitive way before the study begins. Therefore an emergent study design formed part of the research process. It is important for naturalistic studies to be undertaken in a natural setting, in this case schools, as the context is of great significance to the findings. Likewise a human instrument is essential for the conduct of a naturalistic inquiry as the researcher builds on tacit knowledge rather than propositional knowledge. Through the qualitative methods of purposive sampling and inductive analysis a theory emerges from a naturalistic inquiry that is grounded in the data and projects the steps in the design.

Research questions were designed to reflect the tenets of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (proximal processes, the developing person, the environmental context, and chronological time) that provided a theoretical lens for the study. Throughout the study I checked my interpretations and constructions with study participants and the outcomes were negotiated until a common understanding was agreed upon. At the conclusion of a naturalistic inquiry trustworthiness of the research process is tested for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to ensure that the study's findings both represent the constructions of the study participants and they are of use to the reader who may want to use the findings for policy development or other purposes.

1.7 The Research Focus

The unit of analysis for this study was DSTAs' work that has supported students during a parental deployment. As DSTAs work within the school setting and interact with students and teachers on a daily basis it was important for teachers' perspectives to be represented in the data. In addition, as DSTAs' work is focussed not only towards supporting students from ADF families but encompasses engaging with their parents it was important to include parents' perspectives in the data. DSTAs' voices are critical inclusions in the data as DSTAs alone know how they have constructed their work within their specific school contexts in response to

school needs, local ADF activity and the DSTA program guidelines as set by the Defence Community Organisation (DCO).

1.8 Rationale for the Study

This study is important for four reasons:

- There is an identified gap in the research literature informing Australian schools of important considerations when supporting the needs of students during a parental deployment.
- Through common life experiences, associated with their parents' employment, the children of ADF families represent a discreet group of students in schools, with identifiable, unique needs, that require recognition, specific attention and support from their school communities.
- It is likely in the current political climate that Australian schools will continue to enrol students with a parent on military deployment. Schools have a duty of care to offer support to these students to minimise the accompanying risks to their wellbeing, educational engagement and academic progress.
- The Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) has a duty of care to provide programs that assist ADF members and their families to manage the challenges associated with the ADF lifestyle. It is important that their sponsored community based programs, such as the DSTA program, are reviewed regularly to inform dialogue on policy and practice.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the historical, political and local context that frames this study. This context confirms the necessity for educators to understand the unique needs of the children of ADF members and the complexity of their family circumstances. In order for schools to provide students with the necessary social and emotional support to maintain students' educational engagement and progress throughout a parental deployment more knowledge is required. Despite educational policy frameworks that promote cultural inclusivity and parent participation in Australian schools, it is often a challenging and complex task for schools to achieve a school culture that fully embraces and meets the needs of all members of their school communities. Against this backdrop it is important to hear the perspectives of parents, teachers and DSTAs on school based deployment support that has assisted students during a period of intense ADF involvement in areas of international conflict.

1.10 The Structure of the Dissertation

This thesis has seven chapters. Chapter One has highlighted the historical, political and social context that has framed the DSTA program since its introduction in 2001. Chapter Two offers a survey of Australian and international literature reporting on students' needs during a parental deployment, the supportive role often played by schools during a parental deployment and the accompanying challenges. Chapter Two also discusses Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), the theory that provided a theoretical direction for the study design and a lens through which to view the findings.

Chapter Three presents the study's aims and objectives, research questions, research design, ethical issues, method of data analysis and validity issues. The study's findings are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five discusses the findings within the context of the current literature and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. Chapter Six reviews the research process and discusses the implications of the findings, limitations of the research and recommendations for future research within the ecological context that forms the focus of this study. An overview describing the relationship between my professional practice as a REDLO, the dissertation, and the articles referenced in Appendix H, is presented in Chapter Seven.

Consistent with a naturalistic inquiry process the design for this study emerged as the study progressed, including the development of the final report. To present the study's findings in the most comprehensive manner possible the methods employed, the study's findings and a discussion of the study's findings were often overlapping throughout chapters 3, 4 and 5. Such blending of the narrative components allowed the report to flow as well as possible.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The Defence Community Organisation (DCO) estimates that the Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program supports over 11,000 students from Australian Defence Force (ADF) families in Australian schools. Many of these students have a parent who is deployed. This chapter reviews Australian and international literature to investigate the effects of parental deployment on school aged children and how schools have responded to students' support needs. Background to the family context underpinning this study is provided and followed by a discussion of the scope of the literature review. The knowledge identified in the literature search is then discussed followed by an outline of the theoretical framework and an argument for the conduct of this study.

Parental deployment for the purposes of this study is defined as the assignment of military members to overseas military operations in a peacekeeping or combat role for a period of several months or more (Stafford & Grady, 2003). Student support within the context of this study is defined as school based interventions that build on students' strengths, reduce psychological stress and have a positive effect on students' adjustments to parental deployment (Guzman, 2014). Because influences on school students emanate from diverse sources, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) is adopted as a guiding framework to understand how deployment affects children and where interventions have been applied, the source of these interventions relative to the child's environment.

2.2 Background to the Family Context

The most fundamental deployment related family changes involve moving from a two-parent household to a single parent household for the duration of the deployment and then returning to a two parent household at the end of the deployment. During the military members' absence the non-deployed parents usually manage all of the household duties and family responsibilities that were previously managed by two parents (Pincus, House, Christensen & Adler, 2007) and older children inevitably assume more adult roles in the home (Mmari, Roche, Sudhinarset & Blum, 2009). While managing their own stress the non-deployed parents support the increased demands of their children who, more often than not, miss their parent who is deployed.

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment (ECD) was conceptualised by Logan (1987) to provide insight into the emotional experiences of Navy partners when Navy personnel spend several months at sea on a regular basis. The emotional cycle begins several weeks prior to the military members' departure and typically continues until several weeks after the military members' return. Psychological challenges for the successive stages of the deployment were presented as: anticipation of loss, detachment and withdrawal, emotional disorganisation, recovery and stabilisation, anticipation of homecoming, and reunion and family reintegration (Logan, 1987). Logan's ECD framework has been adapted more recently to assist families to understand and normalise their emotional responses to a war based military deployment (Pincus et al., 2007). In addition the ECD framework has been further adapted to help partners with parenting responses during deployment (De Voe & Ross, 2012) and to assist adolescents to understand their own emotional responses to parental deployment (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011).

The magnitude of deployment related changes experienced by families elicits strong emotional responses. Emotions such as loneliness, despair, resentment, depression, anger and anxiety, are typical. These emotions may be difficult for family members to identify and share (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Lester & Flake, 2013) however recognising their emotions as natural reactions to the major changes in their lives assists family members to manage them in a healthy manner. Such an analysis allows family members to separate their emotions from their actions thus enabling them to choose constructive means of emotional expression and coping (Amen, Jellen, Merves & Lee, 1988; De Voe & Ross, 2012; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Lester & Flake, 2013; Logan, 1987). Identifying their emotions also often allows military partners to explore the consequences of destructive responses, such as child abuse (Logan, 1987).

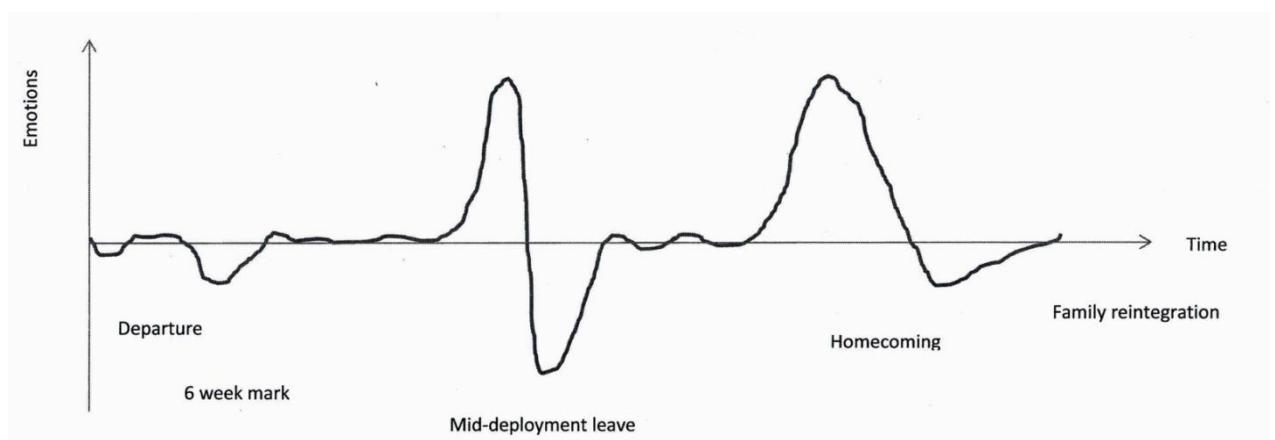
The responses of non-deployed parents to deployment have been shown to often influence their children's emotional responses (Chandra, Martin, Hawkins & Richardson, 2010; Flake, Davis, Johnson & Middleton, 2009; Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass & Grass, 2007; Lester et al., 2013; McGuire et al., 2012; Siebler, 2009). Furthermore as children age they are also typically influenced by other factors. Older children usually have a greater awareness than younger children of the deployment situation and their own responses, and are also exposed to many other social and media influences. With experience children typically develop coping mechanisms to endure several months of parental separation (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011;

Pincus et al., 2007) and usually adjust to the transitions associated with their parents' departure, return for mid-deployment leave and their final return.

Families typically settle into a new routine by about six weeks after the military members' departure (Pincus et al., 2007). In addition families are often destabilised by the military members' 10 days of mid-deployment leave. Young children in particular often find the departure of their parent after only several days with their family difficult to manage. Furthermore young children often find the second parental departure more difficult than the first and in turn react more strongly to their parents' second departure therefore typically taking longer to restabilise (Pincus et al., 2007).

The reintegration of the deployed military member back into the family unit at the end of a deployment typically presents greater adjustment challenges for the family than the military members' initial departure (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). By the end of a deployment the family at home has usually settled into a new routine that is then disrupted by the return of the deployed military member. A new family order often takes several weeks to establish. The reintegration stage is particularly challenging for adolescents who have, more often than not, assumed additional family responsibilities and gained additional freedoms during the deployment (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Mmari et al., 2009). During the deployment period teenagers and their parents who are deployed have had varied experiences and have grown in different ways over several months and these changes often need negotiating into a new shared understanding of family life. Figure 2.1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the emotional cycle of deployment as experienced by children.

Figure 2.1 Children's Experience of Deployment



Frequent communication with the parents who are deployed usually assists family members to adjust to deployment related changes (MacDermid, Samper, Schwarz, Nishida & Nyaronga,

2008). While the importance of communication between the deployed military member and their family during deployment has long been recognised as important to the maintenance of family unity (Hill & Boulding, 1949), access to modern technology greatly assists families to maintain frequent and immediate family communication (Flynn, 2014). Family communication allows the family at home to keep the parent who is deployed informed of family changes and emotionally attached to their family although they are not physically present (Huebner et al., 2007). Long term risks to the family system arise if the parent who is deployed is psychologically excluded from the family and unable to reintegrate as an accepted member of the family unit (Logan, 1987).

Military deployments to a war zone are particularly stressful for families as the wellbeing of the parent who is deployed and their family are mutually interdependent. Everyday concerns may impact more strongly on family members at home because their main source of support is absent (Logan, 1987). Pressures on the family are usually relieved by regular communication with the parent who is deployed (MacDermid et al., 2008) and external supports that in turn allow family members to build on their prior experiences and support each other. Furthermore an eight month deployment often disrupts the families' routine functioning for up to a year.

2.3 Scope of the Literature Review

The electronic data bases Scopus, Eric and Google Scholar were used to collect peer reviewed articles for consideration in this review. Search terms included military families, military deployments, military children, schools, academic risk, student adjustment and Australian to identify articles published in English since 2000. An internet search was also used to gather reports from Australian and international government departments and universities. The reference lists of identified articles were examined to identify further studies of interest. *Future of Children* published a special edition volume titled "Military Children and Families" in 2013. In January 2014 *Children and Schools* published a special edition volume titled "School Social Workers and Military-Connected Schools: New Directions in Practice, Research, Policy, and National Leadership". Both of these special edition journals yielded several articles of relevance to this study.

The search process was refined by a number of criteria. The age group of child and youth research subjects was limited to that of school aged children (5-18 years old) and within the context of recent international conflicts. Further the studies were restricted to those that relate directly to children's wellbeing and academic functioning at school with an emphasis on contemporary educational responses. This literature search identified five bodies of

knowledge for review. First, literature relating to Australian students during parental deployment is reviewed (McGuire et al., 2012, Siebler, 2009). Second, there is a body of knowledge that provides insights into how parental deployments impact on children's health and wellbeing (Mansfield, Kaufman, Engel and Gaynes, 2011). Third, there is a small body of knowledge that focusses on how children's experience of deployment manifests at school (Chandra et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2011; Mmari et al., 2009). Fourth, there is an emerging body of knowledge identifying some deployment support strategies that are implemented in American schools (De Pedro et al., 2015). Lastly, there is a small body of knowledge that identifies some of the barriers facing school communities in their endeavours to support students during parental deployment (Berkowitz, De Pedro, Couture, Benbenishty & Astor, 2014; De Pedro et al., 2014a; Garner, Arnold & Nunnery, 2014). These five bodies of knowledge are reviewed in order in the next five sections.

2.4 Australian Students' Responses to Deployment

Knowledge of Australian children's responses to deployment comes from two major studies by McGuire et al. (2012) and Siebler (2009). In addition to these studies two national reviews of the Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program, undertaken in 2007 and 2011 using surveys and interviews, also offer insights into the views of parents, school principals and Australian Defence Force (ADF) commanders on deployment support offered to students at school through the DSTA program (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2011). Parents identified deployment as the most difficult aspect of the ADF lifestyle and over 36 percent of parents reported that deployments had a negative impact on their children's education (DCO, 2011). Furthermore over 65 percent of parents felt that the DSTA program had improved their families' experience of deployment (DCO, 2011). In addition school principals indicated that their additional knowledge of family circumstances gained from DSTA employment and the DSTAs' monitoring of students assisted them to provide early interventions for students when necessary. Furthermore ADF commanders reported that the DSTAs' proactive approach to monitoring students during deployment enabled the facilitation of support mechanisms within the school before it was too late. Australian Defence Force (ADF) commanders also reported that the knowledge of someone looking out for their children at school gave peace of mind to deployed ADF members (DCO, 2011). Further insights into the responses of Australian children to parental deployment come from the Timor-Leste Family Study (McGuire et al., 2012) and a PhD thesis by Siebler (2009).

The Timor-Leste Family Study (McGuire et al., 2012) highlighted multiple deployments and parental mental health concerns as risk factors for children's wellbeing. Using surveys the study investigated the health and wellbeing of the families of ADF veterans from the East Timor conflict. The large scale quantitative study of over 4000 participants, including 1332 ADF partners, concluded that there is no discernible difference between the health and wellbeing outcomes for the partners and children of East Timor veterans and those of the family members of ADF personnel who did not deploy to East Timor. Furthermore the study did find that the number of parental deployments influenced the nature of children's responses with an association identified between the number of parental deployments and an increased frequency of reported behavioural concerns for children from the second deployment onwards (McGuire et al., 2012). A further finding associated children's increased risk of behavioural and emotional problems with poor mental health in the non- deployed parent (McGuire et al., 2012), a finding also supported by Siebler (2009).

Siebler (2009) discovered that many Australian children's needs during deployment often went unidentified and therefore were unaddressed (Siebler, 2009; Siebler & Goddard, 2014). Nuanced findings that represented Australian parents' responses to deployment come from a qualitative study that involved in-depth interviews with 76 participants comprising ADF East Timor veterans and their partners. Siebler's (2009) study gathered information on the physical and mental health of children and adolescents during their parents' deployment from the perspectives of both parents. Siebler (2009) concluded that ADF families do not like to ask for professional assistance for personal and family difficulties preferring instead to rely on informal networks for support. This finding is concerning given the demands that ADF deployments place on families.

While limited in number, Australian studies provide compelling evidence of increased student needs during a parental deployment. In addition the reviewed studies vary greatly in their research design and in their recommendations. The DSTA program reviews (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2011) strongly recommended the continuation and expansion of the DSTA program in Australian schools. Siebler (2009) recommended the further development of comprehensive intervention strategies by military social workers and family support policies to support the whole family unit, including children. Moreover the *Timor-Leste Family Impact Study* (McGuire et al., 2012) concluded that the experiences of the children of East Timor veterans are comparable to population norms and did not offer any specific recommendations for supporting children during parental deployment. The limited number of Australian studies is

supplemented by an increasing number of international studies mainly from America. A review of international literature follows.

2.5 The Effects of Deployment on the Health and Wellbeing of School Aged Children

American research suggests that parental deployment poses health and behavioural risks for children. A retrospective study of health records for 300,000 American children aged between five and 17 years by Mansfield et al. (2011) reported an increased risk of acute stress, behavioural and mood diagnoses were associated with parental deployment. Mansfield et al. (2011) also noted that their data may underestimate the extent of the problem. These findings are supported by two further studies (Gorman, Eide & Hisle-Gorman, 2010; Hisle-Gorman, Eide, Coll & Gorman, 2014) that accessed medical data bases retrospectively and associated an increased delivery of medical services to pre-adolescent children during parental deployment. Both studies recognised an increased delivery of medical services and an increased diagnosis of children's anxiety and behavioural disorders were associated with parental deployment. Hisle-Gorman et al. (2014) reported a 30 percent increase in mental and behavioural health concerns for children with a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

This literature review identified a further ten studies that report on school aged children's health and wellbeing during a parental deployment. All studies found that children's health was adversely affected by parental deployment however the medical risks varied with children's developmental age. Behavioural difficulties were more prevalent in younger children (Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell & Beidel, 2016; Card et al., 2011; Chartrand, Frank, White & Shope, 2008; Flake et al., 2009; Lester et al., 2013; Morris & Age, 2009; Mustillo, MacDermid Wadsworth & Lester, 2016; White, De Burgh, Fear & Iversen, 2011) and depression and anxiety were more apparent in adolescents (Baptist, Barros, Cafferky & Johannes, 2015; De Pedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty & Berkowitz, 2015). Furthermore through the administration of standardised surveys to 101 parents of children aged between five and 12 years old Flake et al. (2009) suggested parenting stress to be the biggest predictor of children's psychosocial morbidity.

A qualitative study, interviewing 30 adolescents, conducted by Baptist et al. (2015) concluded that parental deployment increased the likelihood of increased stress as well as emotional and behavioural problems in adolescents. In addition Baptist et al. (2015) concluded that parental deployment accelerated maturation at the expense of adolescents seeking emotional support

and comfort. Young people and parents who made better social connections with each other, peers and neighbourhoods were recognised by Mmari et al. (2009) to make better adjustments to deployment.

These studies in total represented the deployment related health and wellbeing responses of children from five to 18 years old, the age-group of interest for this study. As a whole the findings from these studies suggested that a parental deployment presents risks to students' wellbeing and health across primary and secondary school years with specific risks attached to different developmental stages. However none of these studies of children's health and education risks addressed students' support needs at school.

2.6 Students' School Experiences during Deployment

A decline in students' health and wellbeing often manifests at school as changes in students' behaviour and a decline in academic engagement (Chandra et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2011; Mmari et al., 2009). Three qualitative studies retrospectively accessed educational data sources and demonstrated that students' academic results were adversely affected by parental deployment. These studies associated school students' standardised test results with the deployment status of military parents (Engel, Gallagher & Lyle, 2010; Lyle, 2006; Richardson et al., 2011). Each study discovered that student's test results were adversely affected by lengthy parental deployments. From the test results of 44,000 students Richardson et al. (2011) found that the results of elementary and middle school students were more significantly affected than those of senior high school students when parents were deployed for 19 months or more.

Insights into the experiences of adolescents at school during parental deployment were gained from three qualitative studies using focus groups. Focus groups were conducted with adolescents (Huebner et al., 2007), adolescents, parents and teachers (Mmari et al., 2009), and teachers (Chandra et al., 2010). Adolescents reported experiencing a range of disturbing emotions and emotionally charged behaviours during parental deployment (Huebner et al., 2007). Huebner et al. (2007) suggested that adolescents' mental health was significantly related to their caregivers' mental health. Furthermore, Chandra et al. (2010) reported that during parental deployments adolescents typically experienced a sense of alienation, a low sense of belonging and less supportive relationships with their peers and adults. In contrast Huebner et al. (2007) and Mmari et al. (2009) recognised that adolescents showed resilience and increased maturity during a deployment as they took on more "adult roles" such as additional family responsibilities and provided emotional support to their non-deployed parents. The students themselves reported that little adult support was available to them at

school as teachers and counsellors did not understand what they are going through (Chandra et al., 2010; Mmari et al., 2009). Teachers in turn reported that they had received little training on suitable support measures and felt at a loss to know how to support their students' additional emotional needs (Mmari et al., 2009).

Students' experiences of separation from their parent, concerns for parent safety, additional responsibilities at home and anxieties relating to family changes placed them under additional pressure during a parental deployment (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009). Students' vulnerability was compounded when their emotional and behavioural responses went unrecognised and unacknowledged or were misunderstood at school (Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esquada, Benbenishty, 2013; Park, 2011). Moreover Lemmon and Chartrand (2009) proposed that supportive and engaging adults, who created safe environments, mitigated tolerable stress and helped children to cope and recover from adverse emotional responses to deployment. MacDermid et al. (2008) suggested that positive relationships with parents and other adults contributed to children's wellbeing and their ability to regulate their emotions during deployment. Aaronson and Perkins (2013) recommended military-school-community partnerships to fill the gap in services for military families that experienced high levels of stress and low levels of coping resources.

2.7 The Supportive Role of Schools during Parental Deployment

De Pedro et al. (2015) suggested that a positive school climate buffers emotional and academic risk factors experienced by students with a parent who is deployed. Using data from the Californian Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), De Pedro et al. (2015) examined associations between school climate, military connection, deployment and mental health. The study discovered that while military connected students experienced more depressive symptoms than non-military students, they were able to cope with deployment related stress when adults in their school provided them with emotional support and encouragement. The dimensions of school climate that were considered by De Pedro et al.'s (2015) study were safety, caring relationships, high expectations, school connectedness and meaningful participation, with data collected from students in the 7th, 9th and 11th grades. These findings indicated that multiple components of a positive school climate were critical to the maintenance of students' wellbeing during parental military deployment. Furthermore Chandra et al. (2010) demonstrated that school based activities that promoted a sense of belonging offered support to those students who were experiencing deployment related psychological strain.

School based nurses and social workers support the needs of American students with a parent who is deployed. Fitzsimons and Krause-Parello (2009) developed a comprehensive school based strategy, for delivery by American school nurses, to address students' needs during a parental deployment. Based on the emotional cycle of deployment the strategy targeted the unique needs of students from military families. The proposed support process included supplying teachers with relevant data, informing teachers of increased student needs, supporting parents and facilitating appropriate family referrals (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009). In addition American school based social workers played a comprehensive role in supporting students from military families (Astor et al. 2013; Garcia, De Pedro, Astor, Lester & Benbenishty, 2015) by conducting resilience based programs for students, training teachers and connecting with parents. School based programs such as resilience and skill building programs (Friedberg & Brelsford, 2011; Garcia et al., 2015; Waliski, Kirshner, Shue, & Bokony, 2012b), additional tutoring, and the development of hero walls and friendship gardens (De Pedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum & Astor 2014b), as well as individual counselling (Waliski, Bokony, Edlund & Kirchner, 2012a), were all demonstrated to be effective strategies for assisting American students to manage the stresses associated with parental deployments.

In a qualitative study De Pedro et al. (2014b) explored the experiences of 31 school community stakeholders (principals, military social workers, school liaison officers) with a professional interest in the education of students from military families. The participants identified that students from military families had unique needs that necessitated school intervention. Furthermore the participants described a number of "home grown school practices" (De Pedro et al., 2014b p. 12), such as lunchtime activities and a connection room, that had been implemented in some schools to facilitate positive emotional, psychological and academic outcomes for students during a parental deployment. Study findings suggested that these strategies were well supported by students and had the potential to contribute to a more positive school experience for students. Moreover these practices arose from the initiatives of individual staff members rather than from a whole school approach to supporting students from military families and their effectiveness is as yet untested (De Pedro et al., 2014b).

School based adults who are familiar with military life and culture and are willing to spend time with students have been demonstrated to make a valuable contribution to the wellbeing of students with a parent who is deployed (Astor et al., 2013; Mmari et al., 2009). Furthermore Easterbrooks, Ginsburg and Lerner (2013) suggested that those children who encountered adversity in the presence of a supportive and sensitive adult were more able to buffer their

stress and foster their resilience as the adult provided modelling and mentoring that in turn helped the students to frame stressful circumstances within the context of values. Moreover students who were experiencing overwhelming pressures in their lives, such as those associated with a parental deployment, were more vulnerable and likely to benefit from the understanding of adults and peers at school (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009).

2.8 Barriers to School Based Support for Students with Parents who are Deployed

A number of factors present barriers to students with a parent who is deployed receiving school based support. De Pedro et al.'s (2014b) study of 31 stakeholders discussed in the previous section identified a number of barriers to schools providing optimum support for the students with parent who are deployed. Firstly students were not systematically identified within school processes and are therefore not recognised as a group of students who shared culturally based experiences and knowledge associated with their parents' employment. Secondly teachers had very little awareness or sensibility of the military as an institution or as a way of life. Chandra et al. (2010) and Mmari et al. (2009) suggested that deployment related stresses could lead to a lack of both school engagement and a sense of school connectedness for students. Similarly De Pedro et al. (2014b) suggested that it would be possible for students from military families to perceive the school environment as hostile.

In 2014 three American studies, conducted concurrently in eight school districts, explored the responses of teachers (Garner et al., 2014), school administrators (De Pedro et al., 2014a) and parents (Berkowitz et al., 2014) to students' deployment related support needs. De Pedro et al.'s (2014a) study reported that school administrators had limited time to plan for the additional needs of military students. Furthermore teachers were discovered by Garner et al. (2014) to have a limited understanding of deployment related stresses and are in need of further knowledge of the unique needs of students during a parental deployment. In addition military parents were found by Berkowitz et al. (2014) to rate school effectiveness more harshly than non-military parents. In summary these studies identified a lack of awareness by these school communities of the potential impact of deployment related family stresses on students' wellbeing and academic engagement. A more detailed discussion of these studies follows.

Garner et al. (2014) conducted focus groups with 55 teachers from eight elementary schools in four school districts and recognised that few teachers have military knowledge and many teachers lacked experience of supporting students as they adapt to family changes. Teachers

reported that often students seemed distracted from their studies and their academic completion rates declined during parental deployment. In addition teachers described their students as particularly sensitive to the absence of their parents during important family celebrations such as Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day and Christmas. Furthermore the teachers stated that students had less academic support available to them at home during a parental absence and in turn teachers often felt hindered in their ability to support their military connected students adequately without further training (Garner et al., 2014; Mmari et al., 2009).

Teachers' lack of military cultural awareness presents risks to the quality of teacher-student relationships. Teacher participants from Garner et al.'s (2014) study explained that a decline in students' level of academic engagement and wellbeing affected their own professional work as they did not feel equipped to adequately meet their students' increased emotional needs during parental deployment. Furthermore none of the schools represented in Garner et al.'s (2014) study monitored the enrolment of students from military families nor recognised military connected students as a unique group within the school. Teachers perceived that their lack of knowledge or understanding of military structures or military family support services presented barriers to accessing additional help for their students (Garner et al., 2014). Without a professional understanding of students' additional needs teachers were at risk of misinterpreting students' non-adaptive behaviours. Reporting on the same data as Garner et al. (2014), Arnold, Garner and Nunnery (2014) suggested that when culturally competent teachers learnt more about students' home environment they were often able to effectively interpret behaviour and facilitate learning.

Surveying 130 American school administrators De Pedro et al. (2014a) reported that school administrators struggled to provide additional supports for military connected students in their schools. De Pedro et al. (2014a) discovered that almost one third of the participants believed that military connected students had special needs and would benefit from targeted programs. However one quarter of the participants did not believe that military connected students should be identified as a distinct group. Attention to other national priorities, the lack of resources and specialised personnel as well as the lack of relevant examples and ideas, were cited by principals as on-going barriers to the implementation of targeted strategies to support military-connected students (De Pedro et al., 2014a). Study findings suggested that school administrators were less aware of students' deployment related needs than are teachers and parents.

Accessing data from school satisfaction surveys Berkowitz et al. (2014) reported that military parents were less satisfied than civilian parents in areas relating to their schools' support for their children's wellbeing. Military parents provided a significantly more negative assessment of school climate and of encouragement for parent involvement than did non-military parents (Berkowitz et al., 2014). Strengthening the relationship between the school and families has been suggested by Russo and Fallon (2014) to produce beneficial outcomes for students' academic engagement. Furthermore providing support to students in an education setting was discovered by De Pedro et al. (2014b) to assist other family members to build resilience to deployments. Moreover supportive schools provided opportunities for the establishment of community networks for families (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen & Orthner, 2009) that further enhanced school-family dialogue. A sense of school connectedness was particularly relevant for students from military families who endured a great deal of instability in their lives (De Pedro et al., 2014b).

School climate and its underlying conditions are deeply interconnected and grow out of the shared experience of a dynamic, ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Schools can offer sources of resilience and protection for students particularly through the dynamic relationships that occur between students and the people and resources around them (Astor et al., 2013; De Pedro et al., 2011; Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Furthermore Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) proposed that the legitimisation of cultural heritage helps students to feel validated by public acknowledgement of their background that in turn helps them to make sense of their world. Sensitivity to cultural nuances also often helps teachers to integrate relevant references to students' cultural and family backgrounds into their teaching and learning environment. Moreover Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) proposed that a culturally relevant curriculum demonstrates to students that teachers care about them and recognise their different ways of knowing thus encouraging a sense of connectedness with their school and peers (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

Five bodies of knowledge were reviewed for this study. These bodies of knowledge encompassed relevant Australian research, how children's deployment experiences manifest at school, deployment strategies currently employed by schools and barriers faced by schools in providing students with support during parental deployment. Australian research is limited but many studies reported from America reflect similar experiences to those faced by Australian students and Australian schools (Siebler, 2009). Australian schools also face barriers such as limitations in teachers' understanding of deployment related challenges (Garner et al.,

2104) and limited resources (De Pedro et al., 2014). Many of the DSTAs' initiatives that supported students during parental deployment corresponded to "home grown strategies" discovered in American schools by De Pedro et al. (2015b).

2.9 The Theoretical Perspective

Students' functioning at school during a parental deployment is influenced by multiple factors that interact with students' internal and external environmental systems. The lives of students from ADF families are embedded in an array of systems including their family, school, community and the military. Links between families and their communities influence the ways that children adjust over time. To better understand how parental deployment affects students and how schools can offer students meaningful support it is necessary to recognise how multiple systems contribute to student and family outcomes. After the data had already been collected and analysed for emergent themes using an initial grounded theory analysis, due to the enormously complex interaction of influences on students' responses to a parental deployment Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development was selected to guide this study and act as a lens through which to view the data. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development was chosen to provide an additional layer of scrutiny because it helps to provide greater clarity regarding the mutual influences within families and between families and their social contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

A military deployment induces many family changes. As only a small percentage of the population has firsthand knowledge or experience of military service many people may not understand or recognise the potential influence of parental deployment on children's development and wellbeing. The non-deployed parents are often denied the opportunity to share family decisions with their deployed partner that in some cases creates additional stress and worry (Lester & Flake, 2013). Additional pressures on the non-deployed parent may contribute to fewer opportunities for children to participate in developmental opportunities such as extracurricular activities and social engagements. Older students are likely to take on extra family responsibilities that could lead to either personal growth or feelings of resentment (Mmari et al., 2009). While many students thrive on these opportunities for increased responsibility and autonomy, increased family responsibilities may limit students' opportunities to participate in other developmental activities (Chandra et al., 2010).

The tenets of Bronfenbrenner's theory relate directly to areas of interest to this study: proximal processes, the developing person, the environmental context and the historical period during which the study is conducted (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Tudge, Mokrova,

Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory describes proximal processes as "engines of development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). As such proximal processes are defined as enduring forms of interaction that form the primary mechanisms for producing human development and vary as a joint function of the developing person and their environmental context. As children age, progressively more complex interactions between themselves and the people, objects and symbols in their environment shape their course of development. Therefore key adults, such as parents and teachers, and peers with whom students interact on a regular basis play a significant role in children's developmental progress. Accordingly cultural symbols within the school environment, such as plaques, military commemorations and other activities that recognise parents' military service, contribute to the school context with which students interact on a continually more complex basis with age.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory defines three clusters of human characteristics that are instrumental in shaping human development: demand, resources and force (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Each student possesses demand characteristics such as age, gender and physical characteristics that act as an immediate stimulus to another person and therefore instigate proximal processes. Students also possess a range of mental and emotional resources gained from their past experiences such as knowledge and mental and social skills that they bring to each new situation. In addition each student has force characteristics based on their disposition, such as temperament, motivation and persistence, that invite or discourage reactions from their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Unique individual characteristics lead students to engage with their environment in individual ways based on their own personal characteristics and biography, and their perceived properties of their environment.

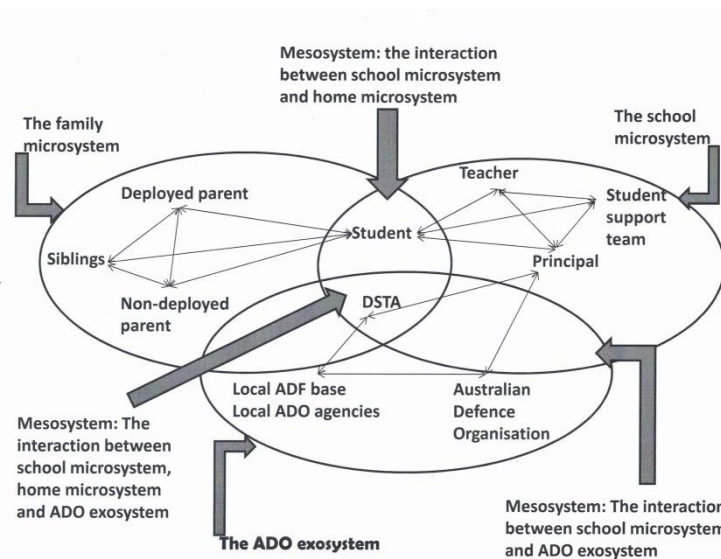
Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the environment of a developing person as a web of interrelated systems that are often represented as nested systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The microsystem consists of environments, such as the home and school, where students spend considerable time engaged in interactions and activities. The microsystem context for this study is comprised of the school environments of 13 Townsville schools (eight primary school and five secondary school campuses).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the mesosystem as a zone where microsystems, such as the home and school, interact with each other. People and activities from each microsystem come together in the mesosystem to interact and allow students to bridge two systems that might otherwise be unrelated. Where microsystems contain similar values children experience fewer

adjustment demands, compared to when the microsystems contain conflicting values, as they move between microsystems (Astor et al., 2013). Family-school relationships represent a mesosystem link that has a direct impact on students' school adjustment with the degree of cultural similarity between the microsystems influencing the level of adjustment demands placed on the students. The influence of mesosystem links, such as dialogue between parents and their school during deployment, is of particular interest to this study.

The exosystem consists of systems, such as the parents' workplace (in this study a deployment zone) and the Australian Defence Organisation's (ADO) family support agencies, that influence children's development even though they do not spend any time interacting in these systems. The mesosystem link between schools and parent who are deployed is of particular interest to this study. In addition the mesosystem link between schools and ADO support agencies also influences this study. The macrosystem encompasses cultural mores including influences from government policy. The contextual environment for this study is represented in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Research Study Environment



Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) described the human environment as containing both objective properties and subjective elements that exert strong influences on children's development during their formative years. Subjective elements such as a sense of belonging and a perception of support influence children's experience of their environment and mobilise their resources and force characteristics. Feelings such as anticipation, forebodings, hopes, doubts and personal beliefs therefore shape the course of an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Bronfenbrenner argued that proximal processes, those

enduring forms of interaction between a person and their environment, are bidirectional forces that generate reciprocal interactions between students and their home and school environments.

The environmental context of each person's life is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and events through which they live. Elder (1998) suggests that human lives are lived interdependently with the social and historical influences of the times and are expressed through a network of shared relationships. The developmental influence of historical events for each individual depends largely on the person's developmental age at the time they occur. Children who are undergoing major life transitions, such as parental deployments, therefore experience them differently at different stages of their emotional and psychological development. Furthermore, human agency as defined by Elder (1998) enables individuals to construct their own life course through the choices they make and the actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of historical and social circumstances (Elder, 1998). This study considers how multiple systems contribute to students' outcomes during deployment.

2.10 Knowledge Gap in Education Research

The reviewed literature identifies the influences of deployment related family disruptions on students' social and emotional functioning at school, existing school support structures and barriers to school based support. Family changes associated with a parental deployment to a war zone place unusual developmental pressures on children that interfere with their emotional and psychological wellbeing and academic engagement. An emerging body of literature recognises the potential of schools, as normative developmental sites, to support students with social, emotional and academic challenges associated with a parental deployment to a war zone. However, lack of awareness by school staff, limited training opportunities for teachers and competing priorities for principals present barriers to the development of a whole school approach to deployment related student support.

School based support programs are referenced in the literature but evaluations of these programs are limited (Brendel, Maynard, Albright & Bellomo, 2013; DePedro et al., 2014b). While there is strong evidence to suggest that the supportive processes generated from the components of a positive school climate enhance student wellbeing during a parental deployment (De Pedro et al., 2015) the effectiveness of specific school based support programs is not clear although satisfaction ratings endorse their utility. This presents a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed by identifying the key features of effective,

supportive school based programs that promote students' wellbeing during a parental deployment.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development provides a framework through which to explore insights into key elements that influence students' development during a parental deployment. By considering the nature and essence of interactions between the characteristics of developing students and the characteristics of their environmental systems evidence can be gained to assess the overall impact of school based support programs on students' development. This can be achieved by investigating the Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program, a program that currently operates and is considered effective by parents, school administrators and Australian Defence Force (ADF) commanders (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2011).

The Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program has operated in Australian Schools since 2001. Teachers and parents are familiar with the program and have had opportunities to observe and form views of key DSTA program features and the program's effectiveness for supporting students during parental deployment. Furthermore experienced DSTAs have had the opportunity to conceptualise their role and assess the efficacy of different aspects of their program delivery. In addition the researcher's experience of working as both a secondary school teacher and as a Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO) with the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) has sensitised her to the underlying deployment related experiences of students from ADF families.

The lack of evidence about what factors specifically contribute to the success of the DSTA program presents an opportunity to address some of the gaps in the current understanding about how schools effectively support students during a parental deployment. In addition the unique perspectives of parents, teachers and DSTAs will inform school administrators of interventions that are perceived to have effectively enhanced students' wellbeing and school engagement during parental deployment. Purposive sampling of parents, teachers and DSTAs with firsthand knowledge of the DSTA program is likely to contribute keen insights into effective school base support practices that support students from ADF families during parental deployment.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used for this study. The aims, objectives and research questions for the study are presented followed by an overview of the research design and ethical issues. The methods for data collection are discussed and followed by the process used for data analysis. Finally the validity and reliability of the data is discussed.

This study employed a naturalistic inquiry design, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), to investigate how schools support students throughout a parental military deployment cycle. A deployment cycle encompasses pre-deployment, during deployment and post-deployment phases with each phase of the cycle presenting family members with a range of emotional tasks and challenges (Pincus et al., 2007). The study investigated the challenges faced by students from Australian Defence Forces (ADF) families and the support they received at school during a parental deployment. A naturalistic inquiry design was appropriate for examining the relationship between the personal challenges faced by students during a parental deployment and the programs created to address students' needs within the context of the school (Denzin, 2001).

The work of Defence School Transition Aides (DSTAs) was the unit of analysis and focus of this study. Perspectives were sought from parents, teachers and DSTAs to gain a holistic view of the research problem. Participants were drawn from the communities of eight primary and five secondary schools in Townsville, an Australian provincial city that is home to two major Australian military bases. The findings were related to DSTAs' work conducted in Townsville schools between 2001 and 2014, a period of intense ADF deployment to areas of international conflict.

A naturalistic inquiry design sought to show rather than tell the reader about the effectiveness of the DSTA program. A research design with explanatory power provided insight into the possible influences of the DSTA program on promoting adaptive student functioning. Data were gained through semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers and DSTAs and analysed using inductive methods. The use of inductive methods resulted in the emergence of a theoretical framework that was used to organise and make sense of the collected data. The resultant theoretical framework incorporated a number of themes that emerged during concurrent data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

3.2 Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

The aim of this dissertation was to gain an understanding of specific school based processes and practices that offered support to students during a parental deployment. Furthermore the study sought to identify those programs and strategies that were employed by DSTAs and contributed to a sense of student wellbeing during a parental deployment. The study endeavoured to identify processes used by DSTAs to encourage students to develop new and enhance students' existing strengths that enabled them to more successfully participate in their educational program during their parents' absence.

Previous evaluations of the DSTA program (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2012) returned a high satisfaction rating for the DSTA program's achievements by parents, school principals and military commanders. Furthermore these evaluations suggested that the educational performance and wellbeing of students from ADF families was enhanced by the presence of the DSTA program in Australian schools. However, little qualitative data were collected during these evaluations with regards to the practices and processes adopted by DSTAs in the conduct of their work. Hence few specific strategies employed by DSTAs were differentiated in these reviews. Therefore in order to achieve the study's aims, the following objectives were developed:

1. to review current literature on students' responses to parental deployment and related support processes implemented by schools during a parental deployment cycle;
2. to obtain participants' perspectives of the type of additional support that is beneficial to students throughout a parental deployment cycle;
3. to collect accounts and personal constructions of DSTA work from a sample of parents, teachers and DSTAs who have supported students throughout a parental deployment cycle;
4. to analyse the data and generate a theoretical framework that responds to the research questions; and
5. to contribute to the level of knowledge available to educators regarding helpful practices that support students throughout a parental deployment cycle.

The research questions were formulated to gather specific knowledge about DSTAs' work when supporting students during a parental deployment. As noted in the literature review a parental deployment presents a number of challenges for school aged children from preparatory through to Year 12. While difficulties experienced by students are apparent to parents, teachers and DSTAs, little is known about how schools assist students to address their

needs during a parental deployment. The following research questions were developed to gain a comprehensive understanding of how DSTAs' work met those DSTA program objectives pertaining to *student support during parental absence*:

1. What student supports, associated with parental deployments, are valued by the teacher, parent and DSTA participants?
2. What aspects of the DSTA program are perceived to activate student strengths to manage the challenges associated with parental deployment?

3.3 Research Design

The aims and objectives of this study suggested the requirement of a qualitative research design to allow a focus on participants' perspectives. Participant interviews were an appropriate means of collecting qualitative data for analysis. Schools provided the context for the study and all but one participant interviews were conducted within a school setting. The researcher was familiar with school settings through her previous teaching experience and employment with the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) as a Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO) during the period of relevance to this study, between 2001 and 2014. In addition the exploratory nature of this research necessitated an emergent design to provide the researcher with sufficient flexibility to explore multiple realities as they emerged from the data. A naturalistic inquiry design as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) allowed the researcher to meet the objectives of this study and meet the requirements of the research design.

A naturalistic inquiry paradigm postulates that there are multiple realities that can only be studied holistically. The aim of a naturalistic inquiry is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge that describes individual cases. Prediction and control are unlikely outcomes of a naturalistic inquiry although some level of understanding can be achieved. Furthermore the researcher and the subject of the research interact to influence each other. Therefore the researcher and the object of their study are in a simultaneous state of mutual shaping so it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects. The naturalistic inquiry is bound by values that are reflected in the research problem, the paradigm guiding the investigation and congruence between the research problem, the research paradigm and the study's context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A naturalistic inquiry is carried out within a natural setting as the multiple realities cannot be easily understood in isolation from their contexts. In this study the majority of interviews were

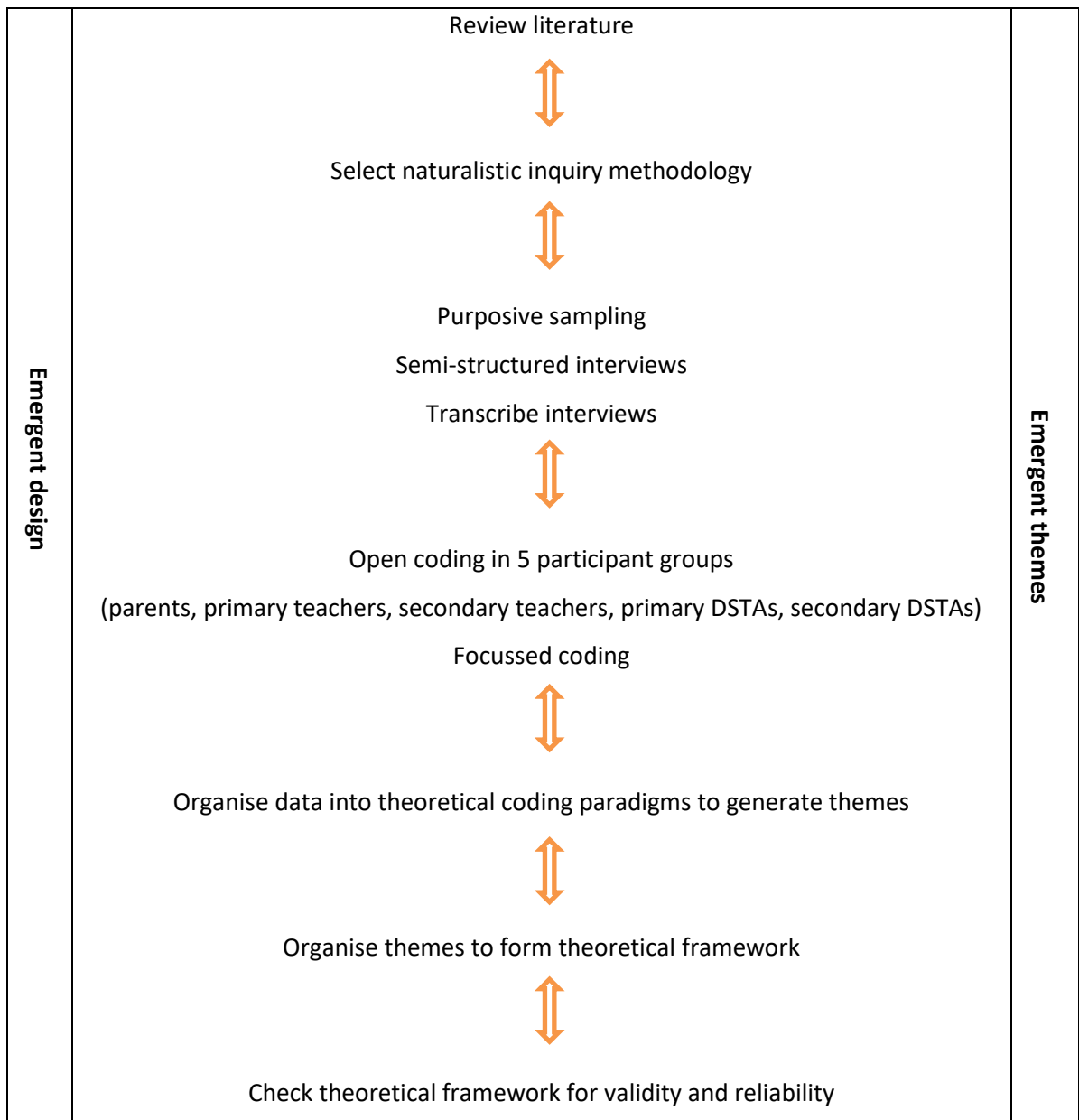
conducted on school premises to more fully understand the interactions under discussion. I conducted the interviews myself and recognised that it would have been virtually impossible to capture the depth of responses with a survey. Besides, the administration of surveys interferes with the mutual shaping that occurs within face to face contact between the researcher and the research subjects. In addition much of the nuanced personal experiences shared in the interviews were more fully shared within a discussion.

Qualitative methods were employed to gather and analyse the data as they are more adaptable to dealing with multiple realities. In addition qualitative methods are more sensitive to the influences on mutual shaping and value patterns that may emerge within the interview environment. Purposive sampling increased the likelihood that an array of multiple realities would be uncovered maximising my ability to devise a grounded theory that took full account of the local conditions, mutual shapings and values. Inductive analysis methods were more likely to identify multiple realities and mutual shaping influences within the data thus enabling a grounded theory that was responsive to the contextual values to emerge from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data for a naturalistic inquiry is drawn from the negotiated constructions and reconstructions that depend on the interactions that occur between the researcher and the research subjects. The naturalistic research design emerges as the patterns of mutual shapings become apparent throughout the study and are interpreted by the researcher. Furthermore it is inconceivable to construct a research instrument ahead of time that would capture the multiple realities and mutual shapings that make up a naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This study was suited to a naturalistic inquiry paradigm as it was predicted that multiple realities would emerge from the data that would be constructed and shaped within an interview process. The research process followed the steps outlined in Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1 The Research Process



Although Figure 3.1 suggests a linear process for conducting the research, this was not the case. The double ended arrows reflect the dynamic and iterative nature of the research process that involved the ongoing comparison of in-vivo codes within the data (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006). Constant comparison of data ensured that the emergent themes from the data were consistent with the integrity of the total data.

3.4 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations are important in research. During the initial stages of this research project, including throughout the data collection phase, the author of this study was employed by the Defence Community Organisation and worked in an advisory role with those Defence

School Transition Aides (DSTAs) who participated in this study. In the past some DSTAs have introduced the researcher as their “other boss” despite having the school principal or deputy principal as their direct supervisor. The author had an advisory and support role rather than a direct supervisory role with the DSTAs and had no authority over their employment status. Participation in the study was voluntary and unrelated to the professional relationship held between the author and the DSTA participants.

Applications for ethics approval were made to the Australian Defence Human Research Ethics Committee (ADHREC), James Cook University, Education Queensland and Catholic Education, Townsville Diocese. The research protocol was approved by all of these ethics committees. Informed consent from school principals and participants was achieved by providing them with a letter that clearly explained the study’s aims and procedures, expected benefits and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were required to sign an informed consent document acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study with the knowledge that they were free to withdraw their consent at any time without question. Participants were informed prior to the interview that a Defence social worker was available to assist any participants who became distressed throughout the interview process. Samples of participant letters and consent forms can be seen in Appendix G.

Participants were assured of confidentiality both on the initial paperwork and then verbally before the commencement of their interview. Participants’ names, contact details or any other identifying information were not identified in any way with anything they said to the researcher. Pseudonyms were used for quotes and any case studies from the interview transcripts that were used in written form to maintain participant confidentiality. The research process was designed to ensure that all participation was voluntary and that the interview process was comfortable.

3.5 Insider Research

As a former teacher as well as employee of the Defence Community Organisation (DCO), the researcher was considered to be an insider researcher. The position of insider researcher brought many advantages, such as knowledge and a special understanding of the complexities affecting the study, but it also presented risks that needed to be managed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, Costley, Elliot and Gibbs (2010) cautioned that being very close to the study may lead the researcher to “fail to see the obvious”. In addition Costley et al. (2010) also recognised that the insider-researcher was likely to bring valuable insights to the study. Furthermore due to their sensitisation to pertinent issues the insider-researcher needed to

guard against the influence of personal bias (Costley et al., 2010) and monitor trustworthiness by ensuring that the findings were grounded in the data, confirmed through triangulation, and that the overall design was reviewed for integrity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher's professional closeness to the data from this study was addressed through regular feedback from the supervisory team, who were not directly involved with the researcher's workplace, and participant checks. Retiring from the workplace half way through the study also assisted the research to manage these risks.

The researcher was practically assisted by her professional closeness to the study. Access to participants and resources allowed the study to proceed unimpeded. The researcher had access to potential participants through her employment with the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) and her professional relationship with school principals. Furthermore DCO management provided support in terms of study time release and school principals supported the project by inviting members of their school community to participate in the study.

3.6 Values

Naturalistic inquiry is value bound. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p38.) outlined five corollaries to Axiom 5, the axiom that relates to the role of values:

- inquiries are influenced by inquirer values as expressed in the choice of a problem, evaluand, or policy option and in the framing, bounding, and focussing of that problem, evaluand or policy option;
- inquiry is influenced by the choice of the paradigm that guides the investigation into the problem;
- inquiry is influenced by the choice of substantive theory utilised to guide the collection and analysis of data and in the interpretation of findings;
- inquiry is influenced by the values that inhere in the context;
- the problem, evaluand or policy option, paradigm, theory and context must exhibit congruence (value resonance) if the inquiry is to produce meaningful results.

As a former teacher in Education Queensland schools the researcher shares the values of the Queensland College of Teachers which states that schools must provide a safe and supportive school environment that fosters positive and productive relationships with families and the community. Furthermore as a previous employee of the Defence Community Organisation the researcher also shares the values of social work colleagues who, as a professional body, value human dignity, social justice, service to humanity, integrity and competence.

3.7 Pretesting and Piloting

A separate interview guide based on the framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) was developed for parents, teachers and DSTAs. These guides were discussed with the supervisory team and modifications were made from the recommendations that arose from these discussions. After the refinement of the initial interview guides trial interviews were conducted with a volunteer parent, teacher and DSTA. These interviews were transcribed and discussed with the supervisory team resulting in further modifications to the interview guides. Further minor refinements to the interview guides were made after the first third of the interviews had been conducted. Sample interview questions are shown below in section 3.10.

3.8 Sampling Approach

Consistent with a naturalistic enquiry design purposive sampling was employed to allow the uncovering of multiple realities of the phenomenon under study. The ecological lens through which the findings were to be viewed suggested that data needed to represent the constructions of parents, teachers and DSTAs, all of whom represented school communities. School principals were contacted initially to request their support. Initial contact with principals was made by letter outlining the parameters of the study. Included with the letter was a consent form that indicated the principals' support for members of their school communities to be interviewed for the study. The principals were requested to invite teachers, parents and DSTAs from their school community to participate in the study. In some cases the principals delegated the issuing of parent invitations to the DSTA on their staff. All participants were volunteers and represented one of the thirteen school communities involved in the study. With one exception all interviews were conducted in person and most of the interviews were conducted in school settings. One parent, who was recruited late in the study, was interviewed by phone as the family had relocated to another geographical area.

As the data collection process progressed early data indicated the need for gathering specific individual perspectives in order to triangulate data pertaining to particular circumstances. As such purposive sampling (Charmaz, 2006) was used to recruit two teachers and two parents. Second interviews were conducted with two DSTA participants for the purposes of triangulating data from other sources.

The triangulation of data was purposefully pursued when a particular student intervention strategy, as described by a participant, was assessed by the researcher as being particularly relevant to the nature of DSTAs' work. Where possible, one or more potential participants,

with knowledge of the same scenario, were invited to be interviewed for the purposes of triangulation. The additional interviews allowed the researcher to compare the constructions of two or three participants with knowledge of the same situation thus increasing the credibility of the findings (Denzin, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unfortunately it was not possible to triangulate all data and themes of interest to the study as the families of many students had since left the study location and some teachers had transferred to other areas.

3.9 Participant Characteristics

To assist data triangulation and capturing of different perspectives of the research problem 15 parents, 17 teachers and 15 DSTAs were interviewed. All parent participants were the female partners of male ADF members. These parents had, collectively, a total of 31 students ranging in age from preparatory to Year 12 as summarised in Table 3.3. The partners of all parent participants had experienced at least one overseas deployment; most of the ADF parents had deployed several times.

Table 3.1 Ages of Students Represented by Parent Participants

Student age group	Boys	Girls
Children under school age	1	1
Junior primary school (Years p-3)	4	6
Senior primary school (Years 4-7)	5	2
Junior secondary school (Years 8-10)	5	6
Senior secondary school (Years11-12)	2	1
Adult children	2	2
Total school aged children	16	15

The teachers and DSTAs were employed in schools of varying sizes, enrolling from 350 to over 2000 students, and with a wide range in ADF student enrolments, from 25 to over 200 students. The number of students from ADF families enrolled in the schools participating in the study can be seen in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Student Enrolment Numbers

The number of students from ADF families enrolled in participating schools	The number of participating schools
Between 25 and 50 students	4
Between 50 and 100 students	3
Between 100 and 200 students	4
Over 200 students	2

Nine teacher participants worked in primary schools and eight teacher participants worked in secondary schools. With the exception of one male secondary teacher, all teacher participants were female. All teachers had at least three years of teaching experience. Three primary school teachers and three secondary school teachers had an ADF family connection. Teacher participants represented students in all year levels from preparatory to Year 12. Ten DSTA participants worked in primary schools and five DSTA participants worked in secondary schools. All DSTA participants had at least three years of experience working in the DSTA role and all but one secondary school DSTA were female. All DSTAs, bar two, were the partners of ADF members who had experienced multiple partner deployments.

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

Forty-seven semi-structured interviews (15 parents, 17 teachers and 15 DSTAs) were conducted with participants who shared their experiences, constructions and reconstructions of the research problem. The interviews were scheduled in accordance with participant availability and were not conducted in any particular order. A separate interview schedule was developed for each group of participants (teachers, parents and DSTAs).

Interviews have a number of properties that needed to be considered such as structure, overtness and the quality of the relationship between the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The degree of structure imposed on an interview depends on the purpose of the interview with the structured interview used when the definition of the problem has been defined by the researcher. In an unstructured interview the problem of interest was expected to arise in response to the broad issues raised (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study a semi-structured and flexible interview schedule was determined to be the most effective approach (Charmaz, 2006). Each script was comprised of a small number of broad, open ended questions that were complemented by probes to investigate specific areas of interest to the study as well

as particular areas of concern for the participants. Prompts were used to encourage the participants to further explore areas of relevance to the study.

Participants were fully informed about the purposes of the interview prior to commencement and also of their right to withdraw at any time without prejudice or question. Written consent to allow the interview content to be used for the purposes of the study was gained prior to commencement of the interview. Furthermore the researcher encouraged the participants to feel comfortable and sought to develop a rapport with each participant prior to the interview. A small number of guiding questions allowed the researcher to gather data around existing themes while remaining alert for and responsive to emergent themes. The six interviews conducted specifically for the purposes of triangulation were more structured than the other interviews as the researcher was pursuing data that was specific to a particular situation.

The interview questions were designed to reflect the tenets of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), the formal theory used to guide the study and act as a lens to examine the study's findings (Birks & Mills, 2011). The tenets of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory consisted of: the characteristics of the developing person, the key elements of the developing person's environment or context and the interactions or processes that occurred between the developing person and their environmental context, and within the historical influences on the study (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Copies of the interviews and transcripts are available on a compact disc.

Parallel interview guides were developed for each group of participants. The broad questions were organised into a semi-structured format and addressed the research questions:

1. What student supports, associated with parental deployments, are valued by the teacher, parent and DSTA participants?
2. What aspects of the DSTA program are perceived to activate student strengths to manage the challenges associated with parental deployment?

Examples of the interview questions are given below:

Question 1: *Describe how students respond to a parental deployment.* Some of the sample questions are as follows: "How do your children respond to your partner being deployed?" (parents). "How have your students responded to a parents' deployment?" (teachers). "How do the students in your school respond to a parents' deployment?" (DSTAs).

Question 2: *Describe the efforts employed at school to help students to manage a parental deployment.* Here are some of the sample questions: “Was there anyone at your children’s school who was helpful or supportive to your children during your partner’s deployment? What did they do?” (parents). “Are there programs at your school to support students during a deployment?” (teachers). “What strategies have you found helpful and supportive for students during a deployment?” (DSTAs).

Questions 3: *Identify aspects of the DSTA role that eased the transition process for students with a parent who is deployed.* Sample questions are as follows: “What do you think schools could do to help children when a parent’s deployed?” (parents). “Are there things that schools should do or not do to assist children during a parent’s deployment?” (teachers). “What things does your school do to help students during their parents’ deployment?” (DSTAs).

Consistent with Lincoln and Guba (1985) the interviews were conducted as conversations for the purpose of obtaining the here and now constructions of the participants, reconstructions of the past and projections of expected future experiences. The researcher encouraged participants to explore the topics under discussion and to feel sufficiently safe and confident to openly reveal their views, feelings, intentions and actions. The researcher listened carefully to the responses, showed interest and sensitively encouraged the participants to explore topics in further depth by following hunches and examining views and feelings that arose (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher was reflective of her own role during the interview process while seeking to understand the participants’ perspectives and constructions of students’ behaviour and school responses throughout a parental deployment cycle (Charmaz, 2006). Participants were encouraged to reflect on their responses that were of particular relevance to themes emerging from the data.

3.11 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using qualitative methods of coding, sorting, collapsing, refining, and constant comparison in line with the principles of grounded theory (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006). These methods are consistent with a naturalistic inquiry paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data were first broken down analytically thus allowing initial codes to emerge from the data. The initial codes were identified “in-vivo” (Charmaz, 2006) and included words used by participants. After several interviews it became apparent to the researcher that each group of participants (parents, teachers and DSTAs) responded to the interview questions with a different focus than the other groups. Other subtle differences were noted between the responses from teachers and DSTAs working in the primary school sector when compared to

the responses from teachers and DSTAs who worked in secondary schools. In order to capture the nuances represented in the data from each group of participants the transcripts were initially coded within five separate groups of participants: parents, primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, primary school DSTAs and secondary school DSTAs. The initial coding process therefore resulted in separate in-vivo codes from the five separate data sets.

The initial codes were later refined and collapsed using constant comparative methods to produce focused codes (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006). The focused codes obtained from each data set were combined into a single list and compared for common themes. A summary of the focused codes is shown in Appendix A. Given the multiple perspectives represented across the five groups of participants, some codes were more commonly represented in some data sets than others. Parents, for example, were more focussed on DSTAs' monitoring of their children's emotional needs and social relationships whereas primary and secondary teachers were more focussed on the DSTAs' contribution to students' participation within the classroom and within the school community. The different focus on DSTA work from each participant group reflected their current priorities and concerns and this finding is reviewed in Chapter 6.

To assist with further conceptualisation of themes emerging from the data the coding paradigm for social science research questions, as outlined by Bohm (2004, p. 272), was applied to the data from each group of participants. Bohm (2004) suggested organising the data into the coding paradigm *context-condition-strategy-consequence* thus allowing key phenomenon to emerge from the data. The outcomes of this coding exercise are provided in Appendix B. To further explore the properties of emergent themes the phenomena emerging from the previous exercise were further explored using Charmaz's (2006, p. 61) axial coding framework. See Appendix C for an example.

Memos were written continuously throughout the data analysis process. Charmaz (2006) described memo writing as a transitional step between data collection and the findings. Memos varied in sophistication and captured thoughts and revealed questions that guided further data collection. Bohm's (2004) framework of coding families that including the categories of *causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences* and *conditions*, was used to construct more structured memos during the analytic process. Coding families assisted to raise focused codes to abstract themes by explicating properties, describing consequences and revealing relationships (Bohm, 2004).

The themes that emerged from the analysis of each data set were collated and examined as a whole collection. From this examination an overarching theme emerged to describe the totality of the data set: *DSTAs bridge the cultural gap between ADF families and schools*. In addition four role functions that drove DSTA praxis (*reducing cultural barriers, constructing cultural knowledge, integrating knowledge and practice and building school capacity*) emerged to underpin the overarching theme that spoke to the research questions and represented the totality of the data. The relationship between themes that emerged from the data and DSTA role functions is represented in Appendix D.

In order to consider the level of congruence between the findings framework and the properties of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, the study's themes were mapped onto the four tenets of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework: *person-process-context-time* (see Appendix E). A good fit was demonstrated between the two frameworks. For example one of the key themes that emerged from this study was *helping students to make sense of their experiences*. This theme maps onto both the DSTA role function of *integrating knowledge and practice* and the *process* tenet of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework. A matrix was developed to demonstrate the relationship between the findings framework and the tenets of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (see Appendix F).

3.12 Validity and Reliability

A number of techniques were used to ensure the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example four participants were recruited specifically to provide an individual perspective on a specific scenario with which the participant was familiar. For two particular scenarios parents, teachers and DSTAs were all able to provide a perspective on a specific program intervention designed by the DSTA to cater for the unique needs of an individual student. The different perspectives representing the situation were integrated into a single story line supported by quotes from each of the participants. The final storyline was discussed with each contributing participant and each participant accepted the final written representation as an accurate depiction of the event from their personal perspective.

At each stage of the analytical process the emergent findings were presented to the supervisory team for discussion and further refinement. Furthermore the findings were presented to DSTA supervisors and the Townsville DSTA network for comment and discussion. Verbal and written feedback from the DSTA network overwhelmingly confirmed their agreement with the findings as an accurate representation of their work to support students throughout a parental deployment cycle. The researcher also had opportunities to present the

study findings to DSTAs in Cairns and regional Victoria. Both groups expressed resonance between the findings and their own work of supporting students during parental deployment. The next chapter, Chapter 4, presents the study's findings organised under the four role functions that drive DSTA praxis: *reducing cultural barriers*, *constructing cultural knowledge*, *integrating knowledge and practice* and *building school capacity*. Evidence is provided in the form of data excerpts to illustrate the findings. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Chapter Four

Findings

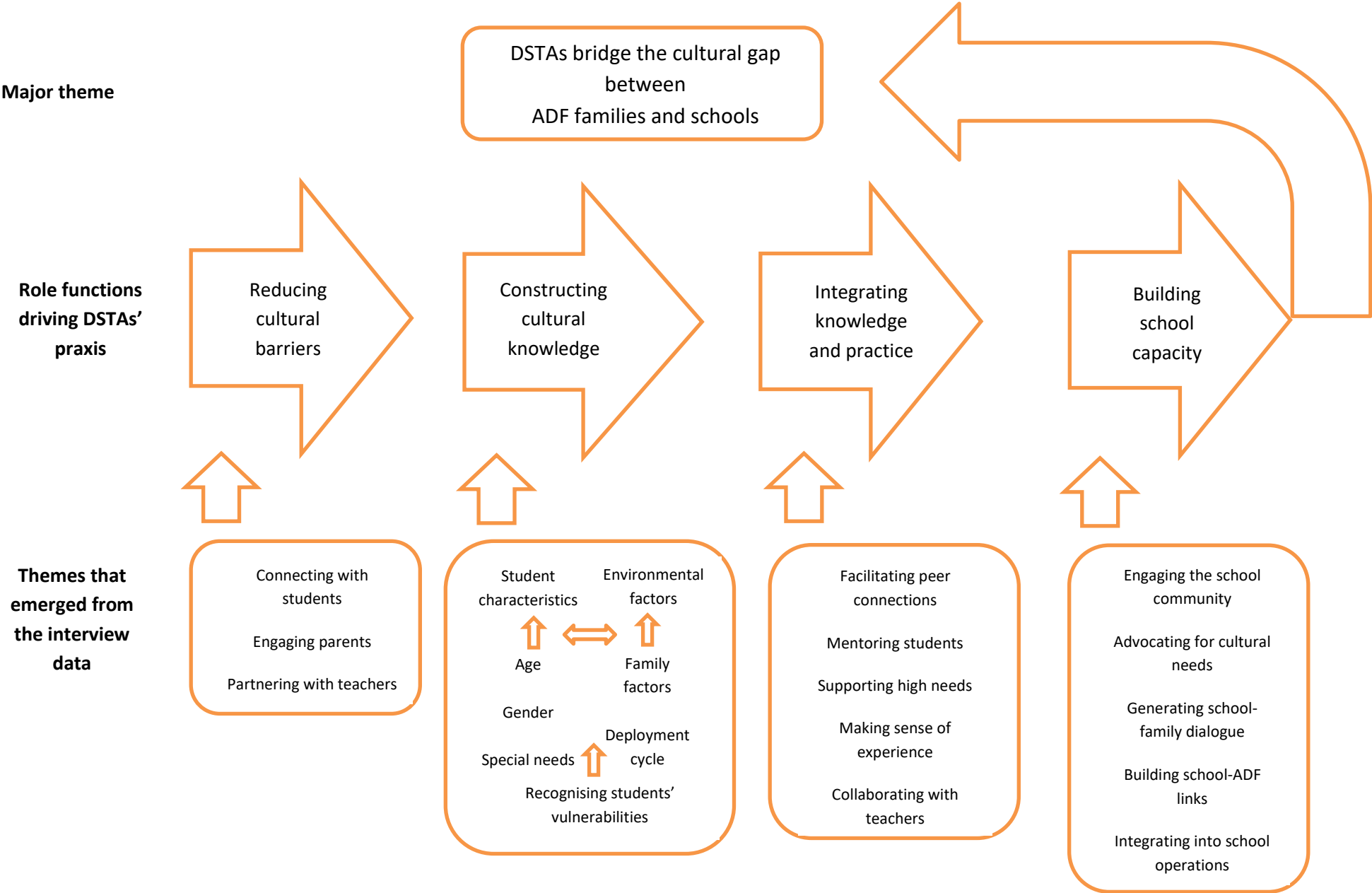
4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings and outlines Defence School Transition Aides' (DSTAs') work occurring between 2001 and 2014 that supported students during parental deployments. The data were collected from interviews with 15 parents, 17 teachers and 15 DSTAs. The parents were all the female partners of male ADF partners. These parents had, collectively, a total of 32 school aged children ranging in age from Preparatory to Year 12. Nine teachers worked in primary schools with students enrolled from Preparatory through to Year 7 and eight teachers worked in secondary schools that enrolled students from Years 8 to 12. Ten DSTAs worked with primary school students and five DSTAs worked with secondary school students. Except for one male secondary school teacher and one male secondary school DSTA, all teacher and DSTA participants were female. Six teachers had firsthand experience of living in an ADF family as did thirteen of the DSTAs. The parent participants are referred to as *mothers* in this dissertation to distinguish them from the overall body of parents referred to by teachers and DSTAs. Teachers who participated in this study are referred to as *teacher participants* to distinguish them from teachers as a group that were referred to by parents and DSTAs. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of participants.

The unit of analysis for the study was *DSTAs' work conducted during a parental deployment*. The major theme that emerged from the data was *DSTAs bridge the cultural gap between ADF families and schools*. The major theme is underpinned by four role functions that drive DSTA praxis: *reducing cultural barriers, constructing cultural knowledge, integrating cultural knowledge with practice, and building school capacity*. Synthesised in context the findings suggest the following:

Defence School Transition Aides (DSTAs) *bridge the cultural gap between Australian Defence Force (ADF) families and schools* and assist students to adjust to deployment related transitions by *reducing cultural barriers, constructing cultural knowledge* while building professional relationships and *integrating cultural knowledge with practice*. Through their work DSTAs assist in *building school capacity* to support students throughout a parental deployment cycle.

Figure 4.1 Integrating DSTA Praxis with the Study's Themes



Each DSTA role function contains a number of underlying themes. Within *reducing cultural barriers* three themes emerged: connecting with students, being accessible for parents, and partnering with teachers. *Constructing cultural knowledge* is underpinned by six themes: recognising age related responses, supporting special needs, noticing gendered responses, considering family factors, understanding the deployment cycle, and communicating students' vulnerabilities. *Integrating cultural knowledge and practice* is informed by five themes: facilitating supportive peer processes, providing individual student support, supporting high needs, helping students to make sense of their experiences, and collaborating with teachers. *Building school capacity* contains five themes: promoting whole school awareness, promoting supportive school processes, encouraging school-family interactions, building school-ADF connections, and integrating into the school community. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the relationship between DSTAs' praxis and the study's themes. The findings are organised under the four role functions that drive DSTA praxis: *reducing cultural barriers*, *constructing cultural knowledge*, *integrating cultural knowledge and practice* and *building school capacity*.

4.2 Reducing Cultural Barriers

The data suggested that all three groups of participants (mothers, teacher participants and DSTAs) felt that DSTAs performed a vital role in their schools. A strong theme arising from the data was the importance to students' wellbeing of supportive relationships between DSTAs and students, parents and teachers. The strength of the relationships built between DSTAs and students, parents and teachers provided an essential foundation for DSTAs' work and reduced cultural barriers between ADF families and schools. The mothers appreciated the approachability and accessibility of the DSTAs and the DSTAs' willingness to assist themselves and their children with everyday concerns. The welcoming nature of the DSTAs in the schools encouraged the mothers' confidence to contact the DSTAs with concerns about their children's education and wellbeing.

The mothers felt that DSTAs were well placed to represent their children's needs to teachers. Teacher participants appreciated the availability of the DSTAs to provide additional support to their students when needed and in turn provide teachers with information and practical assistance. The DSTAs shared their expert knowledge about the ADF lifestyle with teachers during the course of their everyday work. Moreover DSTAs offered teachers insights that helped them to further understand and address their students' needs.

With a professional focus on promoting student wellbeing during a parental deployment, DSTAs developed caring and supportive relationships with students and valued professional

relationships with parents and teachers. Through their influence DSTAs shaped students' experience of the school context. By attending to students' social and emotional needs DSTAs helped students to manage the challenges associated with a parental deployment. Table 4.1 summarises key components of the DSTAs' role that assisted DSTAs to reduce cultural barriers between ADF families and schools.

Table 4.1 DSTAs' Role Components

DSTA role components	Participant	Quote
For supporting students:		
Key adult	Mother	"My daughter trusts them. She's always with them. She loves them. She opens up. They're fantastic. "
Regular contact	Primary DSTA	"You're seeing students on a regular basis whether it's once a fortnight or once a week."
Defence Room access	Mother	"My daughter was in the Defence Room probably every day. She always knew the DSTAs were there to keep an eye out."
For supporting parents:		
Stable point of contact	Mother	"I know if I have a problem the DSTAs will do something about it or follow up on things."
Cultural responsiveness	Mother	"I just ask the DSTAs if they can have a look, keep an eye on my children and I touch base. And a lot of the times with the youngest one, 'yep we had a talk to him and he was fine.'"
Connection to other families	Mother	"The DSTA really went out of their way to get to know me, welcome us into the school and introduce us to other families."
Connection to school	Mother	"This school's been awesome with deployment stuff ... like my kids have come here with issues just about everyday stuff at school and it's always been sorted. They're always comfortable."
Feedback	Mother	"I could approach the DSTAs at any time. If I was concerned about anything I could go in and talk to them. If they were concerned about anything they would let me know as well."
Reassurance	Mother	"The kids can just go up at any time and speak to the DSTAs. It's never a problem, they always find the time. They're really approachable."
Community connections	Mother	"The DSTAs are really helpful, not just with the kids. I go and say 'I'm having problems with xyz' and they know who to point you to."
For supporting teachers:		
Information	Primary teacher	"The DSTA will come and tell me or give me the heads up that the parent is going to be away in the near future."
Cultural knowledge	Secondary teacher	"I think if you are aware of it and the extra stress that it puts on kids, if you know there is stuff going on at home and the kids have other stuff to deal with I tend to be a

		bit easier on them.”
Practical support	Primary teacher	“The DSTA supported him in the classroom and it wasn’t done in a way that made him feel different or separated from other kids.”

4.2.1 Connecting with Students. The DSTAs became key adults who supported students at school during a parental deployment. This is consistent with the findings of several American researchers (Chartrand et al., 2008; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013) who propose that key adults play a significant role in student support during times of stress. Confident of the DSTAs’ interest in their lives, students took opportunities to spend time with the DSTAs and keep them informed of what was happening in their families. The DSTAs’ relationships with students were based on pastoral care and mentoring and students approached the DSTAs freely during the school day. Catherine, a primary school DSTA described her relationship with students:

You see them maybe start and be unhappy at the very beginning but because you’re seeing them on a regular basis ...they’ll come and see you...They’ll come and find you ... just for that contact.

Through knowing children well DSTAs were able to identify individual students’ needs and generate supportive processes both within the school environment and also at home. Supporting students at school often prompted DSTAs to alert parents to children’s concerns so that they could be addressed within the family. Lesley, a primary school based DSTA described how her pre-deployment preparation activities sometimes uncovered students’ concerns that needed attention by their parents:

A lot of them were very frightened about Dad being shot or killed or they didn’t have a big concept of what Dad was actually doing over there so we had a little questionnaire. “Where’s dad going? What do you think he’ll be doing while he’s there? What job does he do? What might happen?” And write those things down so the parent, when they took it home, could see where things were. So if they think Dad’s going to be shooting people or killing people they can then take that information on board and talk about that that might not necessarily be the case.

DSTAs committed to having regular contact with each student throughout a parental deployment cycle to monitor their wellbeing. This practice concurs with Easterbrooks et al.’s (2013) proposal that resilience is a product of interactions between people and their environments. Intentional monitoring of student wellbeing during deployment helped DSTAs

and teachers to identify any student difficulties early and in turn promptly implement support structures that helped students to regulate their emotions and return to full engagement with their educational program and social relationships.

DSTAs recognised the importance of creating specific school practices to complement existing student support structures during a parental deployment. Many of the proactive strategies employed by DSTAs resembled the “home grown practices” identified in De Pedro et al.’s (2014b, p.17) study. For example the “Defence Room” provided a known location where students could gather to meet informally with others and interact with the available resource materials. Regular student contact gave DSTAs the opportunity to hear students’ concerns and help students to reframe unhelpful thoughts or learn new coping strategies. Overall the majority of students were described by DSTAs as coping well with a parental deployment with some students thriving on the additional responsibility they had at home.

Principals allocated a spare classroom in which DSTAs could conduct group programs and offer lunchtime activities. A work space from which to work and welcome students was of primary importance to the DSTAs’ ability to facilitate supportive peer processes. The DSTAs’ work space has become known as the Defence Room in most schools. Students regarded the Defence Room as a safe place where they were free to discuss concerns and express their feelings. DSTAs established a program of regular activities that took place in the Defence Room including lunchtime programs, small group programs and individual activities. DSTAs accumulated a stock of resources, games and equipment that were available to students. Miranda described how her six year old daughter Kim relied heavily on the Defence Room during her husband Jock’s deployment:

She was in the Defence Room probably every day... She always knew the DSTAs were there to keep an eye out, even if she didn’t need them... If she didn’t have the Defence Room and the DSTAs to deal with, it would have been a nightmare to be honest. She wouldn’t have come to school... She’d just come and block out what was going on and she coped better.

The Defence Room became a valued meeting place for many students. Not only did students interact with the DSTAs but they also shared conversations with other students from ADF families. Lynne, a secondary school DSTA, described how her students accessed the Defence Room:

They'll always come in at the beginning of the day and sometimes you can get something that you can nip in the bud. So having that open door policy really works... You get a lot of information with kids and you can help a lot with that.

While students enjoyed spending time with the DSTAs and new friends from ADF families, their regular friends also offered them a source of support throughout a parental deployment. Friendship groups played an important role in assisting students to adjust to the changes in their families (Lester & Flake, 2013) and the DSTAs paid close attention to the stability of students' friendships during a deployment. By spending time in the playground DSTAs were able to observe students' friendship patterns and note any changes. Knowledge of students' friendships assisted DSTAs to understand the students' support networks. Casey, a secondary school DSTA described her work with students in the playground:

I get out in the playground and I stop and talk, ask "how's it going, is everything alright?" If they are by themselves there is usually something going on. You know your kids before a deployment, what they do, who they are with, how they behave so when there's a deployment you can see if there's a difference and that I think that is the most important thing I do.

DSTAs developed positive relationships with students. Through knowing students well they recognised concerning changes in students behaviour and responded accordingly to attend to their needs. Despite widespread ADF family satisfaction with the DSTA program it is noteworthy that some families preferred their children not to engage with the DSTAs or to disclose parental deployment at school. This parental response reflects Siebler's (2009) findings of self-reliance as an ADF cultural norm with ADF families rarely asking for help. These typical ADF family attributes sometimes played out at school as explained by John, a secondary school teacher:

There's another group in the school though that for whatever reason don't disclose that they are defence families. It's all very secret, I think, I know some families tell them not to, don't disclose that. Those families, it makes it harder for them because then it's hard to say "why can't you go and see the DSTA?" "Because they'll know we're a defence family" and to do so would be breaking dad or mum's confidence... And it makes it quite complicated for the kids.

4.2.2 Engaging Parents. Very little research has focussed on parents' perspectives of school based deployment support for their children. In this study the mothers

reported the DSTA program to play a vital role in the school by assisting both their children and themselves at key times. The presence of DSTAs in schools provided families with a sense of security and a reliable source of support during times of school mobility and parental absence. The mothers felt comfortable contacting the DSTAs whom they reported to be approachable, available and willing to help. For the participating families connecting with the DSTA did not appear to carry the same stigma often associated with contacting more formal services (Siebler, 2009). Furthermore the mothers were confident that their worries about their children would be understood by the DSTAs and their requests would be followed up. The mothers recognised DSTAs as an initial point of contact in the school and they were reassured by the knowledge that the DSTAs, who they felt understood both the challenges of deployment and their children's individual needs, were available to their children and advocated for them within the school context. Contact between the DSTAs and parents was relatively informal and the mothers felt free to contact the DSTAs when the need arose.

The mothers also appreciated the DSTAs' support to help them connect with other ADF families in the school. Parent gatherings provided opportunities for social contact and debriefing, and such opportunities generated mutual support and school engagement processes. Heather, the mother of four middle school aged boys, described how the DSTA welcomed her family to the school and kept her informed of local opportunities:

The DSTA really went out of their way to get to know me, welcome us into the school and introduce us to other families which I think is important as well.

Parents contacted the DSTAs by email, phone or in person alerting them to family changes and student difficulties. Parents often asked DSTAs to monitor students' wellbeing at times of particular vulnerability. Those parents, who preferred not to discuss a parental deployment with the school staff in general, were often comfortable disclosing family information to the DSTA whom they recognised to be understanding of their concerns and thorough in their actions. Rita, a primary school DSTA, described a typical email conversation with a parent:

We get a lot of emails telling us you know "so and so is going on deployment, could you keep an eye on?" and we will email back "yep, been down to the classroom, they seem to be fine. Let me know if there's anything else I can do."

The mothers appreciated the individual attention that their children received from the DSTA. Recognising the significance that their children placed on time spent with the DSTAs, the mothers believed that their children would approach the DSTAs at school if they needed to

discuss any worries. The mothers felt reassured by the DSTAs' presence in the school and by the enjoyment expressed by their children after they attended the regular lunchtime programs. Katrina described the relationship that her 10 year daughter Peta had with the DSTAs at school during her husband's deployment:

The DSTAs are their second mums. Peta will go to their room and tell them everything and anything... And that's how they make them feel... She trusts them.

The mothers were particularly grateful that their children's individual needs were both identified and addressed at school. The mothers worried that their children received less individual attention with one less parent in the home. Kylie, the mother of four young children, believed that the demands placed on her by her pre-school aged son James compromised the amount of time she had to spend with her seven year old daughter Amanda. Kylie believed that the time that Amanda spent with the DSTA in some way compensated for the parental attention that she felt Amanda missed out on at home due to James' demands on Kylie's time. Kylie described the DSTA's support for Amanda:

I spoke to the DSTAs and they took Amanda out ... and did activities. It was a special time for her because it was all about her which made her feel really good. Because at home, with James behaving the way he is, I was dealing with those problems and she missed out... It's the support they give them and the recognition they give them to show "we're here and we can help you and we realize that life's a bit tough or different at the moment and we can help you out." And the kids can just go up at any time and speak to them. It's never a problem, they always find the time.

While most parental deployments came to the DSTAs' attention ahead of time it was not unusual for schools to learn of a parental deployment only after changes were observed in students' behaviour. John, a secondary school teacher, described how he became aware of a parental deployment when he investigated changes in the students' behaviour:

The kid starts showing behaviours... poorly behaved and you investigate... You'll have a lack of engagement, you'll have acting out. You'll have kids that have minor character changes even in terms of some of them becoming more emotional, not necessarily bad, just I suppose the effect is probably unsettled... Often it will be a disciplinary thing in the first instance but out of that we filter it for the wellbeing side of things... Often it comes up because the kid's struggling. So Mary is having trouble and Mary doesn't usually have trouble and when you scratch the surface and you speak to home you

discover that mum or dad's deployed and this is causing issues. And I assume it's because they are worried. Home's a bit unsettled, the kid's worried about the welfare or perhaps they're just missing, but either way, the kid's not themselves.

Once the parental deployment was known about at school, teachers referred students to the DSTAs for additional support and the DSTA would contact the parent at home. DSTAs advised parents of opportunities and services available to their family members at school and also in the local community. Receiving information and contact from the school aligned with community norms for parents and most parents welcomed the additional support for their children at school. Some parents were unaware of available services until they needed additional support for themselves or their children.

It is well recognised that students benefit when parents and the school work together in the best interests of the student (Lester & Flake, 2013). The positive relationships that developed between DSTAs and parents helped to break down communication barriers between the school and families. Through these facilitation processes families and schools established beneficial dialogue and communication processes. The mothers felt secure in the knowledge that DSTAs took a particular interest in the wellbeing of their individual children.

The mothers found the DSTAs to be more accessible than teachers during the day. Furthermore the mothers felt confident to approach the DSTAs secure in the knowledge that the DSTA would appreciate the pressures experienced by their families during deployment and they would follow up on their concerns. Informal contact with parents in the school grounds provided DSTAs with opportunities to pass on helpful information in response to parents' enquiries. Established relationships with parents were helpful to DSTAs when they approached the parents with concerns as described by Lesley, a primary DSTA:

I've never had any negative feedback from the parents when I've rung. I will just ring and say "look I've spent a bit of time with such and such, either they are doing really well or they're a little bit worried or a bit sad about this"... Because sometimes I think they might feel a bit judged like you're ringing up to say "you're doing a really bad job" so they don't want to come and let you know there's a problem. If you do the opposite thing and ring up and say "I've been spending a bit of time. We've done this and sent some letters". The couple of little worries that come out of it, "they're doing well, what's working for you at home?" They often feel positively inspired to then accept

the little negatives because it doesn't feel like such a judgement if you've complimented them on all the things that they've done.

As highlighted by Lesley, the non-deployed parents were often vulnerable themselves during a deployment and may have feared being judged when their children experienced difficulties at school. However with a DSTA in the school the mothers felt welcome and secure in the knowledge that their children's deployment related needs were understood and communicated by DSTAs to other staff members. As such, the mothers were reassured in the knowledge that their children were well supported at school. Furthermore the presence of a DSTA in the school has become an expectation of ADF families who think that DSTAs offer an essential service that helps students to meet the demands of their lifestyle as expressed by Natasha, the mother of two teenagers:

There is an expectation of understanding and for extra help. My husband's overseas serving his country and his children are suffering for it in some aspect.

The mothers, however, were aware that not all school staff members were necessarily appreciative of the pressures on students during a parental deployment. Jacinta, the mother of three middle school students, related her experience of informing the school office attendant of her husband Rob's deployment:

When I approached the school when Rob deployed... I went to the main office and said "he's leaving. I just want to let you know he's deploying for ten months" and the lady in the front office actually said "why are you bothering to tell us? It's nothing to do with me" was her response which I thought "Oh My God this is actually primary school children and this is how you respond to a huge change in a child's life."

Regardless of the lack of awareness by other staff members, the mothers felt they could approach the DSTAs at any time with any concerns in the confidence that their concerns would be understood and they would receive a supportive response. Despite her experience with the school office attendant Jacinta was confident that her children's wellbeing was regularly monitored and supported by the DSTAs at the school:

The DSTAs would keep an eye on my children for me as well and I knew I could approach them at any time. If I was concerned about anything I could go in and talk to the DSTAs. If they were concerned about anything they would let me know as well.

The mothers were confident of the DSTAs' availability and support for themselves and their children. The presence of the DSTAs provided the mothers with a sense of security that their

children's needs would be understood and communicated by the DSTA to other staff members in the school. The reassurance provided by the DSTAs welcoming presence in the school assisted ADF families to feel welcomed and understood in the school community and influenced the mothers' overall deployment experience.

4.2.3 Partnering with Teachers. Several studies have discovered that many teachers have very little knowledge or understanding of the military lifestyle (Arnold et al., 2014; Garner et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2014a). While the findings from this study were somewhat consistent with past research it suggests that DSTAs' work with teachers has increased teachers' awareness and understanding of the ADF lifestyle. DSTAs provided teachers with student lists to keep them aware of upcoming deployments. Keeping teachers informed of the changes in students' lives was a high priority for DSTAs who also provided classroom assistance to teachers. DSTAs offered teachers information, expert professional knowledge and practical assistance that helped them to better understand and support their students' needs. Regular communication from the DSTAs encouraged teachers to remain alert to additional student needs and to monitor student behaviour with an additional layer of awareness, seeking additional support when needed. Being aware of parental deployments alerted teachers to the possibility of additional student support needs and assisted them to prepare ahead as explained by Ricky, an early childhood teacher:

The DSTA will come and tell me or give me the heads up that the parent is going to be away in the near future so that I can prepare for those emotions or behaviours that the child might demonstrate... She'll give me a suggestion on what to say or do... I'll record that to remember the date and give that little person a bit of space and a bit of me time for the child.

A recognition of students' family circumstances allowed teachers to respond more sensitively to changes in students' behaviour as described by Hannah, a secondary school teacher:

I think if you are aware of it and the extra stress that it puts on kids, if you know there is stuff going on at home and the kids have other stuff to deal with I tend to be a bit easier on them than a kid that's just being a smart arse. It's good as a teacher to know.

DSTAs encouraged teachers to stay alert for any changes in student behaviour that may indicate a need for additional student support. In turn this reminded teachers of the possible pressures in students' lives and the importance of early referral. Casey, a secondary school

DSTA, described the specific behaviours she asked the teachers in her school to look out for in students:

I send teachers an email and say “please let me know if I can help, if there’s any changes in behaviour, if there’s changes in attendance, if there’s any assessment that’s not being done, if they’re late.” So I give them an idea of what they’re looking for not just “if there’s something wrong with this kid, send them to me.”

Building and maintaining professional relationships with teachers was vital to the strength of the DSTA role and required an ongoing effort by DSTAs. Staff turnover was high in some schools with a continual stream of new teachers in need of an introduction to the DSTA program. DSTAs in large schools reported that the large number of teachers and the high volume of internal emails were challenges to effective communication. As teachers’ availability for consultation was limited due to classroom commitments DSTAs made themselves available when teachers had available time. Kate, a primary school DSTA, described her commitment to building relationships with staff:

Getting out there on a personal level and letting everybody know ... and just penetrating. Let them know who you are and what you can do for them... it’s very much about relationship building in the first instance.

Catherine, a primary school DSTA, recognised the demands on teachers’ time and explained the importance of the DSTAs’ flexibility and willingness to meet with teachers when they were available:

I think it’s important the DSTA has a good understanding and good rapport with all the staff, admin and teachers, and everyone here at the school. Because if you don’t have that, that’s where your communication breaks down... You have to be easy going, go from teacher to teacher to get your information and be available early in the morning and late in the afternoon to see them because it’s for the students.

DSTAs shared their professional knowledge about the ADF lifestyle with teachers when opportunities arose. They also offered practical support to teachers through working in classrooms as well as working with students outside the classroom. Ongoing supportive relationships that developed between DSTAs and teachers generated additional school based support that assisted individual students to overcome obstacles to their learning. Pam, a Year 7 teacher, explained the benefits of working closely with both the DSTA and the student’s mother during the student’s father’s deployment:

The deployment did have an effect on him. He missed his dad when he was overseas... I think sometimes he felt a little bit lost so having the DSTA that he knew for a couple of years there, getting to know me and that I would support him too, it actually made a difference... We found that having the DSTA and I working together and working with mum made a big difference and he really, really settled down.

Nonetheless some teachers viewed individual student's behaviour as isolated from the student's family situation and failed to grasp an understanding of the cumulative underlying pressures experienced by some students throughout a parental deployment cycle. Kathleen, a primary school teacher with a partner in the ADF, expressed the frustration she felt towards those colleagues who she did not think appreciated the unique challenges facing students with a parent who was deployed:

A lot of teachers don't understand how difficult it is for these children. And I think it's one of these things, unless you are defence yourself, I don't think you can quite grasp. Having been through that experience myself, I don't think you can quite grasp what this child is going through, especially when your parent's in a war zone and you've gone from being a two parent family to being a one parent family. It's almost like going through a family split and on top of that you know that your dad is somewhere dangerous... Many teachers use it like "that's not an excuse." I don't think they quite understand the impact it can have on children.

Teacher professional development poses an ongoing challenge for schools. Teachers perform a complex role and carry high community expectations. Kathleen's comments demonstrate how a lack of understanding about the pressures on children's lives has added to the pressures felt by some teachers. In order for students to receive the level of understanding they need during a parental deployment more understanding is required about teachers' professional development and support needs.

4.2.4 Conclusion. The participants in this study felt that the DSTAs provided an essential service to students, parents and teachers. The presence of a DSTA on the school staff highlighted the additional needs of students during a parental deployment thus reducing cultural barriers between ADF families and schools. Furthermore students had access to a key adult in the school who understood the pressures on their lives and with whom they had regular contact. In turn teachers had ready access to a resource person who assisted them to both contextualise changes in students' behaviour and provide practical support within the

classroom. Parents were reassured that their children's needs were represented in the school and they had access to a known adult with whom to air their concerns. Moreover the student focus and informality of the relationship developed between DSTAs and parents appeared to suffer less from the stigma often associated with more formal helping relationships as reported in a recent Australian study by Siebler and Goddard (2014) and provided opportunities for DSTAs to offer incidental support to parents.

DSTA employment in Australian schools has provided a continuity of targeted support for students throughout a parental deployment cycle. DSTAs' focus on student wellbeing and the facilitation of activities has influenced students' social functioning at school and educational engagement with the classroom. Both teachers and students, based on parental testimony, have benefitted from the practical support and professional knowledge shared by DSTAs with teachers. Access to the DSTA as a classroom resource has provided an additional layer of support for teachers and given teachers additional capacity for supporting students during periods of difficulty. The benefits of school based support were also felt within the family, creating a sense of reassurance for parents. Furthermore the presence of a DSTA on the school staff facilitated greater communication between the school and family resulting in a higher level of teachers' and school administrators' understanding of students' circumstances. The next section investigates specific student needs during a parental deployment.

4.3 Constructing Cultural Knowledge

DSTAs constructed cultural knowledge as they recognised cultural influences on students' behavioural changes during a parental deployment. The data suggested that all groups of participants noticed that students were unsettled during a parental deployment cycle (De Pedro et al., 2014b; Mansfield et al., 2011). Students' behavioural responses to family disruption were particularly evident in the periods surrounding the parents' departure and often more so in the weeks after the parents' return from deployment as identified by Esposito-Smythers et al. (2011) and Logan (1987).

The departure of the parent after mid-deployment leave was often a more difficult adjustment for students than the original parental departure (Pincus et al., 2007). In addition the extended period of the parents' absence was characterised by periodic episodes of emotional disturbance for students (Mansfield et al., 2011). DSTAs remained alert to the particular stage of the deployment cycle for individual students and monitored students' wellbeing needs throughout the deployment cycle. Furthermore DSTAs encouraged students to participate in organised activities and in turn facilitated individual and small group interventions when

necessary. DSTAs maintained contact with teachers and parents through the deployment cycle.

DSTAs identified that parents and teachers, as well as students, had increased needs during a deployment. DSTAs communicated with parents through school newsletters reminding them to inform the school of any family changes. DSTAs relied on communication from the family to inform them of deployment dates and other pertinent family changes. Students also advised DSTAs of a parental deployment when they saw them at school as did teachers when they had been advised by the parents or students. Once the deployment dates were known DSTAs ensured that students were contacted regularly throughout the deployment cycle and were included in deployment specific support programs. DSTAs informed parents of any concerns. Factors influencing students', parents' and teachers' needs during a deployment are outlined in Table 4.2. The following six sections consider factors that contribute to increased students', parents' and teachers' needs during deployment: students' age, special needs, gender, family factors, the deployment cycle and students' vulnerability.

Table 4.2 Factors Emanating from the Data that Influenced Students' Deployment Related Needs

Factors contributing to increased needs	Participant:	Quotes
For students:		
Developmental age	Secondary DSTA	"The juniors probably don't have that language to solve it or sort it out... When they are older they can sort things out themselves."
Gender	Primary DSTA	"I find a lot of the boys really do miss their dad when he's not home."
Special needs	Mother	"If his anxiety got the better of him, if he could not cope, he could get up, walk out of the classroom ... and go straight to the DSTA."
Family changes	Mother	"When parents are away kids do miss out on certain things."
Missing special occasions	Secondary DSTA	"Because I knew when her father was going, I suggested that we record a video for his daughter that we could play for her graduation."
Stage of deployment cycle	Primary DSTA	"Children will be dramatically affected by the parent going away. That's a first time deployment."
Family reintegration	Secondary DSTA	"I can tell the kids what to expect from their parents and what to expect from their feelings."
For parents:		
Changes in children's behaviour	Mother	"We did notice behaviour changes in the boys, not good ones."
Additional workload	Mother	"Because I had four little ones the DSTAs said 'we'll get that information for you rather than you

		trying to.”
Level of social/emotional support	Mother	“If I have a problem I always come in and talk to the DSTAs and have a cup of coffee ... just for advice.”
For teachers:		
Changes in student behaviour	Secondary teacher	“You’ll have a lack of engagement, you’ll have acting out.”
Increased student needs	Primary teacher	“We have 28 of them and with so much going on I think they can be overlooked sometimes.”
Lack of cultural awareness	Primary teacher	“Other teachers, I don’t know if they really do understand what these kids go through.”

4.3.1 Recognising Age Related Responses. DSTAs identified students’ age and developmental stage at the time of the deployment to be the most differentiating factor in students’ coping responses during a parental deployment. This finding is consistent with studies by Card et al. (2011), Flake et al. (2009) and Mustillo et al. (2016) that identified differences in coping abilities at different developmental stages and reflects the teachings of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). DSTAs felt that many students in the lower primary school were almost oblivious to the changes in their family (Card et al., 2011). It is also possible that parents found it easier to protect their young children from media reports and explicit deployment related information whereas this became more difficult with increased student age. Moreover when a young child did become aware of the changes in their lives, either through the distress of their non-deployed parent or from other sources, they found it particularly difficult to cope with their strong emotions. In such circumstances intensive support was required at school. Tess, a primary DSTA, described the response of a preparatory year student at her school:

We had behavioural issues with this student at the beginning ... and then when Dad returned for leave there was a lot of anxiety about coming back to school because there was a sister left at home and he’s at school while Dad’s at home on his leave... He just wanted to be with Dad.

Susan, a DSTA, described the response to a parental deployment of a Year 2 student:

Her dad was in Afghanistan. It was about his third or fourth rotation in just as many years so she was not wanting to come to school, very upset every day. There were tears. She was acting out in class, always at sick bay, that kind of thing.

Students in the middle years of schooling (the upper primary school and lower secondary school) were observed by DSTAs and teachers to be the most emotionally labile of all student

age groups during a parental deployment (Card et al., 2011). Emotional expressions in the form of inappropriate behaviours or emotional distress were most evident in students in the middle years of schooling. An increased awareness of changes in their family coupled with their as yet underdeveloped coping skills often led students in the middle years to seek additional emotional support from key adults in their lives. Robyn, a Year 7 teacher, shared her observations of how students in the middle years become more attuned to relevant information:

All of a sudden when the news doesn't mean much to them, they take notice of that's where Daddy's going or Mummy's going or whatever. They become more aware and that's not with being told more information but tuning into it because it suddenly means something... They become more world aware and they pick up more and that impacts on them.

Many students in the middle years spoke freely to the DSTAs and their peers about what was happening in their lives and how they were feeling. These students, in comparison to those students who were either younger or older, were more likely to seek out regular contact with the DSTAs to air their concerns and seek emotional support (Mustillo et al., 2016). Peers became an increasingly important source of student support and friends often felt compelled to seek additional adult support, on behalf of the student in need, when they had exhausted their own resources. Casey, a secondary school DSTA, described her experience with junior secondary school students:

Kids' friends have come and said to me "Jo's not doing too good I think he's a bit upset today." If Jo won't come to me, then it's "let's go and tell Casey." ... The juniors probably don't have that language to solve it or sort it out so they will come and tell me.... When they are older they can sort things out themselves.

When a parental deployment coincided with students' entry to secondary school, teachers and DSTAs often noticed a decline in students' academic engagement and general standards of behaviour. Furthermore increased demands on the non-deployed parents' time encroached on parents' ability to monitor and assist their children with homework. Consequently older students were often expected to manage their own school commitments without parental support. The increased academic demands on students at secondary school, combined with the demands of their extra responsibilities at home, often left students requiring additional support to develop the skills they needed to remain engaged at school.

The students' demands for DSTA contact decreased in the upper secondary school years. Senior secondary students were more able than junior secondary students to resolve their concerns through personal reflection or with the support of their peers (Card et al., 2011). In addition those students with an already established relationship with the DSTAs continued to seek the DSTAs' support to talk through specific difficulties. The DSTAs were often contacted by senior students with worries related to family dynamics (Chandra et al., 2010). Anna, a secondary school DSTA, described a typical interaction with a senior student:

With the older ones they will come to you and it's quite specific. They will say, just an example, "my dad or my mum is going to Iraq in 2 weeks." You ask questions. "How do you feel about that?" "Oh yeah, I guess it's going to be alright, I'm not sure." Or you can expect "it's going to be great, I'm going to have my freedom, I won't have them breathing down my neck." Or you can get something along the lines of "I'm not sure what to expect and I'm really not looking forward to it." ... They'll all check in without fail, if they know you're there.

From the perspectives of DSTAs developmental age was the single largest contributing factor to an individual student's coping abilities during a parental deployment with middle school students placing the largest demands on school communities. Therefore support needs varied between junior primary, middle school and senior secondary school aged students. Developmental age combined with other student demand characteristics such as special needs and gender interacted with environmental factors such as family dynamics and the stage of the deployment cycle to produce unique responses by each student (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

4.3.2 Supporting Special Needs. Students with pre-existing special needs had unique responses to deployment (Hisle-Gorman et al., 2014) and often required increased understanding and additional support at school to manage their deployment related challenges. Depending on the nature of their special need students were often protected by well-established routines that were in place at home and at school prior to the deployment. DSTAs, in consultation with parents and teachers, paid particular attention to the responses of students with special needs during a parental deployment and provided additional support when required. Jacinta, the mother of a 15 year old Alan with Autism Spectrum Disorder, explained how strict routines had helped her family to cope when her husband Rob was deployed:

I've been very strict in how I keep their daily routines the same... We had a routine even with Rob he would only ring of a Sunday to speak to them so they knew Sundays was when they speak to Dad... Overall we didn't have too many changes in every day for them.

Natasha, the mother of 16 year old Jonathon who has Aspergers Syndrome, agreed that the maintenance of routines was extremely important to Jonathon's coping:

Routine is everything right down to I made up a routine timetable so they knew but not just for them for me also. I knew Monday we had netball training, Tuesday I played netball and Tuesday nights Jonathon will cook dinner so I could leave him at home and I would go to netball and when I come back dinner would be ready. So there were times when the structure, the timetable really helped more than anything. He felt a little bit more useful when he followed that.

DSTAs liaised closely with the parents and teachers of students with special needs and monitored the students' wellbeing closely during a parental deployment. Therese, a DSTA, describes her relationship with a Year 7 student with special needs:

He already needed support because he had difficulty at school... But I knew he was going to have difficulty and I'd spoken to mum. So this kid's dad has done two deployments to Afghanistan and they were almost back to back. So I've spent a lot of time with him.

Schools had established routines to support the needs of all students including those students with special needs. The stability and security of the school environment provided a source of safety for students when they were experiencing significant changes at home (Chandra et al., 2010, Mmari et al., 2009). However students with special needs often required an additional layer of support to remain engaged at school throughout a parental deployment.

4.3.3 Noticing Gendered Responses. Boys, in general, were observed by DSTAs and teachers to express their distress through inappropriate behaviours such as physical outbursts and "aggressive behaviour" whereas girls were more likely to express their distress through being "needy" and "attention seeking". Furthermore John, a secondary school teacher, described passive-aggressive behaviour that he had observed in junior secondary aged girls during parental deployment:

The girls when they become emotional can show a passive aggressive defiance. What they're really saying is "I'd like some attention" or "I'm unhappy" but it sort of manifests through this behaviour, silly things, taking out phones so they are asked by teachers to hand the phone over, these sorts of silliness.

Sensitive boys were observed to be particularly vulnerable during their fathers' deployment especially if they were the only son in the family. Suddenly devoid of male company in the home, only boys felt less supported during their fathers' absence as described by Catherine, a primary school DSTA:

I find a lot of the boys really do miss dad when he's not home. You might have a mum who's at home or a sister or two sisters and there are no other males in the house. You really notice that at school.

Boys of all ages, particularly the oldest son, often attempted to fulfil the role of "the man of the house" in their fathers' absence with varying consequences. Taking on extra domestic responsibilities was an expectation by the parents of older students (Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Mmari et al., 2009). However the "man of the house" position was often problematic for the mothers of younger boys. Some young boys were thought by their mothers to be attempting to dominate the family as described by Kylie, the mother of four year old James:

We did notice behaviour changes in the boys, not good ones. James was just over four and a half and Ian was about three. James in particular, he really would put it on. It got to the point one day when he had one of his melt downs, some-one in our street called the police and the police came to our house to see what was going on. Some-one thought that we were doing horrible things to him and I had warned him one day that some-one might do that. The police came around and had words to me and had words to him and he was shocked that it actually did happen. And we did see a change because it was a male police officer speaking to him. I think it was that lack of that male head of the household model that he realised "well I'm the oldest boy in the house now. I'm going to try and do things my way."

Lauren described how she was challenged by her twelve year old son who attempted to assert his dominance over the family during his father's absence:

I think my husband made the mistake of saying "you're the 'man of the house', you've got to do a lot of things." I think he took that literally, thinking that he was the boss and I said "no, hang on a minute." And I spoke to my husband and said "that's the

worst thing you could have said to him because this, this and this is happening.” So he had a bit of a chat to him and it sort of settled down after that.

Boys in the middle years had unique responses to the expectations associated with the “man of the house” title. For example some boys found the perception or reality of additional family responsibilities very stressful and suffered emotionally as a consequence. Judy, a primary school DSTA, described how she supported a twelve year old boy who felt overwhelmed by the expectations that he placed on himself during his father’s absence:

He’d come in here and he just needed to talk and we’d talk. He just needed to hear from an adult that “hey mate you’re still a child you don’t need to take that responsibility. You’re not the ‘man of the house’ but you’re doing a really good job.”

Many teenage boys, particularly those who were the oldest in the family took the role of “man of the house” very seriously taking on more responsibility at home during their fathers’ absence. These boys supported their mothers and organised their younger siblings. However these boys often felt unappreciated by their fathers once they returned home (Chandra et al., 2010; Huebner et al., 2007; Mmari et al., 2009).

4.3.4 Considering Family Factors. The absence of one parent brought changes to family dynamics as well as to family roles and responsibilities (Pincus et al., 2007). The students’ position in the family influenced their response to a deployment. With one less adult in the home the older children in the family were expected to help the parent at home with domestic tasks (Mmari et al., 2009). Additional domestic tasks were adopted willingly by some students however they caused resentment for others. Older girls tended to provide more practical assistance at home whereas older boys tended to organise the contributions of their younger siblings. Regardless of gender, the eldest child in the family helped care for their younger siblings and provided emotional support to the non- deployed parent. Casey, a secondary school DSTA, took the students’ position in their families into consideration:

The oldest in the family requires more support than their siblings because they tend to take on that little bit of extra responsibility and feel like they’ve got more expectations on them than the younger ones.

In addition the nature of students’ relationships with each individual parent influenced their emotional stability during a deployment. Often one child in the family missed their absent parent more than did their siblings. Students of all ages and both genders who were

particularly close to the parent who was deployed were emotionally vulnerable during a deployment. Miranda, the mother of three children, explained how her middle child was more disturbed by her husband Jock's deployment than were her other two children:

I've got three children... Out of three of the kids, two coped OK but my middle child, she did not cope at all with Jock being away. They're very close those two so yeah she had a meltdown really when he went away.

Even more influential on some children's ability to cope with parental absence was their age when their parents enlisted in the military. Two mothers spoke of their sons' experiences when their partners joined the military later in life. Katrina's husband Paul joined the army when her son Nigel was eight years old. At fifteen Nigel still struggled with his father's absence. Katrina described the effect of his father's enlistment on Nigel:

He was always a dad's boy, wherever dad was, he was. But the two girls, because they were so much younger, Peta was only six months old, they just got used to it. He's here, he's gone where Nigel had his father for about eight years before all of a sudden he joined the army and he couldn't handle it... I had trouble even getting him to school, he didn't want to go. But as soon as his father came home, I got my son back. He's fine when dad's home.

Dawn's older son Samson was 12 years old when his father joined the army. At the time of her husband's enlistment in the army Samson attended a school that did not employ a DSTA.

Dawn explained the effects of her husband's absence on Samson:

I had about four bouts of teenage depression with Samson. At one stage he was suicidal... And I remember getting a phone call from the counsellor at the school. "It's just all to do with attention." And I go "no, it's not to just do with attention, there's more to it than that." ... So people not having that experience really upset me and made me more determined to say "this is what's going on."

As well as the particular parent-child relationship, the gender of the parent who was deployed influenced family coping. When a mother was deployed rather than a father, family dynamics were influenced in a different way. This was noticeable from the lack of organization in students' preparation for school when a mother was away. Fathers were less likely than mothers to monitor the details of their children's lives and follow up to make sure that students arrived at school on time with all of the equipment they needed for the day. Casey, a secondary school DSTA, shared her observations:

There is a difference between having Mum and Dad away. With a dad away things go smoother across the time... When Mum's away, it's more of an up and down, up and down because all of the little things build up to a big thing... Dad will get the kids up and go to work and leave it at that. Whereas Mum would get the kids up, go to work and then ring back.

The deployment of a single parent brought a more significant change to family life than did the deployment of a parent from a two parent family. Equally distressing for those students in families with two ADF parents was the deployment of both parents at the same time. Family members such as grandparents often moved into the family home and fulfilled the role of caregiver for the children. The mutual adjustment required by children and their new caregivers took time and often required additional support for all parties. The new caregiver was usually unfamiliar with the ADF lifestyle and the services that were available to them from within the local community including the availability of the DSTA. When the DSTAs became aware of such a situation they endeavoured to connect with the caregiver to build rapport and offer information about available ADF support structures. Judy, a primary school DSTA, described the support she offered to a Year 5 student and her grandmother:

We had one child that had both parents deployed and that child was very upset. She didn't know whether Mum and Dad were going to come back and she was going to be alone with the grandmother... The teacher would give her permission to leave the class and come into me and we sit down and she'd email mum or dad and when she'd get a reply back it was all good... It was just knowing that she had somewhere to come at the Defence Room where someone understood what she was going through... I was in contact with the grandmother, basically through email. Every now and then she'd send an email which was good so we'd touch base and make sure we were on the same page.

Robyn, a Year 7 teacher, felt that a student in her class had missed one of her parents more than the other when they were deployed simultaneously:

One was more missed than the other one... If they're mummy's boy or girl or daddy's boy or girl, whatever the significant parent is to them, they have the strongest relationship with. If it's that one that goes then I don't think it matters what age.

While many children reacted to the absence of their parent others reacted to changes in behavioural boundaries and expectations that were evident in the home when one parent was

absent. Kathleen, a primary school teacher, shared her observations of on one student's behavior changes when the main disciplinary parent was deployed:

The father was very, very dominant. He was an aggressive man and very dominant and he ran the house and they had actually said when Dad leaves, Mum doesn't cope very well. So Dad came back and everything returned to normal. The child, when Dad was away, was playing up but I think it was also ... they were just doing it because I think they could.

Teacher Kathleen explained that some parents came to see her about their children's behavior after they returned from deployment. In some cases this prompted an initial improvement in the children's behavior.

If the parents were coming in for behaviour issues you did notice a change in behaviour initially after parents got back, for the better. But it was only an initial change and things slipped back.

Specific family changes were unique to each family and coping responses were unique to each individual family member. Individual students' demand characteristics such as age and gender as well as individual resources such self-care strategies learned from previous experiences interacted with individual students' family environments to create a unique experience during each parental deployment. Students exhibited unique force characteristics such as specific behaviours (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) in an attempt to meet their unique individual needs.

4.3.5 Understanding the Deployment Cycle. The first deployment was recognised by the mothers and DSTAs as the most difficult for students, regardless of age (Logan, 1987). Older students, experiencing a parental deployment for the first time, often found the adjustment more difficult than did younger children who were often more adaptable and likely to be less aware of the dangers involved. However, the skills and experience gained in each successive deployment provided students with an opportunity to build personal resources and increase their capacity to manage deployments well (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Catherine, a primary school DSTA, shared her observations:

We do have instances where children will be dramatically affected by the parent going away. That's a first time deployment... They don't know what's actually going to happen... Some of the kids who are older, in grades 6 and 7, their dad or mum might go on their very first deployment. That can be just as challenging for them as for a

preppy. Just because they are older doesn't mean they are going to cope any better. A lot of times they don't cope very well at all, the older ones, because they might be really reliant on that parent.

Consistent with research findings the few weeks prior to a deployment were disruptive and unsettling for the family (Logan, 1987; Pincus et al., 2007). The deploying parent was under increasing pressure and additional demands associated with preparing for the deployment. They distanced themselves from the family emotionally and were unable to keep regular hours resulting in a disruption to family routines. DSTAs engaged with students during the pre-deployment period and focussed their attention towards how students could stay connected with their parent who is deployed as well as how students would attend to their own self-care. Tess, a primary school DSTA, described her observations of students during the pre-deployment period:

There're usually changes in behaviour with children watching dad do the preparation and leave for pre-deployment training. Changes in routine that sort of thing starts to niggle six weeks or so before. That is predictable and quite normal. A lot of parents aren't prepared for bad behaviour quite yet.

The non-deployed parent often felt a sense of relief once the parent had departed (Pincus et al., 2007) and the family could establish a new sense of order in the home. It often took several weeks for the family members to settle into an easy routine. Transitioning from a two parent family to a one parent family required a large adjustment by all family members. The non-deployed parents took on an increased workload while meeting the additional demands of their children. Children often exhibited changes in their behaviour as they adjusted to the changes in family routines thus placing further pressures on the family system (Alfano et al., 2016; De Voe & Ross, 2012).

Following the initial adjustment to the parents' departure the full impact of their parents' absence took some time for many children to recognise. Often obvious changes in students' behaviour only started to occur after a few weeks, indicating a growing realisation of the situation. DSTAs attended to students' needs by employing strategies to help children endure the extended length of a deployment. Significant dates such as the end of term, Christmas and birthdays were used as milestones to mark off time as described by Lesley, a primary school DSTA:

I say “we’ll get this done at school and then we’ve got holidays and we come back and we do this and dad will be home.” Breaking it up much the same as you would a school week seems to work really well for them especially the younger children.

Yet special events, such as birthdays or important school or sporting events, could potentially elicit acute responses from students as noted previously by Garner et al. (2014). When parents missed important events such as birthdays, Christmas, entry to secondary school or school graduations, it was felt deeply by some students. Robyn, a Year 7 teacher, explained that students’ responses to their parents’ absence from important events would come out in students’ writing:

It’s the special occasions that really affect them. So if he’s missed a birthday or Christmas or say if Dad won’t be here for Christmas. Sometimes it just comes out in students’ writing when you’re getting a piece of writing and it might be like, you know a choice or tell me about a special event, and often you get things and you know your heart’s breaking for the child. You see it from their perspective.

At the same time the parents who were deployed also missed out on important family events. DSTAs engaged parents by taking photos of important events at school and sharing the photos with the parents who were deployed by email helping them to share their children’s achievements. Access to email has made it possible for DSTAs, as well as family members, to communicate more easily with parents who were deployed (Flynn, 2014). Therese, a primary school DSTA, described the positive responses she received when she sent photos to parents who were deployed:

If they haven’t come back and at the end of the year if their kid’s got an award, I’ll go and grab those photos and send them on. We sought of build that relationship then. They really appreciate it.

Jessica, a secondary school DSTA, described how she organised for a father’s pre-recorded message to be screened at his daughter Breanna’s Year 12 graduation:

Because I knew when he was going I suggested that we record a video for Breanna that we could play for her graduation. Only her mother was aware, she didn’t tell Breanna... It was the most exhilarating but saddest video ever because he spoke about how proud he was, the fact that he wasn’t there didn’t mean he wouldn’t be thinking about her. And we played it at grad and there was not a dry eye in the house ... It just felt like he was there.

Regular communication with the parent who is deployed has become increasingly available over the past fifteen years. Increased access to telephone services and the availability of Skype has assisted families to have regular communication with the absent parent helping children to cope better with parents' absences. Gina and her four children spoke to her husband on Skype every second day. She describes how it helped her husband to participate in family life during his absence:

We Skype all the time...we pass the ipad around. If anything changes in the house, anything new that I buy or if anything changes I'll have the Skype and I'll take it with me and I'll show him. So he gets to see what's going on as well.

Advancements in technology have kept the parents who are deployed in closer contact with their families and helped some families to communicate more easily about student behaviour changes. Kylie, the mother of four young children, was able to share her frustrations about her son's challenging behaviour with her husband Bill:

Sometimes I would be on Skype with Bill and say "I don't know what to do with him." And he'd say "there's nothing I can do from here. You'll have to work something out that works for you while I'm gone." ... He knew how difficult it was.

The increased frequency of family interactions had unexpected effects for some families. Some children found it difficult to find something to say to their parent on the phone or Skype. DSTAs encouraged students to discuss the activities they had completed at school as a means of initiating and sustaining conversation as described by Lesley, a primary school DSTA:

We do a treasure box ... Some kids use them for all different things... We usually encourage them to keep something in it especially for the younger ones when dad might call or Skype. They might get the box and they have something to actually talk about. Instead of going "nothing, nothing" they've got something tangible they can touch and look and speak about on the phone or over Skype.

Communication difficulties also arose when children misread their parents' manner during calls and blamed themselves for the poor communication. Differences in time zones and demanding workloads could result in poor presentations from the parents who were deployed leaving the children feeling confused. Judy, a primary school DSTA, described how she helped a Year 5 student to step back from his feelings and consider his fathers' situation:

He was upset because when his father put a Skype call through; the father wasn't very happy, he wasn't himself. And the boy thought that he had done something wrong at home, the father wasn't happy with him. And that was when I was talking to him and saying, "listen mate you're doing a great job, your father's very tired, he's putting in long hours over there." And when I just gave him a few other alternative suggestions that seemed to help him and he understood it a little bit more. His father rang up I think and he was so excited he came back about a week later and he said "Dad rang. He'd been really tired, he'd been on duty 24 hours straight" or something and he felt so over the moon about it.

Communication became easier for many children as the end of a deployment drew near and they could plan for the parents' return. DSTAs shared the students' excitement and helped them to organise "welcome home" banners to display at home or at the airport. However some students were very matter of fact about their parents' return while others feared consequences for their inappropriate behaviour during the deployment or for the anticipated family changes that would occur when the parent returned. DSTAs discussed these issues with the students, acknowledging their concerns while also encouraging them to discuss their concerns with their parents. DSTAs reminded students of the likelihood of parents' fatigue and their likely need to rest in order to recover from a demanding deployment.

The reintegration of the deployed ADF member back into the family after a deployment often posed more challenges for the family than the initial departure of the parent as reported by Esposito-Smythers et al. (2011), Logan (1987) and Pincus et al. (2007). The returned ADF members had the task of fitting back into their families that had functioned well without them during the deployment. Families had developed new routines and children had matured over a period of many months. Kylie described her husband Bill's response to the changes she had implemented to help her and her four young children to cope with his absence:

It was friction and it's reestablishing a whole new routine and getting back into the routine of "there's a pecking order in the house and these are the rules." Because while he's away I adapted and changed the rules to survive the six months to get through it and be as happy as we could at home. It was hard for the kids because they'd say "well Mum let us do it like this for the last six months." And Dad's like "no that's not how it happens." And he said "why did you do it like this?" And I said "because that made life easier." So it was re-establishing the old rules or the old routines.

The age of the children often predicted the ease with which the parents who were deployed were reintegrated back into the family. Teenagers found the reintegration of the parent who was deployed more difficult than their younger siblings (Chandra et al., 2010; Heubner et al., 2007; Mmari et al., 2009). Additional family responsibilities and freedoms assumed by teenagers during the deployment were often not known about or understood by the returned parent leaving the teenagers feeling displaced, unappreciated and often restricted (Mmari et al., 2009). Family reintegration was particularly difficult for teenage boys who had taken on extra family responsibilities during the deployment often assuming responsibilities as the male head of the household. Casey, a secondary school DSTA, was aware of the potential challenges facing adolescents during the reintegration stage of a deployment and she prepared her students ahead of time by helping them to think about managing their own emotionally charged responses:

I pre-warn kids and talk about it before it happens so they are aware... I can tell the kids what to expect from their parents and what to expect from their feelings... The senior boys who have taken on the “man of the house” role ... I had one boy who was really distressed and not realised what his distress was until we talked about it for a while ... He said “oh my god that’s exactly how I feel.”

Students gained valuable skills and self-understanding with each successive deployment. However the new knowledge and experience came at a cost and some children appeared to suffer from deployment fatigue as parents participated in multiple deployments. Therese, a primary school DSTA, observed the responses of students who struggled with multiple deployments:

I find there are a few who are very used to it and do adapt and they fall into the routine but there are those that just don’t and they’ve had so many subsequent deployments that they’re just not ready to keep doing them one after another.

This study discovered that students’ coping abilities often seemed to vary across different deployments as noted by McGuire et al. (2012). This may be explained by students experiencing each deployment at a different developmental age and with different levels of experience (Card et al., 2011; Mustillo et al., 2016). Joan, the mother of a primary school aged son and a secondary school aged daughter, explained that her daughter Natasha had coped well with her husband Rod’s deployments when she was young but reacted badly once she went to secondary school:

There were issues with Natasha when she reached like the teenage years when Rod was away... He's been deployed an awful lot and he never saw her graduate Year 7, enter Year 8. And I wish he would have been there for that because when she entered high school a lot of trouble started with them. They had an argument and it came out. She said, "you're never there, why should I listen to you now." It escalated from there.

Joan was critical of the DSTA at her daughter's secondary school who she felt had not done enough to engage with Natasha at school. Astor et al. (2013) demonstrated that school principals with previous military experience catered more effectively for the unique needs of students from military families. Joan felt the DSTA's lack of first-hand experience with the ADF family lifestyle hindered the DSTA's ability to do her job well:

I think they need to be defence to realise what these kids go through to go and hunt them down. You need to have a defence background to relate to what's going on because it's a different way of life. If you haven't lived it you don't know what it's like.

Students experienced a range of emotional responses associated with each stage of the deployment cycle (Logan, 1987; Pincus et al., 2007). DSTAs used their knowledge and experience to assist students to manage their emotions and place them in perspective according to the particular stage of deployment. Helping students to recognise the origins of their emotions assisted students to separate them from their behaviour, access their personal resources and build new strategies to manage their emotions and gain maturity and understanding from their experiences.

4.3.6 Recognising Students' Vulnerability. DSTAs were focussed on the needs of students during parental deployment and were often aware of particular family concerns for individual students at specific times. Teachers on the other hand had a much broader range of responsibilities than DSTAs and may not have always had the same level of awareness as DSTAs of individual students' deployment related concerns. DSTAs were therefore able to alert teachers when teachers needed to be aware of particular students' concerns. Jan, a Year 6 teacher, expressed her appreciation of the information provided by the DSTA:

The DSTA gives you a heads up if there's something going on with the kids. If she'd noticed she'd been a bit emotional or something like that she'd tell me about those things as well... We have 28 of them and with so much going on I think they can be overlooked sometimes and if you have this particular person looking after them and

making sure that everything's good and giving me the heads up that's good for teachers to know.

As noted earlier some teachers found it difficult to understand the potential impact of parental deployment on students' learning. DSTAs attempted to influence the views of these teachers by helping them to recognise the benefits of emotional support to student learning. Lesley, a primary school DSTA, explained how she encouraged teachers to recognise the relationship between student wellbeing and student learning:

If they're sitting in class and all they're thinking about is "I didn't get to talk to Dad today" or "Dad missed this" it's all they're thinking about. They're not actually getting their work done or learning anything anyway and I think sometimes the teachers don't understand that correlation between if their head space is somewhere else sometimes just five minutes with us out of class makes all the difference to their learning outcomes. The more that they see that and I tend to focus a lot of that with the teachers who are a bit negative because the more you focus on their learning to the teachers it makes them feel a lot better about letting them go.

A major feature of DSTA work was incidental teacher professional development. Increased deployment related knowledge allowed teachers to interact with students with raised awareness and understanding of the pressures influencing their behaviour. The presence of the DSTA in the school also provided another avenue of support for students when needed. Teachers accessed the DSTAs both to increase their own professional understanding and to access additional support for their students. In addition increased teacher knowledge gained from working with the DSTAs has left teacher participants asking for further knowledge. Sally, a secondary school teacher with a partner in the ADF, expressed a desire for further professional development:

Maybe the DSTA doing PD at staff meetings so even staff can understand how difficult it can be for students. A quick presentation ... to say "these kids are there and they experience some anxiety around family separation" ... Grab 20-30 minutes at the start of the year. That's when we have the time available and during those times when there's quite a few going.

Deployment related changes in individual students' behaviour were noticed by the mothers, teacher participants and DSTAs and were consistent with findings from several other studies (Arnold et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2015; Garner et al., 2014). Through interacting with

students on a regular basis since their enrolment at the school DSTAs became familiar with students' typical behaviour patterns and noticed behaviour changes that were of concern. From their accumulated experience DSTAs also recognised generic responses to parental deployments that were associated with the students' age, special needs and gender. Family factors such as the gender of the parent who is deployed and family dynamics were also suggested by DSTAs to contribute to the overall students' responses to a parental deployment. Each stage of the deployment cycle presented different challenges and DSTAs helped students to master the challenges that they met throughout the deployment cycle. The early attention to students' difficulties reduced the potential for a decline in student wellbeing (Chartrand et al., 2008).

4.3.7 Conclusion. Despite difficulties experienced throughout a deployment, student achievements and skills gained during the deployment remained. A successful deployment was an achievement for all members of an ADF family that often went unnoticed by those around them. Parents managed higher than normal workloads and increased levels of responsibility and children contributed to the family effort by adjusting to the many associated transitions. Transitions were experienced uniquely by each student within the context of their family and managed by the family with the support of social networks, the school community and broader community. While teachers experienced changes in student behaviour in the "here and now", DSTAs reminded them of the underlying pressures on families during a deployment. Over time the experience gained from working collaboratively with the DSTAs during parental deployments has assisted teachers to further recognise students' additional emotional and social needs and respond to them promptly. With the acknowledgement of students' circumstances teachers were able to contribute positively to students' adjustment to the deployment experience. The next section discusses how DSTAs integrate their cultural knowledge into their schools' programs and assist students to adapt to the changes associated with a parental deployment cycle.

4.4 Integrating Knowledge and Practice

DSTAs integrated their cultural knowledge into all aspects of their practice. The data suggested that all groups of participants felt that DSTAs responded effectively to students' additional needs during a parental deployment (De Pedro et al., 2015). Students accessed DSTAs for individual support and as a key adult who facilitated opportunities for students to engage in supportive peer processes. The teacher participants felt that their own professional knowledge of students' needs during a parental deployment had been enhanced through their

professional relationship with DSTAs. Teacher participants also felt that the availability of the DSTAs enabled them to implement enhanced strategies to address students' individual and cultural needs within the classroom. The mothers felt that the DSTAs understood the additional pressures of the ADF lifestyle, knew their children well and addressed their children's needs in the school environment. DSTAs described a range of supportive processes that they employed to support students throughout a parental deployment.

DSTAs worked within the established structures and processes of the school and added value to many processes. They planned and organised their workload to address anticipated student needs at different stages of the deployment cycle employing both proactive and responsive strategies. By facilitating peer support opportunities and raising whole school awareness of the ADF lifestyle DSTAs' work generated school based social and emotional support processes that assisted students to positively cope throughout a parental deployment. Recognising the benefits of both parent-school communication and teacher cultural awareness to students' academic progress DSTAs communicated regularly with parents and teachers and responded to their requests for information and support. Furthermore DSTAs provided students with emotional support and assisted them to make sense of their personal situation. Additional student support processes facilitated by DSTAs are outlined in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Student Support Processes

Processes	Participant	Quotes
Pre-deployment preparation	DSTA	"We have our deployment activity booklet. We tailor it to each of the children."
Universal support programs	Mother	"They had a reading program, 'Rex the Dog'. My daughter was in the photo. We laminated it so I could send it to my husband".
Focus on family connections	Mother	"My daughter did a tile I think. It had 'I love you' or something on it and that was made for her father, for her to send to him."
Small group programs	Mother	"It's sort of an opportunity to chat and talk and connect with other kids with the same thing so they knew that someone else in their class or year or school was having the same experience as they were."
Regular contact	Mother	"The DSTA checked on him quite regularly. She kept reiterating to him that the room was there for his support if he needed it."
Building endurance	Primary DSTA	"I say 'we'll get this done at school and then we've got holidays and we come back and we do this and dad will be home', breaking it up much the same as you would a school week."
Academic support	Secondary DSTA	"It might be a grade 12 student who's stressed about exams and they've got a part-time job and they're not

		getting enough study in. I'll sit and I'll do a study plan with them."
Coaching / mentoring	Secondary teacher	"It's great for the kids to have that person that's got their back and will work through things with them and at the same time will pull them into line."
Listening to concerns	Primary DSTA	"A lot of them were very frightened about dad being shot or killed."
Reframing	Primary DSTA	"He just needed to hear from an adult that 'hey mate you're still a child you don't need to take that responsibility. You're not the man of the house but you're doing a really good job.'"
Supporting students' initiatives	Secondary DSTA	"The kids produced a DVD. If you let them give back something, it gives a meaning and purpose."
Intensive intervention	Primary DSTA	"I did a whole class activity where I went in with the student and we sat up the front and spoke to the class and showed them where Afghanistan was and talked about how people in the army have to go away."
Celebrating growth	Secondary DSTA	"I really emphasise the pride they should have in what their family is doing... celebrate success of just how far these kids have come... the contribution ... and the coping."
Recognising other perspectives	Primary DSTA	"And that was when I was talking to him and saying, 'listen mate you're doing a great job, your father's very tired, he's putting in long hours over there.'"
Advocacy	Secondary teacher	"The DSTA goes to the principal or deputy and has those conversations. They are more lenient with assessments and give them more time to do it."

4.4.1 Facilitating Peer Connections. Consistent with research findings DSTAs recognised the value of peer support for students with a parent who is deployed (De Pedro et al., 2015). Regular lunchtime activities offered students opportunities to meet and form friendships with other students from ADF families. Activities were often geared towards communicating with the parent who are deployed in the form of making gifts or writing letters. Students' engagement with the activities generated conversations whereby students shared their experiences with peers in a similar situation to themselves. Through informal conversations students often gained a greater understanding of their own experiences. Jan, a Year 6 teacher, appreciated the connection with other students that was available to her students at lunch times:

I think they'll get that connection where they'll link in because ... it's so constant and it's so last minute sometimes it's really hard on some of these kids. So I think definitely having some sort of constant in their lives where they can go to the Defence

Room and do these crafts ... I think one of the biggest things is to make sure they're managing socially.

Peer support both inside and beyond the classroom was considered to be vital to student wellbeing (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). When additional student support was needed in the classroom the DSTA or teacher alerted the students' classmates to their family situation. Classroom discussions about parental deployments helped to raise peer awareness and generate supportive peer processes. Raising deployment as a topic for class conversation opened the possibility of further interactions between the students and their peers. Peer interest helped students to make sense of their experiences as they responded to questions and offered pieces of interesting information. Classroom activities often involved the class communicating with the parent who was deployed. Parents who were deployed, in turn, responded to the classes' communications thus generating further engagement between the student and their peers. Susan, a primary school DSTA, described the classroom activity she conducted with a Year 2 class to assist Glenda, a student in the class, to communicate her situation to the class thus generating peer support processes:

I did a whole class activity where I went in with the student and we sat up the front and spoke to the class and showed them where Afghanistan was and talked about how people in the army have to go away and we then said that it might be nice to make some craft activities to send over to her dad so that he has something from the class. We actually did little hand prints so the kids got to trace their hands, draw a picture on their hands and write a message like "come home soon" or "this student is my best friend." And we also put in an Australian flag and I glued them all on posters and I sent them over to him and he actually sent back pictures of them all up in his office... It also gave Glenda a big confidence boost and she would never have gone in front of the class to talk or read out loud or anything like that. For her to sit in front of the class and talk about Afghanistan and show the kids the map and now she's just really come into herself and that's great. I think it helped her a lot and it was like "Glenda is pretty cool, her dad's in Afghanistan." So it really helped her confidence in the end.

Glenda's mother Joanne appreciated the cooperation established between Glenda's teacher and the DSTA and the emotional support offered to Glenda:

I think they're allowing the DSTA to come in and do a range of activities in and out of the classroom to support the students and make those contacts with parents... it's emotional support ... it's that connecting.

Linda, a primary school DSTA, described how she engaged class groups in writing letters to deployed ADF personnel:

I actually had a few of the classes get together and we wrote letters. Each child wrote a sentence. We wrote letters overseas and the guys wrote back so the classes could see personally what was going on over there but could see ways of doing things were different over there... They have then given them out to all the members over there and they've written back to the kids and that child actually thought they were pretty special.

DSTAs and mothers affirmed that social support from other students was particularly valuable and helped students to normalise their experiences and have their feelings validated (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Small groups of students from ADF families were convened at times to specifically support the needs of an individual student who was experiencing particular difficulties. Sharing experiences with peers often helped distressed students to express their feelings and gain greater emotional regulation by learning ways to ease their worries.

By sharing similar challenges with their peers students were often able to assist each other to find a way forward. Peer support processes that arose in convened support groups proved to be therapeutic for the participating students. Jacinta, the mother of 11 year old Gemma, described how a small group of similar aged girls assisted Gemma to understand more about her own feelings. Gemma writing "I want to die" on her school desk had alerted Jacinta to Gemma's distress during her husband Rob's deployment. Jacinta described the benefits for Gemma of joining a group program with other girls who also had a parent who was deployed:

It's an opportunity to chat and talk and connect with other kids with the same thing so they knew that someone else in their class or year or school was having the same experience they were... And an opportunity for them ... to talk about what was going on... It gave her a reason to keep talking where she used to block. She internalises everything and doesn't know how to start that conversation. Where talking about what she is doing and how such and such is going and "their dad's away and they're missing their dad and I miss my dad" ... or "such and such cried themselves to sleep last night and yeah, I cried as well."... It gave her a topic to start with as well, in

addition to having an activity and connecting with other kids going through deployment. It also gave her that starter with me. It was her way of saying “this is what happened, this is what I did.”... She’s not a child who talks about her feelings easily.

Peers from ADF families proved to be a valuable source of emotional and social support for students with a parent who is deployed. DSTAs facilitated peer support activities through organising open lunchtime activities, targeted small group programs and classroom activities. Classroom activities worked particularly well for junior primary school students whereas targeted small group and lunchtime activities were particularly valuable for students in the middle years. Senior secondary students were typically more comfortable with individual support from the DSTA and their self-selected friendship group.

4.4.2 Mentoring Students. DSTAs reported that they developed supportive relationships with all students and were committed to contacting students regularly throughout the deployment cycle. For primary school students this included an initial pre-deployment planning meeting, regular classroom visits and an invitation to join group activities. DSTAs negotiated students’ classroom release with teachers for specific activities such as deployment preparation or small group activities. DSTAs maintained flexibility in their program and fitted in with teachers’ classroom schedules.

Preparing for a deployment ahead of time allowed students to consider how they would communicate and stay connected with their parents who are deployed. Preparation also helped students to identify their own interests, strengths and needs in order to plan for self-care. By preparing an individual deployment pack students practiced self-reliance skills that were transferable to other life circumstances. Lesley, a primary school DSTA, described the enthusiasm with which most students approached this activity:

We have our deployment activity booklet. We tailor it to each of the children for example if there is a child that particularly likes to write we include in the pack a lot of things for them to write like a little letter thing and draw their attention to that especially. If it’s a family that might not have regular contact with dad or he may only ring every couple of weeks or so we’ll focus a lot on them keeping a journal or writing letters so they can get things down on paper or send emails. There are some kids that will Skype dad every day so there’s not a real need to be helping with that communication. Often we’ll just make something fun that we can physically send to

him. So we'll do more on taking photographs so he can visually see what they are doing. It depends but they all get their deployment pack quite tailored. The younger ones will have a bit more colouring in or the letters might be where they just have to slot in information rather than write a lot... Mostly kids just come up with these amazing ideas themselves. You really don't need to prompt most of them.

Self-care strategies were often difficult for students with special needs to conceptualise. Students with special needs often experienced high levels of anxiety associated with a deployment (Hisle-Gorman et al., 2014) even though established routines provided a stable backdrop to their lives. DSTAs paid particular attention to the additional support needs of students with special needs during a deployment and Natasha, the mother of 16 year old son Jonathon with Aspergers Syndrome appreciated the additional DSTA monitoring of Jonathon's wellbeing during her husband's deployment:

The DSTA checked on him quite regularly. She kept reiterating to him that the room was there for his support if he needed it. He started using it a little bit more again, so going to do his study there instead of just on his own at the library... And then once my husband got home he hasn't really accessed it again.

Particular learning needs also influenced students' participation in support programs. Not all students were interested in joining the regular lunchtime activities offered by the DSTAs and required different approaches to cater to their learning preferences. These students were often boys who engaged more readily with kinaesthetic and visually based activities than with language based activities. Catering to the students' preferred learning styles supported the students to engage more fully with the activity and their peers while assisting them to make sense of their experiences. Laura, the mother of 12 year old Lachlan, described the diorama of the Afghanistan landscape that her 12 year old son Lachlan built:

He did build a beautiful Afghanistan diorama and they videoed that on a DVD and we sent that over to Afghanistan. Those sorts of things, no matter what they are, really just kept Lachlan in the picture... You've got to be very careful at that age how they're supported. I think it's more important than people realise.

Therese, the DSTA explained:

I keep those activities for the boys, the real hands on boys. They don't want to write letters, fill out touchy feely forms or talk about their feelings. They do love to get in and do the hands on stuff. And while they are doing it they'll sometimes make a video

of them doing it. We'll do video messages and they're happy to send those away and photos obviously. And when we get to complete it we go and take it and show the principal and all those sorts of things and it goes home.

Susan, a DSTA, described how an individualised program she designed for year 2 student Glenda helped Glenda to recognise the similarities between Australia and Afghanistan and to feel less fearful about her father's deployment:

Every week I would pull her out of class for 10, 15, sometimes half an hour after arranging with the teacher when was a good quiet time. So we'd start off drawing a picture of her family and we talked about Mummy and Daddy and we had a map of the world and drew on the map where Afghanistan was and where Australia is, just talked about why Daddy is over there. And then the next week we'd look at Afghanistan, we'd look on the internet, what housing looked like, what schools looked like, what clothing they wore just to see the differences between here and over there. Just to get the understanding that it's not a scary place that there're still people that go to schools. Kids still did kid things, play.

Other students accessed the DSTAs' support for peer relationship problems that they found difficult to manage on their own. For example, insensitive comments about the ADF led to misunderstandings between peers. These mostly involved other students who did not understand the ADF's mission. DSTAs used these opportunities to educate misinformed students by helping them to correct mistaken beliefs and reassess their attitudes. Judy, a primary school DSTA, described her experience of helping a misinformed student to broaden his knowledge and perspective:

A little boy was upset because some-one told him that his father went overseas to kill people. So we ... bought in the little boy... and showed him books and said "listen, this is peacekeeping. This is what's happening. No-one's going over to kill people" and gave this boy another perspective of what was actually happening and he saw a whole different light... And that sort of settled down from there... and he realised and he apologised and left it at that. And then they became friends after that.

As students entered secondary school they faced increased academic demands. Secondary school students who were struggling to develop the necessary organisational and academic skills were reported by teacher participants and DSTAs to be particularly vulnerable during a parental deployment. The increased academic demands of the secondary school curriculum,

coinciding with reduced parent capacity to assist them with homework and assignments, presented difficulties for a number of students. Students' failure to submit assignments presented particular concerns for teachers. This was most obvious in boys in the middle secondary years. Without additional support these students were at risk of giving up on their academic work and resorting to misbehaviour to mask their confusion. DSTAs assisted secondary school students to develop time-management skills that were necessary to meet the academic demands of their subjects and reduce the stress associated with poor organisation. Anna, a secondary school DSTA, assisted a group of Year 10 boys to develop their organizational skills during their parents' deployments. She explained her concerns for one of the boys in particular fearing for the consequences had this additional support not been available:

I dare say they... definitely wouldn't have managed, missed deadlines, probably found themselves under pressure, disengaged. It might have been an extreme thing for me to imagine that would have happened but knowing this student's personality he would just have given up. It would have been easier. And sometimes easier is just easier; it's more comfortable at that age.

The failure by students to develop the time-management skills necessary for academic success in secondary school often led to the development of behavior problems. The resultant conflict between students and their teachers in turn contributed to a decline in the students' willingness to accept adult influence at school or at home. Jane, a secondary school teacher, commented on her experience of negotiating with older students:

It definitely changes as they get older. It does become a lot more difficult because a lot of times parents are at the stage where the students aren't listening to them either.

The academic demands of senior secondary school created additional emotional demands for students that were often harder for them to manage during the absence of their parent. This was particularly pertinent to Year 12 students with a parent who is deployed. Year 12 was often stressful for students under normal circumstances but a parental deployment added to the pressures on students. Sharon, a secondary school teacher, shared her observations of the DSTA's support to a Year 12 student:

Lots of kids just get upset and break down especially term 3, Year 12. If their parent's not there to support them it adds another stress... We had a young girl two years ago and the DSTA stepped her through especially term 3, term 4. The girls if they've got

that support person, they're generally OK. Boys might tend to balls it up a bit more and not use those help seeking behaviours. But the DSTA knows which kids are in that situation and she watches them and watches for behaviours.

Individual coaching helped students to manage the emotional demands of deployment. DSTAs listened to students' concerns helping them to reframe unhelpful thinking and develop coping strategies such as engaging with other students with a parent who is deployed and engaging in available school activities. DSTAs were familiar with the range of support programs that operated in their schools and were proactive in making student referrals to resilience building programs that would address their needs when appropriate.

4.4.3 Supporting High Needs. For a small number of students with high needs, often a more intensive classroom intervention was required. Primary school DSTAs used teddy bears dressed in military uniform to assist students who were struggling with emotional regulation to engage with their peers. The bear travelled with the parent who was deployed who communicated with the class from the deployment zone. Photos and letters sent back to the class generated interest from the other students. A focus on the bear provided the student with a means of communicating positively with their teachers and peers by shifting the focus of attention from the students' distress and poor behaviour to the bear's activities. Prior to the introduction of the bear to Joshua's preparatory classroom he was unpopular with his peers due to his unruly behaviour. Tess, a primary school DSTA, described the difficulties experienced by Joshua prior to the introduction of the bear to the classroom:

He was loud and had lots of behaviours... It can be hard work for kids, they're down, "mum's picking on me and the teacher's got me in the corner" and all those sorts of things. It takes them a while to come back out of the drudgery. "I'm not happy and my behaviour comes out - mum's not happy and the teacher's got to deal with some of my behaviour."

The deployment of the school bear with Joshua's father greatly assisted him to better regulate his emotions and engage more positively with his peers. He saw the bear on Skype when he spoke to his father and then reported on the bear's activities to his class. The interest of his peers, promoted by the enthusiasm of his teacher and Tess, helped Joshua to benefit from peer support:

We had pictures of the bear doing exercises and visiting parts where the dad worked... The teachers make a lesson out of everything. So it becomes a geography lesson and

about different cultures and about how people look, looking at what people wear and the environment and “what do you think it looks like over there? Is it hot at the moment? How can you tell? Is it cold? Are there animals that are different to ours?” It just becomes a whole amazing lesson.

Joshua’s teacher used photos of the bear to generate positive discussions between Joshua and his peers. Attention to the bear’s activities shifted classroom focus away from Joshua’s behaviour onto the bear’s activities by offering Joshua a positive topic of conversation for engaging with his peers.

The deployment of the school bear in another school assisted Year 7 student Lachlan to interact more positively with his classroom peers. Lachlan had special needs and his classroom behaviour was not acceptable to many of his peers. DSTA Therese described how the introduction of the bear to Lachlan’s classroom helped his peers to see him in a different light:

Lachlan had some challenging behaviours because he had dyspraxia and he sometimes had trouble focussing and he’d be a little bit bouncy at times. But I think the other students warmed to him, it just showed a side they hadn’t seen before. Because they always knew Lachlan as the kid running around the classroom they just saw a different side of him they hadn’t seen before and more as a person I think.

Lachlan’s mother Laura explained her role in ensuring that Lachlan had a letter from the bear and photos to share with his class each month. Her husband Peter sent her a letter and photos each month:

Peter sends a story to me and I tidy it up and make sure it’s OK for kids and there’s no defence stuff that shouldn’t be in there and then it goes onto the school. So it’s a bit of a process... He would take photos around the bases they were at and at the bomb craters they’d put the bear in and show the kids “this is a bomb that blew up. And it helped the children of that village because there’s no bombs on the road.” I think it was a very real perspective.

Lachlan shared the bear’s letter during class news as described by Therese, the DSTA:

It was about what the bear was actually doing. So the bear was actually doing the manoeuvres, out looking for mines. The bear would write back and tell all the kids to be good and we’d share the letter with the class and we put up a display so that all the other kids could see where this bear had been.

Therese recognised the social benefits that flowed on to Lachlan directly from the efforts of both of his parents:

It made him so proud. He was just so proud and he felt like he had some importance. It gave him some importance because his life was really tricky... Having these things at school just made it like that was for him. He had his own voice and something good to talk about with the other kids... The other kids loved it, they loved getting the letters from his dad and they loved seeing the photos. They especially loved the photos. Because you say to kids "they're in Afghanistan" and they don't know. "What's Afghanistan? Like what are they even doing?" But seeing the photos and seeing the uniform and what the bear was doing using all the equipment it made it more real for them. They could say, "OK now we get what your dad does."

The photos from Afghanistan also assisted teachers in the school to gain some understanding of military deployment. However Lachlan's mother Laura regretted that teachers had very little understanding of the effects of deployments on military families as she described:

The schools really have very little understanding. They don't get the feedback from families. I found the teachers were looking at the photos and going "Oh that might be hard on the kids. That's interesting we didn't know they did that. We didn't know that kids that come here, their dads do that stuff." It's a bit of an eye opener.

Students with high needs were particularly vulnerable during a parental deployment. These students often displayed inappropriate behaviour and aggression (Hisle-Gorman et al., 2014) to express their needs. With an understanding of deployment related pressures on students DSTAs were able to interpret students' needs and provide teachers with a students' perspective of their circumstances and behaviour. In turn teachers and DSTAs worked together to address students' increased needs.

4.4.4 Helping Student to Make Sense of their Experiences. DSTAs encouraged students to recognise their own personal growth gained throughout the deployment cycle. By identifying growth areas for individual students DSTAs helped students to celebrate their achievements. Developing pride in their own achievements assisted students to reflect positively on the deployment experience and their increased personal resources (Mmari et al., 2009). Casey, a secondary school DSTA, described how she helped students to identify their achievements:

I really emphasise the pride they should have in what their family is doing... celebrate success of just how far these kids have come... the contribution ... and the coping. I tell them this is what I've seen from you for the last eight months. This is the growth I've seen... They don't think they've done anything great. They think all they've done is carry on with their lives... Sometimes the parents tell you how amazing they've been and you can feed that back to them. Others it may be that "you haven't cried, you've remained stable the whole time. You couldn't even talk about deployment eight months ago, now you can." Sometimes it's kids have picked up their attendance. The majority say "that's nothing, that's just what you have to do." You have to say "but a lot of people don't. I know it doesn't seem much but some kids don't even do that." You have to tell them the little things they do are good.

Some students felt the need to make a specific contribution to the deployment effort and often initiated their own projects. Through the generation of creative ideas they proposed projects of personal significance. The DSTAs helped students with the planning and coordination of the resources needed for them to meet their goals. The opportunity to contribute to activities that supported deployed ADF members was very engaging and rewarding for students. Casey, a secondary school DSTA, described the personal rewards felt by students when they contributed to ADF member support:

The kids produced a DVD. If you let them give back something it gives a meaning and purpose... They send gifts and letters but they still don't feel that they've done enough to keep in contact. To do something that went to a lot of people, like the care boxes, the kids feel like they can contribute and give back instead of just biding their time for eight months. To actually do something makes them feel good.

As students grew older and developed more awareness of their feelings they were able to make sense of their experiences. With assistance from the DSTA students learnt to appreciate their personal accomplishments and increased personal resources. Increased personal resources and coping strategies equipped students to confidently face other challenges in their lives (Mmari et al, 2009).

4.4.5 Collaborating with Teachers. Supporting teachers was an important component of student support and a primary focus of DSTAs' work. Furthermore DSTAs helped teachers to appreciate the pressures on families during a parental deployment. The DSTAs' availability in the school has allowed teachers to regularly engage with DSTAs and seek

information or ideas thus increasing their professional knowledge of the ADF lifestyle and their students' needs. As school based employees DSTAs were able to offer teachers information and practical support at short notice thus complimenting the teachers' work to support their students. Kelly, a secondary school teacher, described the information provided to teachers by the DSTA at her school:

The DSTA puts a list out. She puts a list out so everybody knows at the beginning of the year who the army kids are. Then she'll contact every individual teacher and has a conversation with them... If any teacher has any questions about any student that she has contact with she's all over it.

Sally, a secondary school teacher, discussed the importance to teachers' practice to have background student information:

We talk about putting faces to data and identifying students. Schools, separate from the DSTA, don't really have an understanding of the defence child or the impact of deployment on families.

DSTAs worked closely with teachers and raised their awareness of student needs throughout a deployment cycle. Rita, a primary school DSTA, described her approach to supporting teachers:

We normally give them a resource about what the kids might go through so when dad or mum's leaving what the child might be experiencing and how they can best support them. Things that they can do during the deployment and the emotions that the child will go through and then anticipating their return... Things they can share with the class like "so and so's dad's gone here. Does anyone know where that is?" And what they're doing is that that child feels more supported in their classroom as well...A lot of the teachers don't have any contact with defence at all so this will be the first time that a child in their class has actually been deployed and what that actually means and how the teacher might be able to ask me any questions about what can I do to support the child.

Teachers' frequent lack of familiarity with the military lifestyle was noted by Garner et al. (2014). However DSTAs' ready availability helped teachers' to fill gaps in their knowledge. Teachers discussed students' needs with the DSTAs and organised for them to work with their students either inside or outside the classroom. Kathleen, a Year 5 teacher, described a disturbing incident in her class where she called on the DSTA for assistance. One of her students, Amy, was returning to school after a family holiday. Amy's father, who was about to

return to the deployment zone after mid-deployment leave, dropped his daughter to the classroom on the morning of his return to Afghanistan. Amy was very distressed and ran after her father but he appeared not to appreciate the level of his daughter's distress. Her father returned Amy to her class commenting "she's always like this." He walked away after returning Amy to the classroom. Kathleen, believing that other students who had witnessed the incident were in shock, was unable to attend to Amy's immediate and pressing needs so she called on the DSTA:

Amy was actually off school for a week and a half which was fair enough. And then Dad left again and she was a mess, an absolute mess, emotionally. I think that had a lot to do with the way Dad left... They dropped her off at school that morning and she had to say good-bye to her dad at the door. She was absolutely distraught. I found it very, very difficult. She had to be withdrawn and he pretty much left and went and got on a plane. I was left to deal with the child who was an absolute mess which left us in a very difficult situation because she really shouldn't have been at school.... We took Amy into the DSTA. I couldn't do much because it was the middle of class. I couldn't leave the class. So the DSTA took her out for about an hour and she came back into the classroom and she was smiling and happy.

DSTAs were available to provide short breaks from the classroom for students who were emotionally agitated. Teachers felt that the learning of some of their younger students was enhanced by a period of exclusive adult attention when they were not coping well emotionally. Ricky described how she called on the DSTA to support one of her Year 1 students:

It might just be that that little person is having a bad day that day and I'll say to the DSTA "is it OK if you just come and grab such and such and give him some jobs and just take his mind off what we're doing?" And it's ... a nice little break and it gets ... their emotional engines going and they're right to carry on for the day.

During routine classroom visits, DSTAs met with students either individually or in small groups. Students felt safe to tell the DSTAs about what was happening in their lives and to share their feelings. By offering small group opportunities DSTAs encouraged students to share their experiences with other students and engage in peer support processes. Furthermore classroom visits by DSTAs were a more accepted practice in the primary school culture than they were in the secondary school culture. Having less time with each class, secondary teachers were reluctant to release students during class time unless it was essential. They

preferred instead to consult with the DSTA or refer students to DSTAs in their own time rather than during allocate class time.

4.4.6 Conclusion. Schools provided a stable and predictable environment at a time when students were experiencing family disruption associated with a parental deployment (De Pedro et al., 2014b). Within the school environment students had access to understanding and support from key adults and peers with similar experiences to themselves. Students associated the Defence Room with adults and peers who understood the ADF culture and empathised with their emotional challenges. Furthermore targeted activities assisted students to make sense of their situation and gain some understanding of their feelings thus aiding their emotional regulation (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Students' engagement with the DSTAs and their peers helped them to make sense of their experiences and feelings and generate a sense of pride in the contributions of their parent who is deployed, themselves and their family to the deployment effort thus developing a sense of agency to help them to manage future challenges.

Working within the school setting DSTAs provided essential support for teachers that in turn assisted schools as a whole to support the increased needs of students from ADF families throughout a parental deployment. By providing professional knowledge and practical support to teachers, as well as targeted support to students, DSTAs contributed towards the holistic adjustment of students to the changes that were occurring in their lives. By integrating their practice into existing school structures DSTAs enhanced the whole schools' capacity to support students during parental deployment. Moreover increased communication between families and schools generated a greater understanding by school personnel of each family's circumstances and created opportunities for schools and families to work together to support the social, emotional and educational needs of students. Increased awareness by the whole school community offered students an enhanced level of social and emotional support that led to self-understanding and resilience. The next section discusses how DSTAs' work builds the schools' capacities to support students during a parental deployment.

4.5 Building School Capacity

The data suggested that all groups of participants felt that their schools' capacity to respond effectively to students' needs during a parental deployment was enhanced by the employment of a DSTA. The mothers were reassured by the availability of an understanding and supportive adult who responded to their children's needs at school. They were also appreciative of the DSTAs' role in advocating for their children's needs with their teachers. Teacher participants

recognised the learning and wellbeing benefits of increased parent engagement and increased opportunities for students. In addition teacher participants appreciated the increased ADF involvement in their schools' learning programs. DSTAs recognised that their work with teachers and their engagement with parents and the ADF enhanced the capacity of the school community to respond effectively to students' needs during a parental deployment. Table 4.4 outlines environmental links facilitated by DSTAs.

Table 4.4 School and Community Links identified in the Data

DSTA facilitated links	Participant	Quotes
For students		
Peers	Secondary DSTA	"They had each other that they could rely on and first time deployment with fourth time deployments together there was a lot of sharing and saying what worked and 'I understand what you're going through.'"
Parents who are deployed	Mother	"My son did build a beautiful Afghanistan diorama and they videoed that on a DVD and we sent that over to Afghanistan."
For teachers		
Parents	Primary DSTA	"You often get the parents that might ring here first, whereas I always say 'have you contacted the teacher too?'"
ADF	Secondary teacher	"We don't know anything about the defence force and the DSTAs help us get the defence force for different events."
For the whole school		
ADF	Primary DSTA	"Remembrance Day we always have a liturgy... Parents in defence come in uniform."
Deployed ADF members	Secondary DSTA	"We do 'Operation Christmas Care' parcels to deployed service men overseas and ... we sent over 700 parcels over three years across the college."
ADF support services	Primary teacher	"The parent's not coping at all and that's when I talk to the defence aide and say 'is there some-one I can send them to?' as I know there's support through the defence force."

4.5.1 Engaging the School Community. DSTA work has raised whole school awareness of the presence of ADF families within their school community and the ADF lifestyle. Prior to the employment of DSTAs in Australian schools ADF parents' deployments and the consequential family disruptions were often hidden from teachers and the sources of students' behaviour changes were often unknown by teachers. Furthermore with the routine reminders that DSTAs placed in school newsletters parents were more likely to advise the school of deployment dates. More reliable communication between the families and the school has meant that teachers have become more aware of upcoming deployments. Teachers' knowledge of deployments has led to the earlier identification of additional

students' needs thus enabling prompt establishment of suitable supports to moderate students' distress.

DSTAs encouraged the building of supportive processes within the school community through the facilitation of projects that related to the ADF lifestyle and the role of ADF families during deployment. Jessica, a secondary school DSTA, described the advantages, to students from ADF families, of the whole student body coming together to prepare Christmas boxes to send to ADF members overseas:

My perspective is that although they've got specific challenges as defence students, I wanted them to be part of the college instead of a separate entity.

The presence of uniformed ADF members at school presentations and commemoration ceremonies raised student awareness and emphasised the cooperation between the school community and the ADF community. DSTAs facilitated a mutually supportive partnership between the school and the local ADF base. Furthermore student participation in ADF related events encouraged an appreciation by the whole school community for the circumstances of ADF families. DSTAs facilitated the engagement of ADF members and students from ADF families in the proceedings for ANZAC Day as described by Rita, a primary school DSTA:

ANZAC Day we always do something... Remembrance Day we always have a liturgy. The defence kids will normally be part of that liturgy or do the reading or this year we put the crosses out so they were very involved in making the crosses and making sure that the school knew how important that is and to be reverent... Students ask parents in defence that come in uniform ... about what they've done, where they're going and "what's it like to be in the army?"

As well as offering specific activities that were available to students from ADF families DSTAs engaged the whole student population in competitions. For instance ANZAC Day was often marked by a whole school art and writing competition. In addition many non-defence students contributed to projects such as the preparation of care packages to send to deployed ADF members and the construction of memorial gardens. Engagement in these activities assisted the whole school community to gain a greater understanding of the ADF role and the role of ADF families.

4.5.2 Advocating for Cultural Needs. DSTAs advocated for students with the schools' administration team when family circumstances interfered with students' ability to meet school commitments such as meeting assessment dates. Modifications to formal school

policies such as assessment schedules and attendance requirements were made by principals in recognition of the significance of mid-deployment family reunions and end of deployment family holidays to student wellbeing. Thus family stability was promoted by school principals who made allowances accordingly. With a greater understanding of deployment related students' needs principals have built greater flexibility into school process as described by Kelly, a secondary school teacher:

As long as we're aware of what's happening, there's no problem with it... Knowing the background info, Dad's come home after eight months, "go on go and have a holiday or do what you need to do, get back together as a family" ... because that's what it's all about first, because if you're not happy at home everything else suffers. If you're happy at home, then things are nice... If we have a kid who's acting up big time and a parent has just left, they're stuck with mum and the four other kids and they end up being the minder at the time, they don't get assessment done and they don't turn up, the DSTA goes to the principal or deputy and has those conversations. They are more lenient with assessments and give them more time to do it. Or they say "we know what's going on and you don't have to do this assessment for this subject term 2." ... The principal is very adamant that parents being deployed is very important in our school and we need to look after those kids. He just wants kids to do the best that they can all the time.

The additional support provided to students at school throughout a parental deployment promoted a sense of school connection for the students and encouraged commitment to their studies. DSTAs organised activities specifically for students with a parent who is deployed. The Defence Room became a meeting place for students to gather with other students from ADF families and participate in peer support processes. Students from ADF families shared common concerns and a common understanding of the ADF lifestyle. Casey, a secondary school DSTA, described the interactions she observed in a deployment support program she conducted for the students at her school:

They had each other that they could rely on and first time deployment with fourth time deployments together there was a lot of sharing and saying what worked and "I understand what you're going through."

Students benefitted not only from the support they received from other students but also from the support they offered. By sharing their experiences and achievements students were

able to internalise their own skills and resilience and in turn recognise their own resources and agency to meet the demands associated with a parental deployment. Interactions with key adults such as DSTAs assisted students to gain a realistic appraisal of their own resources and encouraged further contribution to the school community.

Contributing to whole school projects built a sense of school connection for students. Students from both ADF and civilian families worked together to prepare Christmas care packs that were sent to ADF members overseas. The students wrote messages to accompany the boxes and many received replies. Replies from ADF members, sharing their thoughts and experiences with students in an age appropriate way, assisted students to grasp the significance of ADF work. Making such artefacts available to the broader school community communicated the schools' commitment to ADF families. Jessica, a secondary school DSTA, described how the preparation of Christmas care packages engaged all students in the school with deployed ADF members. She shared return correspondence from the deployed ADF members with the whole school community by publishing them in a scrap book:

We do "Operation Christmas Care" parcels to deployed service men overseas and ... we sent over 700 parcels over three years across the college... We had stickers on top of the boxes which basically says "Merry Christmas" and we printed special school Christmas cards to put in the boxes that all the students wrote messages in and we also had stamped addressed envelopes for them to send responses back to the students. When we got them, when any student got a response we photocopied them and put them in big scrapbooks which sit in reception so all parents and visitors can see. So it really was a whole community event which has worked really, really well.

The involvement of the whole student body in projects raised the awareness of the school community to the sacrifices made by ADF members and their families. Increased whole school awareness promoted supportive school processes that helped student coping. Increased cultural awareness by the school administration team provided opportunities for culturally aware adjustments to school processes that supported individual students at critical phases of the deployment cycle and generated a sense of school connectedness.

4.5.3 Generating School-Family Dialogue. All three groups of participants (mothers, teacher participants and DSTAs) recognised that the DSTAs' work with parents and teachers contributed to a shared understanding of school based support that was available to students during a parental deployment. DSTAs also recognised how the support they offered

to parents and teachers indirectly supported their students by creating a shared adult understanding and a united response to students' needs (Aaronson & Perkins, 2013). Catherine, a primary school DSTA, described how she maintained a dialogue with teachers and also encouraged parents to keep teachers informed:

We like to keep a really good relationship with the teachers in all the classes here... If they know that that parent's deployed they will send us an email or even if they see us walking around the school, they'll make the time to say, "oh so and so's dad's away, can you please pop in and see them they are not feeling well or they're having a bad day. They've been a little sad." So it's just keeping in contact with that teacher after they make that first contact and touching base with them backwards and forwards. Sometimes it can be through emails ... I really believe you need to keep the whole school in the loop. I can't just do my little bit and not keep the teacher informed... I always like to keep that loop circle happening because once you break that circle it's really hard to get everyone back on track again and everyone know what's going on, especially when the student's having problems... You often get the parents that might ring here first, whereas I always say "have you contacted the teacher too?" And they'll say "I thought I would contact you first." And I always say "well we have to keep the teacher in the loop so would you like me to ring or would you like to ring the teacher and we can arrange a time to have a group discussion" and leave it with them.

Teacher participants felt that the relationships that developed between DSTAs and parents assisted their own work as teachers. Background student information shared by parents helped teachers and DSTAs to recognise underlying concerns that were interfering with student engagement. DSTAs shared their insights with teachers who were able to use this information to implement supportive structures in the classroom. Pam, a Year 7 teacher, described how a dialogue that was established between the DSTA, a parent and herself contributed to a more productive learning environment for the student:

I found working with the DSTA very, very helpful... The student was very, very disruptive. He would not settle down, he wouldn't sit still and because he was a defence child the DSTA had some background about him which was really helpful... She told me things I might need to know to get things organised for him at school... She was the one who suggested getting in contact with mum ... and it was just a very good support network really.

Teachers also recognised that DSTAs helped to keep the parents who were deployed connected with the school. Bree, a primary school teacher, expressed the importance she placed on helping parents who are deployed to remain acknowledged as members of the school community:

I think it's just more of an awareness and an appreciation of who makes up our school and that's one component and I guess the significance to those families of being acknowledged as having a contribution to the school community. Because sometimes when those parents are away on deployment for such a long time as well I guess sometimes they can isolate those fathers or mothers from the school because they're not involved in the school community as such. But when these things are happening it helps them to feel that "yes there is a contribution and a little bit of acknowledgement."

The mothers recognised the DSTA as a person in the school who understood and acknowledged the additional pressures on their family during a deployment. Parent contact with the DSTA established important patterns of parent engagement creating a community of ADF families that was part of and interdependent with the whole school community (Huebner et al., 2009). DSTAs encouraged parent-teacher contact and once teachers were aware of a parental deployment they worked more closely with the DSTA who in turn provided a link back to the parents (Aaronson & Perkins, 2013).

4.5.4 Building School-ADF links. Many students from civilian families have only a limited knowledge and experience of the ADF. The inclusion of ADF presentations, displays and demonstrations into the school calendar built mesosystem links between schools and the ADF community and raised students' and teachers' awareness to the role of the ADF and the presence of ADF families within their school community. DSTAs have created important links between the school and the ADF community and, through liaison with the local military base, provided students with a broad range of cultural experiences. ADF representation in the school community provided students from ADF families with opportunities to express their pride and share their cultural knowledge with students from civilian families. Robyn, a primary school teacher, expressed her appreciation of ADF input into the school curriculum:

We don't know anything about the defence force and they help us get the defence force for different events. We had a parent who was in the army, but he bought out

the robotics. Just to say “this is what my dad does” and it was actually one of the parents at the school. So it shows students and it gets the defence families more involved and get to view their kid and the kid feels proud. “That’s my dad or my mum.”

Most DSTAs worked as a single operator in their school although the position was shared by two people in a small number of schools. Collegial support developed amongst DSTAs working in the same district also aided DSTA work. DSTAs working within a geographical area valued the time spent networking with their local DSTA colleagues. Network meetings and training opportunities were facilitated by Defence Community Organisation (DCO) staff and allowed DSTAs to share their experiences and ideas with each other as well as gain skills and local military knowledge necessary for them to do their jobs well. Kate, a primary school DSTA, expressed her appreciation of networking opportunities:

Networking and professional development opportunities and the coordination of them is very important and invaluable. It’s an opportunity to share and support each other. We take away a reinvigorated energy. More of that is needed.

4.5.5 Integrating into School Operations. DSTAs have become integral members of the school staff. Through combining their knowledge of school practices with their knowledge of the ADF lifestyle DSTAs offer their schools a unique perspective on students’ challenges throughout a parental deployment. The DSTA position is located within the student support team in each school where DSTAs work collaboratively with other team members.

Colleagues who held other support roles in the school formed part of the DSTAs’ overall support network in the school. The school chaplain, guidance officer and behaviour support teachers were the closest colleagues of the primary school DSTAs. Primary school based DSTAs often shared a room with the school chaplain due to the similarities of the two roles. Denise, a primary school DSTA, explained how she and the school chaplain, both part-time workers, worked together:

We throw a lot of things to each other as well. If I’m not there she will step in for me with some of these children and help as well. We bounce off each other.

The student support teams in secondary schools were more formally structured and involved a larger range of support staff than those in primary schools. The responsibility for particular aspects of individual student support was determined by particular staff roles with heads of department, year level coordinators and various support staff roles all offering different services. The coordination of services was essential to avoid duplication of services and

students from ADF families were usually allocated to the DSTA for support. However, most DSTA referrals came from outside the student support team, from teachers, parents, the students themselves or their friends. Casey, a secondary school DSTA, described the student services team in her school:

We have our school services support meeting so there's not three people working with the same kid, so we know who's working with who, who's doing what and what messages we're sending. Deputies, guidance officer, nurse, community education counsellor, youth support coordinator, chaplain, year level coordinators, DSTA, police. We talk about individual students. We see kids in our own job and then we can refer them on to the triple S team.

The DSTAs offered a unique service to schools, families and students. Moreover DSTAs' communication with ADF families through school newsletters encouraged reciprocal interaction and promoted greater engagement between ADF members, their partners and school staff. Furthermore the strong connections developed between DSTAs, the ADF and the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) assisted schools to organise a greater ADF physical presence in the school. An ADF presence in the school for formal and informal occasions has raised students' and teachers' cultural awareness of the ADF lifestyle and highlighted the contribution of ADF families to the school community. Understanding the unique needs of ADF families has helped to build a supportive school culture for students and their families. The acknowledgment of the ADF role by the school community has connected isolated students and families to those means of support available to them from both within the school and within the wider ADF and local community. With a greater understanding of deployment related family pressures and the availability of ADF family services schools are able to better identify students' needs and link students and families to professional services when necessary.

DSTAs' work has generated additional student support structures and has built schools' capacities to support students during a parental deployment. Funding for the DSTA program acknowledges the Australian government's commitment to the support of military families and their children's education. Moreover the addition of a DSTA to the school staff has shaped and strengthened the school communities by fostering and sustaining constructive processes between families, the school communities and the ADF community. These processes have supported students to develop skills of ability, motivation and knowledge that encourage positive school engagement and participation.

The increased recognition and understanding in schools of the ADF's role has assisted students to better cope with the demands of parental deployment. In addition the increased sense of collective concern generated within the school community has assisted students with parents who were deployed to manage their own emotions, acknowledge their pride in their parents' service and recognise their own contributions to their wellbeing of their family. These attributes have in turn promoted student and family adaptation throughout the deployment cycle (Aaronson & Perkins, 2013).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the study's findings of parents', teachers' and DSTAs' perspectives on student support throughout a parental deployment. It is evident from the findings that DSTA work is ecological, multidimensional and far reaching in nature (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) and the role functions that drive DSTA praxis provided a structure for viewing the findings in a systematic way. By *reducing cultural barriers* DSTAs have assisted schools to build their capacity to support students with parent who are deployed. Practical and informational support for teachers has broadened the teachers' knowledge of supportive options available for their students. Parents were reassured that their children's increased needs were acknowledged and validated in the school. DSTA support provided to both parents and teachers indirectly provided an additional layer of support for students and in turn enhanced the level of family–school interaction and dialogue.

The proactive nature of DSTA work provided opportunities for DSTAs to engage in informal contact with students and observe students' behaviour and peer interactions in a range of settings. Through *constructing cultural knowledge* DSTAs were able to anticipate students' needs throughout a deployment cycle thereby helping teachers to recognise the need for additional student support. By *integrating cultural knowledge with practice* DSTAs helped students to normalise parental deployment and build on their innate strengths. Furthermore many of the DSTAs' activities encouraged engagement between ADF members and the schools. Involvement of ADF members with the school community enhanced students' and teachers' understanding of ADF work and helped by *building the schools' capacity* to support students throughout a parental deployment (Huebner et al., 2009).

DSTAs were able to achieve many of their goals by working from a position of authority and influence. DSTAs advocated for students' needs by educating members of the school staff about the ADF lifestyle. ADF connections and networking opportunities assisted DSTAs to remain informed of local ADF activities and maintain currency of skills. The next chapter,

Chapter 5, discusses the implications of the research findings within the context of the current literature and the ecological framework of the study.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

The Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program was initially established to support students as they transitioned between schools. DSTAs assisted new students to integrate into the school community and at the end of their stay assisted students to prepare for transitioning out of the school and relocating to another community. However the DSTA role was introduced into Australian schools at a time when the Australian Defence Force (ADF) was already serving in East Timor and would, in the future, serve in many areas of the Middle East. Recognising the DSTAs as key support persons for ADF families in the school, school staff members and ADF families requested that DSTAs also support students during parental deployment even though it was not officially part of their duties until 2007. With little evidence base to guide them DSTAs, in consultation with their school based supervisors and Defence Community Organisation (DCO) staff, developed and implemented a range of practices to address students' needs during their parent's deployment.

The aim of this dissertation was to detail and gain an understanding of specific school based practices that have been suggested to support students' educational engagement during a parental deployment; practices that contribute to students' sense of wellbeing during their parents' deployment absence. Student support within the context of this study was defined as school based interventions that build on students' strengths, reduce psychological stress and have a positive effect on students' adjustments to parental deployment (Guzman, 2014).

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of DSTAs' deployment support practices this study investigated the perspectives of parents, teachers and DSTAs. Because influences on school students emanate from diverse sources, once themes and issues had been identified using a grounded theory analysis, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theoretical model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) was applied.

Bronfenbrenner's model provided an additional framework to promote understanding. In particular the focus was on gaining further insight into how parental deployment affected children and where interventions have been applied, the source of these interventions relative to the child's environment. Bronfenbrenner's layers thereby helped to place the emergent themes and findings into areas of operation so that interventions could be targeted to the appropriate places.

Findings suggest that the participants were well aware of the unique deployment related challenges for students, students' strengths, and of school based practices employed to support students. The findings illustrated school based sources of stability and support that assisted students to feel connected to their school, build on their strengths and develop a sense of agency during a parental deployment. This chapter discusses the study's findings within the context Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The role functions that drove DSTA praxis are used as an organising structure for the remainder of this chapter.

5.2 Reducing Cultural Barriers between ADF Families and Schools

Findings suggest that DSTA practices reduced cultural barriers between ADF families and schools by facilitating increased school-family dialogue, enhancing teachers' cultural knowledge of the ADF lifestyle and providing opportunities for students to make sense of their experiences (Cozza, 2015; Masten, 2013). DSTAs routinely accessed normal school processes such as school newsletters, school email and face to face contact to communicate with students, parents and teachers (Chapter 4.2) and promote further interactions. DSTAs maintained records of families' deployment status from information relayed to them by parents and ensured that teachers were aware of any parental absence (De Pedro et al., 2014b).

The effectiveness of DSTA work was founded on the development of trusting relationships between DSTAs and students, parents and teachers (Chapter 4.2). The study's findings suggest that the DSTAs' attention to helping others, as well as their cultural knowledge, was critical to the quality of DSTAs' professional relationships and the success of the DSTA role in supporting students and parents (Easterbrooks et al., 2103; Chapter 4.2). The relationships built with students and parents allowed DSTAs to gain an understanding of specific pressures that faced ADF families and the challenges experienced by students at school. Furthermore as school staff members DSTAs were uniquely placed to identify students' deployment related needs at school and recognise opportunities for introducing further supportive interventions within school structures.

Findings suggest that DSTAs became a key adult in the school for students with a parent who is deployed (Chapter 4.2.1). Easterbrooks et al. (2013) propose that a meaningful connection with at least one key adult is a core protective factor for students during a parental deployment. Furthermore Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) recognised the importance of increasingly more complex proximal processes between children and key adults as

contributors to human development. Proximal processes are defined as enduring forms of interaction between characteristics of the developing child and elements of their environmental context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Maintaining regular contact with students enabled DSTAs to observe students' baseline behaviours and therefore recognise any concerning behavioural changes throughout the deployment cycle. Regular DSTA contact assisted students to develop their coping strategies and participate in targeted activities that addressed their unique needs. Furthermore the Defence Room (De Pedro et al., 2014b) represented a secure base for students during times of family change (Chapter 4.4).

Regular student contact throughout the deployment cycle enabled DSTAs to respond promptly to specific student needs as they arose. DSTAs supported students through facilitating group programs, individual mentoring and the organisation of intervention programs to address students' unique needs when necessary (Chapter 4.4). By anticipating students' needs at each stage of the deployment cycle DSTAs facilitated age-appropriate activities to support students' deployment-related needs (Chapter 4.4). DSTAs assisted students to prepare ahead for the deployment and plan for self-care and communication with their parents who were deployed. In addition DSTAs encouraged students to recognise and celebrate their personal growth and achievements throughout the deployment cycle. In total these processes assisted students to increase their personal resources (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) by making sense of their experiences. Students' active engagement with the DSTAs is consistent with Watanabe and Jensen's (2000), and Easterbrooks et al.'s (2013) proposals that students opened up more readily to adults whom they perceived to be interested, concerned and naturally empathetic with what they have to say.

The findings illustrate that the mothers were reassured by the additional attention paid by the DSTAs to their children during their partners' absence (Chapter 4.2.2). The past experiences of some of the mothers indicated that not all school based personnel understood the pressures on their families (Chapter 4.2.2; Garner et al., 2014) however the mothers expressed full confidence that their children's concerns would be acknowledged and understood by the DSTAs. DSTAs became a key school-based contact point for parents encouraging parents to keep the school informed of deployment dates and other relevant information (Chapter 4.2.2). Furthermore the DSTAs' cultural understanding of the ADF lifestyle offered parents the security of expectation that their concerns for their children would be understood and followed up at school.

The mothers particularly valued the informality of the relationship they had established with the DSTAs (Chapter 4.2.2) and contacted the DSTAs with concerns when necessary. The mothers appreciated the DSTAs' availability to their children and DSTAs' advocacy with teachers for their children's support needs. Many parents requested additional DSTA support for their children's wellbeing during difficult periods and appreciated feedback on their children's functioning at school (Chapter 4.2.2). Moreover the DSTAs' facilitation of parent gatherings provided opportunities for parents to meet others in a similar situation to themselves and develop a sense of connection with the school community (Huebner et al., 2009). Huebner et al. (2009) suggest that supportive processes generated through such opportunities have potential flow on effects such as facilitating indirect support for children.

The pressures experienced by ADF families during deployment were not always appreciated by teachers (Huebner et al., 2007; Mmari et al., 2009). Even those teachers with a high level of understanding were limited in their ability to implement time-consuming student interventions due to the constraints imposed by teachers' workload demands. Moreover DSTAs offered teachers a rich source of cultural knowledge and practical support. Furthermore with advanced knowledge of parental deployments teacher participants planned ahead to cater for students' needs (Chapter 4.2.3).

Teacher participants, particularly those with a military family connection, demonstrated an awareness of students' unique deployment related needs (Astor et al., 2013). Findings suggest that teacher participants monitored students' deployment related needs and accessed the DSTAs' support for their students as a matter of priority when they deemed it to be advantageous for their students (Chapter 4.4.5). The benefit of school staff members' military knowledge is consistent with Astor et al.'s (2013) finding that school principals with a military background are more attuned to the needs of students from military families and also implement more support structures for students from military families.

Teacher participants appreciated opportunities for distressed students to spend time out of the classroom with the DSTAs thus enabling students to recover their composure before returning to the classroom ready to continue with their studies (Chapter 4.2.3). Through their professional relationship with DSTAs teachers became more alert to changes in students' behaviour and accessed the DSTAs' services to assist students to manage distressing emotions (Chapter 4.2.3). Together DSTAs and teachers implemented tailored classroom based interventions to generate supportive peer processes for particular students (Chapter 4.4.3).

Furthermore early interventions assisted students to develop additional coping and self-care strategies and participate more fully in their classroom program.

DSTAs provided practical support for teachers that in turn increased teachers' ability to provide culturally aware support to their students (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Through the use of ADF cultural values such as pride in military service both teachers and DSTAs assisted students to shift their focus from inward distress and isolation to an outward focus of expressing pride in their parents' military service. The use of cultural artefacts such as teddy bears dressed in military uniform encouraged students to actively participate in supportive classroom processes (Chapter 4.4.3). Furthermore introducing teachers to students' cultural concerns raised teachers' awareness of their students' home lives and strengthened the mesosystem links between the family and school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

Through their professional relationships with the school administration team DSTAs advocated for the needs of ADF families and negotiated for the implementation of supportive school processes. For example school processes were adapted to capture relevant deployment related data. Furthermore increased knowledge of the military lifestyle assisted principals to make flexible and family friendly decisions with regards to students' assessment and attendance requirements during critical phases of a deployment cycle (Astor et al., 2013; Chapter 4.4.5). Reuniting as a family during mid-deployment leave and at the end of a deployment were significant times for families and flexibility in schools' assessment and attendance policies (Chapter 4.3.6) assisted students to adjust more readily to significant family changes.

Findings suggest that being integrated into the school community placed DSTAs in a position of influence. Embedded within school processes (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) DSTAs were in a position to realistically appraise the opportunities and resources available to them for implementing student and family support strategies and structures from within the context of the school microsystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). In addition DSTAs' professional relationships with teachers and members of the school administration team placed them in an advantaged position to negotiate for the implementation of new programs that supported the schools' mission while also addressing the unique needs of students from ADF families (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). As a member of the school staff DSTAs were active in promoting mesosystem relationships between the school and ADF families thus promoting mutual school-family understanding and reducing cultural barriers between ADF families and schools.

5.3 Constructing Cultural Knowledge

Due to their professional relationships with students, parents and teachers, DSTAs were in a position to recognise the links between individual student characteristics, the parental deployment cycle, and students' behaviour at school. By combining their professional experience with personal observations, reports from parents and teachers, and professional development learnings, DSTAs continuously constructed educationally relevant cultural knowledge. In turn DSTAs shared their cultural knowledge with members of the school community through professional relationships. DSTAs' cultural knowledge contained insights into the unique needs of individual students as well as generic knowledge applicable to groups of students. Furthermore DSTAs have become a source of expertise for the school communities with regard to the educational implications of the military lifestyle (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2011).

DSTAs reported that most students with a parent who is deployed exhibited some changes in behaviour (Mansfield et al., 2011) however the nature and degree of behavioural changes varied greatly between individuals (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Chapter 4.3). Supported by regular DSTA contact and participation in targeted activities the majority of students coped well at school during a parental deployment. Furthermore DSTAs reported that many of their students sought increased DSTA contact during a parental deployment and often accessed the Defence Room on a daily basis. These students were more likely to be enrolled in the middle school (Card et al., 2011; Chapter 4.3.1) and some may have had special needs (Chapter 5.3; Hisle-Gorman et al., 2014). A small number of students required creative solutions to address their unique needs (see Chapter 4.4.3). Primary school students were supported both inside and outside the classroom whereas secondary school students were supported both individually and within groups outside of the classroom.

Changes in students' behaviour placed additional pressures on parents, teachers and DSTAs. Individual students' demand characteristics such as age (Alfano et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Card et al., 2011; Mustillo et al., 2016), nature, gender and special needs (Hisle-Gorman et al., 2014) presented challenges for some students as did individual family factors (Chapter 4.3.5). DSTAs and teachers reported observations of maladaptive student behaviour in junior primary and middle school students such as aggressive acts (Gorman et al., 2010), attention seeking and general distraction from their work (Garner et al., 2014). Somatic complaints were more common in primary school children and attendance difficulties were more obvious in secondary school students. Students who had grown up in a military family

and were therefore familiar with parental absence tended to cope better with a deployment than those children whose parents joined the military when their children were at an older age (Chapter 4.3.5). Regardless of age the first deployment presented challenges for students of all ages. These findings correlate with Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2007) concept of children developing personal resources through life experience and displaying force characteristics in an attempt to meet their needs.

The closeness of the relationship between the individual student and their parent who is deployed was a key factor influencing students' coping abilities (Chapter 4.3.5). Several of those students who required intensive intervention measures were described by the participants as having a particularly close relationship with their parent who is deployed. The absence of a key support person from the family home presented a particular challenge for these students. Boys were demonstrated to grieve the absence of their father particularly when they were the only male child in the family. Pressure felt from assuming the role of "man of the house" placed pressure on younger boys but was usually embraced positively by senior secondary students who through their life experiences had developed sufficient personal resources to make an adult contribution to family functioning (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

DSTAs and mothers observed that transition periods such as the lead up to the parents' departure, the parents' departure after mid-deployment leave and the reintegration of the returned parent back into the family unit at the end of the deployment, as the most unsettling stages of the deployment for students (Chapter 4.3.6; Logan., 1987; Pincus et al., 2007). These phases of the deployment cycle represented times of major change for families as they transitioned from a two parent to a one parent family and from a one parent family back to two parent family. Reintegrating the returned parent back into the family unit was particularly challenging for teenagers who had in general assumed a more adult role in the family during the deployment (Mmari et al., 2009). This finding confirms Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2007) recognition of role changes as significant ecological transitions that impact on development. Further pressures experienced by students during the parents' deployment absence were often felt most strongly when their parents missed important events such as birthdays (Chapter 4.3.6; Garner et al., 2014).

Chandra et al. (2010), Flake et al. (2009) and Siebler (2009) recognised the mental health of the non-deployed parent as a key influence on children's wellbeing. In addition McGuire et al. (2012) discovered that in general ADF partners increased their skills and resiliency with each deployment. While parent mental health was outside the parameters of this study DSTAs

reported paying attention to the wellbeing of the non-deployed parents and made appropriate referrals when appropriate. Linking parents with external sources of support contributed to the parents' wellbeing and in turn their children's wellbeing (Chapter 4.2.2). The mothers demonstrated resilience evidenced in their skills of seeking help for themselves and their children when necessary. The findings suggest that the welcoming response of DSTAs encouraged both parents and students to enhance their skills of help seeking and in turn self-care.

Garner et al.'s (2014) and Mmari et al.'s (2009) studies discovered that teachers in general have little knowledge of military structures and the military family lifestyle. This study recognised a large variation in teachers' cultural knowledge as illustrated in Chapter 4.2.3. Study findings suggest that teacher participants, equipped with information and practical support, felt able to support the needs of students during a parental deployment. As informed teachers the teacher participants were in a position to consciously address students' support needs themselves as well as seek additional support from DSTAs if required. Without DSTA support teachers may not have linked a decline in students' wellbeing or academic performance with deployment related stressors and therefore may not have been as well equipped to support students throughout the deployment cycle. Teacher participants expressed appreciation for the cultural expertise offered by the DSTAs and felt that the DSTAs' expert knowledge assisted them to gain an increased understanding of students' needs during a parental deployment. However further research is needed to explore teachers' professional development needs in the area of military deployment.

Additional student needs associated with parental deployments placed increased pressures on school resources (Garner et al., 2014). In addition findings suggest that the DSTA program assisted the school community to construct cultural knowledge that generated supportive processes and contributed to a supportive school environment for students with an absent parent. DSTAs provided an additional layer of school resources that not only offered direct support to students but also supported students indirectly through the provision of support to parents and teachers. By facilitating increased school-based cultural awareness the DSTAs' encouraged the formation of a strong network of adult and peer support that identified students' additional deployment related needs and assisted students to manage the additional demands associated with a parental deployment.

5.4 Integrating Cultural Knowledge and Practice

The DSTA program offered students access to culturally aware key adults (Chapter 4.2.1), a specific purpose venue (Chapter 4.2.1), proactive programs to address students' anticipated needs and responsive strategies to address students' individual needs (Chapter 4.4). The findings illustrate how DSTAs assisted students to restructure and reconfigure difficult emotional situations so their narrative changed and in the process the emotional context became more palatable (Chapter 4.4.2). In addition DSTAs responded to student referrals from parents and teachers, and facilitated a strong network of support for students within the school microsystem (Huebner et al., 2009).

The study participants shared many examples of how DSTAs integrated their cultural knowledge into their daily practice. These examples demonstrated how DSTAs creatively accessed existing school processes such as school newsletters, student notices and assemblies to communicate with students, parents and teachers and raise their awareness of the ADF culture and advertise school based activities. Furthermore DSTAs demonstrated cultural understanding of the deployment cycle and the specific challenges met at each stage of the deployment cycle. For example DSTAs facilitated targeted student activities such as preparing for self-care prior to the deployment and celebrating success at the end of a deployment.

The DSTAs' professional understanding of the emotional cycle of deployment enabled DSTAs to offer students targeted support that assisted students to develop coping strategies. Planning ahead for self-care and communication strategies helped to sustain students throughout the deployment as did opportunities for students to engage in group activities and projects (Chapter 4.4.1). Through individual coaching and mentoring DSTAs assisted students to endure the extended length of the deployment and to address individual concerns as they arose (Chapter 4.4; Easterbrooks et al., 2013). A celebration of achievements at the end of a deployment assisted students to recognise and celebrate their personal growth thus helping them to make sense of their experiences (Chapter 4.4.4; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009). With increased support students developed their own resources thus assisting them to engage in positive behaviours, regulate their emotions, and manage deployment related challenges.

Personalised interventions assisted students with higher level needs to manage their distress, benefit from supportive peer processes (Chapter 4.4.1; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Lemmon & Chartrand, 2009) and engage in their classroom program. Classroom liaison with the parent

who is deployed proved to be beneficial to the wellbeing of those primary school students who appeared to suffer severely from the absence of their parent (Chapter 4.4.3). Junior primary students were most appropriately supported within their classroom environment (Chapter 4.3.1) whereas an especially selected small group of peers often provided a successful vehicle for meeting the needs of middle school students (Chapter 4.3.1). Individual coaching and mentoring assisted upper secondary school students to address the concerns that were preventing them from participating fully in their school program (Chapter 4.3.1).

The Defence Room (De Pedro et al., 2014b) offered a known and valued venue for students to gather and address their social needs while learning and building resilience through interactions with peers and the DSTAs. Consistent with De Pedro et al.'s (2015) findings DSTAs recognised the benefits of peer support for students during a parental deployment (Chapter 4.4.1). Through participation in group programs students became aware of many other students who shared common challenges to themselves. These opportunities helped students to normalise their experiences. Making gifts for their parents who are deployed and sharing experiences with others provided opportunities for students to express and process their feelings. Students' participation in informal as well as facilitated activities generated mutually supportive peer processes and enhanced students' sense of wellbeing (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Lemmon & Chartrand, 2009).

Assisting less experienced students was observed by DSTAs as beneficial for those students who had resolved some of their own concerns (Chapter 4.3.1). By creating a situation where students were able share their own experiences, some students adopted a more positive group role through a sense of purpose. Furthermore student initiatives and active participation in supportive peer processes assisted students to gain a sense of agency and build pride in their own and their families' achievements (Jensen & Shaw, 1993). In turn students also benefitted from the appreciation of their peers.

DSTAs supported students to address their additional needs at each phase of the deployment cycle through the delivery of proactive and responsive strategies (Chandra et al., 2010; Chapter 4.4). Regular student contact as well as liaison with parents and teachers enabled DSTAs to identify additional student support needs early and assist students to build on their personal resources to successfully manage deployment related challenges (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). In addition DSTAs' work developed an awareness of students' additional needs amongst students' peers, teachers and the whole school community. Increased community

awareness generated supportive school processes and created an increased school capacity to support students during parental deployment.

5.5 Building School Capacity

DSTAs assisted multiple levels of the school community to gain a greater appreciation of the pressures facing students during a parental deployment (Chapter 4.5.1). Whole school and classroom projects facilitated an increased whole school understanding of ADF culture. Furthermore, increased engagement between the school community and ADF families, the ADF, and Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) family support agencies, enhanced school-based cultural awareness and broadened school staff members' understanding of increased student needs. In addition an increased awareness of the ADF lifestyle enhanced the capacity of the whole school community to offer culturally relevant support to students and contribute to building a more responsive and supportive school environment for students with a parent who is deployed.

The employment of DSTAs facilitated increased levels of school-family interaction. Findings suggest that the student focus and informality of the relationship developed between DSTAs and parents appeared to suffer less from the stigma often associated with more formal helping relationships that was identified in Australian studies by McGuire et al. (2012), Siebler (2009), and Siebler and Goddard (2014) (Chapter 4.5.3). The mothers and many other parents engaged with the DSTAs as members of their known support group and when necessary DSTAs provided social-emotional support to parents and made appropriate parent referrals to professional support agencies. Findings suggest that increased engagement with the school community enhanced parents' sense of connectedness and participation in school activities (Huebner et al., 2009; Chapter 4.2.2). Furthermore increased dialogue between parents and teachers facilitated an increased teacher appreciation of the ADF lifestyle and students' unique needs.

DSTAs encouraged the integration of ADF families into the whole school community thus strengthening parents' subjective as well as objective experiences of school engagement while increasing the opportunities for parents to contribute their cultural knowledge to the school community (Huebner et al., 2009). As a result the mothers felt welcome in their children's schools and participated in school activities. Consistent with Huebner et al.'s (2009) work on community capacity building DSTAs represented a key connection point between schools, ADO support agencies and ADF families (Chapter 4.5.4). Huebner et al. (2009) proposed that informal relationships, such as those formed amongst parents at their children's schools,

linked with formal support structures such as schools and ADO family support agencies, build goodwill and a desire for reciprocity.

Through the provision of practical support and collaboration DSTAs assisted teachers to appreciate the pressures facing students and parents during a deployment. Equipped with greater knowledge teachers planned ahead and prepared to cater for additional students' needs (Chapter 4.2.3). Increased teacher knowledge was communicated to their students through classroom processes. Furthermore practical support from DSTAs enabled teachers to facilitate additional activities to cater for the needs of students during a parent deployment.

An increased understanding of the challenges facing students during parental deployment assisted school administrators to exercise flexibility in school processes, such as those related to attendance and assessment requirements, and supported individual students and families in specific life circumstances (Chapter 4.5.2). School responsiveness to students' and families' unique needs increased the level of mutual understanding, reciprocity and cooperation between ADF families and their schools. In turn a whole school understanding of students' needs promoted an integrated network of support for students during a parental deployment by bridging the cultural gap between ADF families and the school communities.

DSTAs' work has generated many school-community links and provided opportunities for sharing knowledge of the ADF lifestyle (Chapter 4.5). Australian Defence Force (ADF) commanders, ADF families and ADO family agencies recognise DSTAs as an initial point of entry into schools (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2007) thus breaking down previously perceived cultural barriers recognised in the Hamilton report (1986). Through working collaboratively with both ADO community agencies and with all levels of the school community DSTAs have contributed towards a collective appreciation of the ADF lifestyle and the related pressures placed on children and their education. In turn the findings suggest that DSTA work promotes, within the school, a shared sense of responsibility for supporting students from ADF families that in turn helps students to address their increased social, emotional and academic needs during parental deployment (Huebner et al., 2009). Community links between schools and ADO family support agencies have raised school staff awareness of additional services available to families and has instigated family referral processes when appropriate (Chapter 4.5.4).

Consistent with the tenets of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) managing deployment related life experiences has helped students to acquire increased personal resources with which to approach future deployments

and other environmental transitions. Furthermore engagement in supportive school processes established important patterns of participation and interaction that placed students in good stead for positive community engagement throughout the remainder of their schooling and as future community based adults. Moreover DSTA employment contributed towards generating a more supportive school environment for students during a parental deployment thus reducing the likelihood of students and parents perceiving the school environment as hostile, a possibility suggested by De Pedro et al. (2014b).

5.6 Conclusion

DSTAs facilitated proactive and responsive strategies that arguably enhanced students' subjective experiences of school during a parental deployment (De Pedro et al, 2014b; Elder, 1998). In turn DSTAs' support to students also supported family units as parents were reassured by the additional attention paid to their children's deployment related needs at school. Furthermore DSTA advocacy, practical support and sharing of cultural knowledge enhanced teachers' ability to provide their students with culturally targeted support. Overall the DSTA program bridged the cultural gap between ADF families and schools.

Supported by the ADF and ADO community connections (Huebner et al., 2009; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Watanabe & Jensen, 2000), DSTAs integrated their knowledge of the emotional cycle of deployment (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011), the ADF lifestyle and related student needs with their education experience and professional skills to support students, parents and teachers (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Tudge et al., 2009). DSTAs responded flexibly to the needs of students, parents and teachers who in turn all increased their capacity to support others during deployment. Thus DSTAs shaped students' experience of deployment by facilitating multiple sources of supportive school based processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

DSTAs' work contributed to the development of a culturally relevant pedagogy (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011) by exposing school communities to the culture and role of the ADF. DSTAs created opportunities for students from ADF families to participate in processes that shared aspects of their families' military culture with their peers (Mmari et al., 2009) and in turn assisted students to build resilience to their family circumstances (Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990). The students expressed pride in their parents' military service as a means of contributing positively to their classroom environments (Jensen & Shaw, 1993). More importantly in terms of raising their resilience students became active agents in their lives and were able to gain some control and power as well as enjoyment from the culturally aware support of their peers and teachers (Masten et al., 1990). In addition positive

classroom dynamics and supportive peer processes assisted students to cope with the stress associated with their parents' deployments. The next chapter, Chapter 6, reviews the research process, including the effectiveness of the research questions, and discusses the conclusions drawn from the findings.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This qualitative study investigated how Defence School Transition Aides (DSTAs) supported students during a parental military deployment to a peacekeeping or war zone. The inclusion of perspectives from parents, teachers and DSTAs, assisted me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and an appreciation for the complexity of the ecological and historical context surrounding the problem. The axioms and characteristics of naturalistic inquiry as outlined in Chapter 3 provided an appropriate methodology through which to conduct the research and draw meaningful conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While offering a clear research process, a naturalistic enquiry allowed for an emergent design that proved to be beneficial for this study. A decision to conduct a separate data analysis for each participant group allowed nuances from different perspectives to emerge. A later synthesise of the analytical findings during the reconstruction phase of the research process allowed an integrated response to the research questions, a triangulation of the results, and addressed the study's aims.

The findings presented in Chapter 4 and a discussion of these findings in Chapter 5 demonstrated that the aims of this study, outlined in chapter 3, have been achieved. Chapter 4 presented the key findings of the research process organised within a grounded framework defining DSTA praxis and supported by verbatim quotes from study participants. Chapter 5 discussed the research findings within the context of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) and the current literature. This chapter draws my final conclusions in response to the research questions and then examines the trustworthiness of the research process. The implications of the research findings including recommendations for future research followed by the limitations of this research conclude this chapter.

6.2 Conclusions drawn from the Research Questions

The questions guiding this study were:

1. What student supports, associated with parental deployments, are valued by the teacher, parent and DSTA participants?
2. What aspects of the DSTA program are perceived to activate student strengths to manage the challenges associated with parental deployment?

By exploring these questions I gained an understanding of processes that DSTAs employ to meet the requirement of their duty statement *supporting students during parental absence*. The conclusions drawn from the perspectives of each participant group in relation to the first research question are discussed below followed by a discussion of the conclusions drawn in response to the second research question.

6.2.1 Student Supports Valued by the Mothers. The mothers valued the personal interest that DSTAs took in their children's wellbeing and were reassured by the social interactions that regularly occurred between the DSTAs and their children. The knowledge that their children had access to an adult at school who acknowledged and understood their family situation provided the mothers with a strong sense of security. This sense of security was reinforced by the mothers' own experiences of finding the DSTAs to be friendly, approachable and always willing to help. The approachability and availability of the DSTAs provided the mothers with a familiar and easily accessible point of entry into the school to alert school staff to their concerns about their children. Furthermore the DSTAs had the flexibility within their program structure to spend more time communicating with parents than was usually available to teachers.

The mothers particularly valued DSTAs' work outside of the classroom that supported their individual children's social and emotional needs. Intensely aware themselves of the deployment related changes experienced within their families the mothers were particularly concerned about the possible influences of deployment related family disruption on their children's coping at school. The mothers were encouraged by their children's enthusiasm for joining DSTA organised activities and valued the DSTAs' advocacy for their children's needs with the school staff, particularly with classroom teachers.

DSTAs provided a thread of continuity for ADF families. The ADF members experienced the continuity of their military connections when they relocated and when they worked away from home. However the families of ADF members experienced change and upheaval with each relocation and extended absence of the ADF member. The continuity of a DSTAs' presence in schools across the nation provided a point of stability for the partners and children of ADF members when they relocated and adjusted to the ADF members' absences.

6.2.2 Student Supports Valued by Teacher Participants. Teacher participants valued the DSTAs as an available resource and accessed the DSTAs' services on a needs basis. Teacher participants particularly valued the DSTAs' practical assistance to attend

to students' additional needs during class time. The availability of the DSTAs to attend to individual students' needs at short notice freed the teachers to attend to the needs of the whole class and focus on their teaching role. With an already demanding workload teachers had few additional resources to assist them to cater for the totality of students' demands in a busy classroom.

Teacher participants valued the DSTAs' expertise pertaining to the needs of individual students as well as background knowledge of the ADF lifestyle. Most teachers had little knowledge of the ADF lifestyle and valued the increased cultural understanding that they gained from working with the DSTAs on a regular basis. Through working with the DSTAs over an extended period of time the teacher participants developed their own knowledge base and understanding of the military lifestyle. Furthermore individual interventions assisted many students to participate more positively in their classroom program. Teacher participants also valued the opportunities made available to students through lunchtime activities.

Teacher participants recognised the benefits of DSTAs' contact with parents particularly for those students whose classroom engagement appeared to be disrupted by deployment related concerns. Moreover teacher participants appreciated the increased parent involvement in the school promoted by DSTAs as well as the increased ADF involvement with the school. An increased awareness of ADF equipment and vehicles proved to be motivating for many students and exposed students to future educational and career opportunities. Access to the ADF brass band for special school events enhanced school celebrations.

Australian society is diverse and embraces people from many cultures and backgrounds. Teachers, however, traditionally come from white, middle class backgrounds and must learn about the diverse backgrounds of the students they teach and their students' needs. Daily interactions with DSTAs contributed to teachers' professional knowledge of the military and the ADF family lifestyle thus reducing cultural barriers between schools and ADF families.

6.2.3 Student Supports Valued by the DSTAs. DSTAs took pride in the uniqueness of their role and their ability to support students by adding value to existing school processes from a position of cultural expertise. DSTAs belonged equally to two professional cultures, the ADF family culture and the school culture. By straddling these two cultures *DSTAs bridged the cultural gap between ADF families and the school* and offered a unique perspective on students' school based needs during parental deployment.

DSTAs valued the stability and security that schools offered to students during a parental deployment. DSTAs developed professional relationships with students, parents and teachers, and took pride in their own creative efforts to assist students to build on their strengths and develop coping strategies. DSTAs recognised the impact of their practice on students' wellbeing and took pride in their role of supporting students to build on their resources to manage difficult emotions and circumstances. Furthermore DSTAs recognised that their support for parents and teachers contributed indirectly to the overall support experienced by students.

DSTAs recognised their influence on the wellbeing of individual students. DSTAs appreciated the many deployment related pressures on students and through individual mentoring and group facilitation they assisted students to manage the associated challenges. Access to students through individual contact, classroom visits and lunchtime activities provided DSTAs with many opportunities to support students through conversations and coaching. Furthermore DSTAs engaged with both parents and teachers which helped to provide a coordinated approach to student support.

DSTAs appreciated the contribution of supportive peer processes to students' wellbeing during difficult times. Through the facilitation of group activities DSTAs offered opportunities for students to share their experiences with others. In turn students developed increased personal resources through making sense of their experiences and in turn supporting each other. Furthermore DSTAs sought opportunities to introduce the whole student body and classroom communities to the ADF lifestyle through competitions, projects and presentations. Whole school awareness of the ADF lifestyle further enhanced opportunities for supportive peer processes.

The strength of the DSTA program lay in the full integration of DSTAs' work into existing school processes both inside and outside the classroom. DSTAs' work operated on multiple levels within what Bronfenbrenner classified as the school microsystem and within the mesosystems connecting schools with individual ADF families, with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and with Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) family support agencies. Providing opportunities for students to engage with local ADF personnel and deployed ADF members brought an increased understanding of the ADF lifestyle to the whole school community. Furthermore DSTAs' work facilitated the generation of supportive processes that increased the level of school based support experienced by students on a daily basis. Increased student support encouraged a strong sense of connection by students with the school community as did

community links with local ADF establishments. (Refer to figure 2.2 which provides a visual representation of the study's ecological context.)

6.2.4 Activating Students' Strengths. Students from ADF families faced many maturity demands that may not have been faced by their age peers. Frequent relocations and family changes associated with deployment required students to continually adapt to changes in their lives. As a result the children from military families have often been recognised for their resilience, strong sense of community and tolerance of others (Park, 2011). However as identified in this and many other studies the benefits and opportunities of the military lifestyle also presented students with associated challenges. Through individual support and the facilitation of targeted activities the DSTA program assisted students to manage their lifestyle related challenges at school.

The Defence Room offered a secure space where students could meet with others who understood the nature of their challenges and engage in conversations that helped them to make sense of their experiences. Opportunities to participate in group programs exposed students to the experiences of peers who faced similar challenges to themselves. Involvement in supportive peer processes and access to a key adult for support created a social environment that encouraged student participation and emotional regulation (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Social and emotional support from DSTAs and peers provided a secure environment from which students could make sense of their experiences.

The flexibility of the DSTA program enabled DSTAs to respond to students on a needs basis. Through anticipating students' deployment related needs DSTAs' work was preventative and promoted student efficacy. Students were offered many opportunities to discuss their concerns and learn from experienced others. A whole school exposure to the ADF and the ADF lifestyle increased the school communities' understanding of the military lifestyle and assisted students to feel included and gain a sense of belonging at school (Easterbrooks et al., 2013).

Participants' responses to the research questions revealed specific school based practices, programs and strategies that supported students throughout a parental deployment. Despite individual school variations all DSTA participants conceptualised their programs according to common principles of inclusivity, social and emotional support and culturally relevant practices. In addition the study revealed a number of DSTA processes that supported students to develop their existing strengths and develop new skills to manage deployment related

challenges. As such the formulated research questions contributed to the achievement of the study's aims. The next section discusses the trustworthiness of the study design.

6.3 Establishing Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and transparency of research findings are matters of critical importance not only to reassure participants that they have been accurately represented but also for those readers who may wish to act on the findings for official purposes such as making evaluations or formulating policy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore the reader needs sufficient evidence to assess whether the processes used to generate the study's conclusions were satisfactory. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are appropriate to assess whether the processes of a naturalistic inquiry are satisfactory and whether the findings are grounded in the data. In order to provide such assurances ethical practices were implemented throughout this research process in line with the axioms and characteristics of a naturalistic inquiry as described in Chapter 3. The following section considers the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in relation to the conduct of this study.

6.3.1 Credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a number of strategies to increase the likelihood of credible findings. These include prolonged engagement with the research context, persistent observation, and triangulation. Prolonged engagement involves the investment of sufficient time by the researcher to absorb the complexity of the specific culture and develop trust. Denzin (2001) stresses the importance of researcher time spent on observing and critically understanding the cultural nuances of a particular group and of being open to multiple influences, sources of information, contextual factors and theories. In addition Denzin (2001) suggests that participants are more likely to be frank with researchers whom they perceived to understand their challenges and concerns. Furthermore participants are more likely to trust a researcher who keeps their confidences (Denzin, 2001). I have extensive experience of working with ADF families and of working in schools and as such I am familiar with the nuances of both cultures. Being aware of the associated risks, such as over involvement, that such familiarity can bring I consistently checked that the findings were explicitly grounded in the data.

The triangulation of data surrounding specific events also built credibility for this study. Where possible the perspectives of more than one participant were gathered in relation to a specific event or circumstance. Gaining multiple perspectives from parents, teachers and DSTAs from the same school community allowed this process to happen naturally. Furthermore on three

occasions the researcher sought a participant's permission to engage in theoretical sampling processes and invite further participants with knowledge of a particular situation to be interviewed. In these cases data relating to a particular scenario were gathered and collated into a storyline that included up to three different perspectives. In each case the storyline was returned to each participant for review. The storyline in each case was endorsed by each participant thus providing evidence for the authenticity of the analysis.

Member checks were an important tool used to verify that the analysis was acceptable to both the study participants and others with an interest in the study's findings. Feedback and discussion with interested parties also assisted with the analytical and reconstruction processes. I took several opportunities to present tentative findings to both DSTAs and school principals in a range of formal and informal settings. In all cases the recipients reported the findings to be congruent with their own experiences. The following comments were gathered during written feedback from DSTAs after a formal presentation and group discussion of the findings. The comments below represent the level of resonance felt by Townville based DSTAs with the findings:

The findings correlate heavily with all aspects of the DSTA role in particular having someone who is bridging all the gaps between all parties. Overall the main thing demonstrated is how the seemingly simple tasks carried out in the day to day role of the DSTA can have such a significant impact on so many.

Gail has demonstrated a very astute finger on the pulse. She identifies the core elements of the role and the intricacies of the DSTA and displays a depth of understanding... Key adults make a huge difference for students.

6.3.2 Transferability. Naturalistic inquirers often work with hypotheses and descriptions that belong to a particular time and context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was therefore incumbent on the researcher to provide thick description that allows an interested person to transfer the findings to another time and context in order to reach a conclusion about whether that is possible. A thick, relational description as described by Denzin (2001) brings a relationship alive by describing actions that recreate a slice of interactional experience. This thesis has offered many examples of DSTAs' practices and their professional relationships with students, parents and teachers. The first hand examples presented in Chapter 4 highlight the significant contribution that DSTAs have made to supporting students during parental deployment at a particular time in history. The decision about whether these

findings are transferable to other aspects of DSTAs' practice, for example student mobility, and in other Australian locations, is left for the reader to determine.

6.3.3 Dependability. The dependability of an inquiry relies on clear processes that allow claims to be justified (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have kept electronic records of all stages of the research process. Interviews were voice recorded and transcribed for future reference. The outcomes of coding processes are recorded and stored electronically as are the outcomes of the reconstruction process such as themes. Copies of analytical tools such as coding matrices (Bohm, 2004; Charmaz, 2006) are all recorded and stored electronically as are memos written throughout the research process.

6.3.4 Confirmability. The confirmability of a study is best assessed by what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as an audit trail. Evidence of the raw data, data reduction and reconstruction processes and process notes allow an auditor to confirm the trustworthiness of the research processes. Electronic records confirm that the findings are grounded in the data and that the applications of code and category labels are logical and appropriate. My response to these issues is demonstrated in Chapter 4 where direct quotes from study participants are used to illustrate the specific themes that emerged from the analytic and reconstruction processes.

Charmaz (2006) suggests that labels attached to codes and categories need to be useful for people in everyday life while also contributing to the larger body of knowledge. Charmaz (2006) also warns against researchers imposing their own a priori theories on the data rather than letting the findings emerge from the data. To avoid the imposition of personal bias I have consistently referenced codes and themes against the raw data to ensure accurate representation. The constant comparison of findings with the raw data has built consistency amongst the findings.

6.4 Implications of this Study

This study is the first to explore the nature of DSTA work through a naturalistic inquiry. As such the study has revealed the depth and complexity of the DSTA role and the contribution of the DSTA program to assisting students from ADF families to manage the challenges of a parental deployment. The findings demonstrate the depth of cultural knowledge that DSTAs have constructed with regards to the support needs of students throughout a parental deployment and of related age-appropriate supportive structures and practices. However evidence from this study may not be indicative of DSTAs' work at a national level. Further research would

help to clarify whether these research findings are more broadly applicable to DSTAs' work at a national level and if the themes and DSTA role functions that emerged from the data are transferable to other areas of DSTA responsibility such as supporting student mobility.

DSTA priorities differ amongst different military locations and within different schools. For example, schools in proximity to ADF training bases experience high rates of student mobility while parental deployments are not common. Therefore DSTA work in these areas is focussed towards supporting high levels of student mobility. Implicit in the findings is the complexity of the issues dealt with by the DSTAs throughout a parental deployment. Moreover DSTAs are continuously called on in their schools as subject matter experts on the needs of students with parents who are deployed. Parents in turn rely on DSTAs to represent their children's needs to teachers and the school administration. It is therefore incumbent on the Australian Defence Organisation to ensure that DSTAs' training requirements are researched and addressed.

6.5 Broader Applications of DSTA Practices

Practices developed to support students from ADF families are potentially applicable to other students who are also experiencing challenges related their families' circumstances. DSTA work demonstrates that it is possible for school based practitioners with relevant cultural knowledge and skills to integrate into the school community and capitalise on existing school processes to meet the specific needs of their targeted cultural group. Normal school processes provide opportunities for practitioners with in-depth cultural knowledge to advocate for families and offer a school based resource for students, families and other staff members during the school day. Employment on the school staff brings an understanding of the school culture that is only available to school employees (Huebner & Mancini, 2005).

Many schools that employ DSTAs have widely adopted DSTAs' practices of welcoming and farewelling students to support all students who are mobile in their school. Similar consideration is needed for students who experience long periods of parental absence associated with dangerous occupations for instance bush fire response teams. Strategies employed by DSTAs to assist students to manage the emotional demands of a parental deployment are also applicable to the children of emergency services and mining industry employees as indicated in work carried out by Kudler and Porter (2013). Furthermore, the school responses described in this study can potentially be used in cases of recent family separation or divorce where children are learning to adjust to a new family configuration and its associated stresses. DSTAs provide a nationally recognised school based contact for students and parents from ADF families. The security of knowing that schools employ DSTAs

provides a sense of stability and security for families during periods of mobility and deployment (Chandra et al., 2010). A national program also increases the likelihood that initiatives and ideas are shared amongst schools in different geographical areas (De Pedro et al., 2014b).

Chandra et al. (2010) and De Pedro et al. (2014b) identified schools to be places of security for students during parental deployment and the DSTA program contributes to this sense of security for students from ADF families. DSTAs are recognised nationally by ADF families as having an understanding of the ADF lifestyle as well as a professional understanding of school operations (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2011). Furthermore DSTAs are integrated into Australian school communities and reach out to the ADF community with a unified purpose of supporting students throughout parental deployment cycles.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

This thesis reports on the findings of a small study involving 47 participants and therefore the results cannot be generalised. At the time of the data collection the participants were located in Townsville, a regional Queensland city that is home to a major Army base and Air Force base. The DSTA work discussed in this study does not necessarily represent the experiences of DSTAs working in other areas of Australia.

As a regional city that is known amongst ADF personnel as a “garrison city” the experiences of ADF families living in Townsville are often quite different from their experiences when living in other locations. In addition the percentage of students from ADF families that make up school communities varies greatly across the nation and influences the degree to which ADF family factors are felt by school communities. Moreover military bases are more prominent features of regional communities such as Townsville than they are in some other areas such as capital cities.

All parent participants were the female partners of male ADF members. The increasing number of female ADF members, single parents, same sex couples and dual serving parents in the ADF are not represented in this study. Student voices are also absent. Student voices would have contributed a valuable perspective to this study allowing a greater insight into how children perceived their experiences of parental absence as well of support structures offered to them at school. However it was not possible for ethical reasons to include students directly in the study. Because children and young people are considered to be a special group, a study including student interviews would require a separate study proposal for consideration by the

Australian Defence Human Research Ethics Committee (ADHREC). In addition further investigation of participants' perspectives on the use of social media during would have highlighted would have offered insight into the influences of technological advances on the deployment experience. Other theoretical perspectives such as connectedness and wellbeing could also have enhanced the study. In addition the inclusion of quantitative data could have added depth to the study.

I worked with and professionally supported the North Queensland DSTAs prior to the commencement of this study and during the data collection phase. As such it is possible that "unintentional bias" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p.290) may have influenced my methods. However I was aware of this risk and consistently ensured that the findings were grounded in the data.

6.7 Recommendations for Further Research

This study has highlighted some of the outcomes of the DSTA program, the benefits of the program for ADF families and also for schools, and also some of the challenges faced by DSTAs due to the complex nature their work. Further investigation of the nature of DSTA work at a national level and across the totality of the DSTA role description would be beneficial to DSTAs when they gain employment as a DSTA. In addition a nationally based study would provide a broader perhaps more nuanced view of the DSTA role.

Due to the breadth of the DSTA role further investigation of DSTAs' professional development needs is required. A sound knowledge base of the military lifestyle, communication skills and educational knowledge are all required to perform the DSTA role well. In addition high level interpersonal and intrapersonal skills are required. While the DSTA position is school based and supervised within the school the position benefits the families of ADF members and as such the Australian Defence Organisation's (ADO) family support agencies have a strong interest in ensuring that DSTAs are adequately trained. Further investigation of DSTA training needs and the national facilitation of a relevant training program would add to the professionalism of the DSTA role.

Australian studies into the needs of students from ADF families are limited in number. Further Australian based investigations of the needs of ADF families, particularly children, would greatly enhance the DSTAs' knowledge base. Australian students' perspectives across a broad age range would be particularly valuable to aid DSTAs with the development and delivery of their school based program and would also inform teachers and school principals of the unique needs of students from ADF families. In addition areas for future research have arisen from

this study including the influence of social media on children's experience of parental deployment, the influence of more mothers being deployed by the ADF on children's responses and the additional requirements of students with special needs during the deployment of a parent.

6.8 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a synopsis of the research process that has been described throughout the preceding chapters and to demonstrate that the aims of the study were met through the application of an appropriate methodology. Through an evaluation of the research design and a presentation of conclusions drawn from the study's findings the implications of this research along with its limitations and potential areas of further study have been identified. In doing so this dissertation has been demonstrated to make a contribution to the existing knowledge base concerning student support during parental deployment. Chapter 7, the final chapter of this dissertation, presents an overview that describes the relationship among the following: aspects of my previous professional practice as a Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO) while working for the Defence Community Organisation (DCO), related contemporary Australian and international literature, the study's findings, and the two journal articles and conference paper that are included in Appendix H.

Chapter Seven

Overview

7.1 Introduction

This portfolio of work includes a 50,000 word dissertation, a conference paper and two journal articles. These documents represent my investigations into student support during parental deployment, an area of study closely connected to my previous employment as the Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO) with the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) in North Queensland. One aspect of my role as a REDLO was to liaise with Townsville schools and education systems to generate an increased understanding amongst educators of the implications of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) lifestyle for students' education.

Prior to my employment as the REDLO from January 1999 I had worked in the education sector for 25 years in a variety of roles. From past teaching experience I was aware of the potential impact of school mobility on students' learning. In addition from working with parents from Australian Defence Force (ADF) families as a REDLO I had become more acutely aware of not only the education needs of students who live a mobile lifestyle but also the students' mobility related social and emotional needs.

To generate a greater understanding of how schools and families could work together to support mobile students I initiated a Mobility Task Force comprised of parents and teachers. Outcomes from the Mobility Task Force included the preparation of a "Welcome Book" for new students, a "Goodbye Book" for students leaving the school and the employment of parent volunteers in participating schools to facilitate welcoming and farewelling activities for new and departing students.

The Mobility Task Force researched evidence based strategies and resources designed to support mobile students. In addition members of the Mobility Task Force liaised with the principal of Puckapunyal Primary School, a school located on an Australian army base in Victoria, a school that had established a range of mobility support activities for their students. During a personal visit the principal of Puckapunyal Primary School spoke to Townsville principals about his experiences of supporting mobile students. His visit coincided with the launch of a DCO study into the needs of mobile students.

The DCO and DEST (2002) conducted research using focus groups in several Australian centres, including Townsville. One recommendation of the study's report *Changing schools: Its impact on learning* (DCO & DEST, 2002) was the employment in school of Defence School Transition

Aides (DSTAs) at a national level. As a result DCO funded the introduction of the DSTA program into Australian schools in July 2001. REDLOs in each state and territory worked with schools to implement the DSTA program and offered a program of professional development and local networking opportunities for DSTAs. DSTAs employed in Townsville schools continued the work of the Mobility Task Force. Furthermore in my role as a REDLO I facilitated regular networking and professional development for DSTAs in Townsville.

The DSTA program was introduced into Australian schools during a period of increasing ADF support to other countries such as East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. In turn many schools began to experience increased support needs from students with parents who are deployed. While the DSTA program had been introduced to support students with mobility related needs parents and teachers called on DSTAs to also support students with deployment related needs. As the REDLO I worked closely with school principals and DSTAs to develop this new and unanticipated aspect of DSTA work. Over time DSTAs gained experience in the field of deployment support and developed student resources and school based support processes.

The high level of demand on DSTAs, at a national level, for deployment related student support became apparent in the 2007 evaluation of the DSTA program (DCO, 2007). Following a recommendation from this review deployment support was officially recognised as an additional component of DSTAs' duties. Feedback from ADF families, school principals and military commanders in a subsequent DSTA evaluation (DCO, 2011) expressed a high level of satisfaction with deployment support offered by the DSTA program. However little was documented to describe the nature of DSTAs' work during parental deployment.

My work as a REDLO included the oversight of the Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) program in Townsville schools. It was therefore necessary that I gained a greater insight into the potential role of DSTAs to support students during parental deployment. This study aids that requirement by investigating the specific aspects of DSTAs' work that were considered by parents, teachers and DSTAs to contribute to students' wellbeing during parental deployment. This overview introduces the connections that I have identified between my previous professional practice as a REDLO, related research conducted in the last fifteen years and the documents submitted for examination.

7.2 Implementing the DSTA Program into North Queensland Schools

In 2001 the proposed DSTA role was new to schools and unique in its design. I initially gauged interest from local school principals and undertook negotiations with principals prior to the

introduction of the DSTA program into several schools. The program has expanded over time and currently employs DSTAs in over 20 Townsville schools.

DSTAs are employed as a member of the school staff and they are supervised by the school principal or deputy principal. I negotiated the terms of DSTA employment with school principals within each school setting. I inducted each new DSTA into the DSTA role and provided them with on-going professional support, networking opportunities and facilitated professional development. In turn the DSTA role developed uniquely in each school and varied according to the school size and sector, the number of students from ADF families enrolled in the school, and individual school needs.

The purpose of the DSTA program as outlined in the DSTA program guidelines (DCO, 2015, p.4) is stated below:

The purpose of the Defence School Transition Aide Program is to facilitate the best possible educational outcomes for children of Australian Defence Force members through on-site, direct and flexible assistance to students, parents, teachers and other support services.

Since the introduction of the DSTA program in 2001 a greater understanding of the DSTA role during parental deployment has evolved amongst educators and Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) services. DSTAs have, in collaboration with REDLOs, contributed greatly to a professional understanding of the parameters of their role. Furthermore the increasing availability of contemporary international research literature has assisted DSTAs to conceptualise the nature of the deployment support that they offer to students on a daily basis. Furthermore as the REDLO for DCO North Queensland I worked collaboratively with REDLO colleagues from other states and territories and DCO headquarters staff to formalise the professional guidelines for the DSTA role. Furthermore I believed that further research was needed to articulate the parameters of the DSTA role and to learn more about how the DSTA program contributed to student support during parental deployment.

Australian students' responses to parental deployment, reported to me anecdotally by DSTAs and parents, were comparable to many of the findings reported in American research literature. For example DSTAs reported that students demonstrated an increased need for support from key adults and peers as recognised by Easterbrooks et al. (2013), Mmari et al., (2009) and Chandra et al., (2010). Furthermore DSTAs described students' responses to the stages of the deployment cycle that were documented by De Voe and Ross (2012) and Pincus et al., (2007). In addition while I was confident that the Townsville based DSTAs were

performing well in the area of deployment support for students, I also believed that the complexity of their work was not reflected in the DSTA program guidelines. For example the requirement for DSTAs to provide deployment support to students is listed broadly in a single statement in the DSTA guidelines (DCO, 2015, p.13) as:

Supporting students at school during times of parental absence from home for service requirements.

To gain a greater understanding of DSTAs' deployment support work I facilitated two small studies in Townsville schools. The first study was conducted during a large deployment of Townsville based ADF members to Afghanistan from June 2009 until March 2010. DSTAs observed students' responses to deployment throughout the study period. DSTAs' observations suggested that up to one quarter of students in their schools experienced behavioural problems, social withdrawal, increased absenteeism or a decline in academic progress during parental deployment. The second small study was conducted during another large deployment between August 2011 and May 2012.

The purpose of the second small study was to gather information on the nature of DSTAs' support work for students with a parent who is deployed. Findings revealed that DSTAs supported students by enhancing peer support networks, facilitating communication between the school, families and defence, promoting whole school awareness of family contributions to the ADF's mission and facilitating individual student support. These findings suggested to me that a more comprehensive study of DSTAs' work during deployment was called for and I enrolled in my Doctor of Education studies in July 2012 to begin the necessary work.

The findings from the second small study were reported in a paper written during the early stages of my candidature. This paper discussed some of my early understandings of the research problem before I had collected and analysed all of the data for the dissertation. The findings from the small project were nonetheless supported by the early data collection stage of the research study. This paper *Student support during parental deployment* (Macdonald & Boon, 2014) was presented to the Australian Association of Education Research (AARE) conference in December 2014. This paper recognised that the responses of Australian students to deployment, such as a decline in student wellbeing, academic progress and school attendance, were consistent with student responses reported in several American studies (De Pedro et al., 2011)

7.3 Contemporary Research Literature concerning Children during Parental Deployment

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan led to research interest, particularly from America, into the effects of parental deployment on children's health and education. Studies have revealed that students with parents deployed to a war zone are more vulnerable to increased levels of stress and anxiety (Card et al., 2011, De Pedro et al., 2011), health problems (Mansfield et al., 2011), behavioural disorders (Chartrand et al., 2008), and academic under achievement (Richardson et al., 2011). However little is documented about how schools support students' additional needs during this time (Brendel et al., 2013).

Two American studies that stand out to me as paving the way, at their time of publication, for further research are *Adjustments among adolescents in military families when a parent is deployed* (Huebner & Mancini, 2005) and *The children of military service members: Challenges, supports, and future educational research* (De Pedro et al., 2011). Each report led to a number of further studies that have both supported and added to the findings.

Huebner and Mancini (2005) presented the report *Adjustments among adolescents in military families when a parent is deployed* to the Military Family Research Institute and the American Department of Defense: Quality of Life Office. This report presented the findings from interviews with 107 adolescents with parents who were deployed conducted in 14 focus groups. The aim of Huebner and Mancini's research was to gain an understanding of adolescents' experiences during parental deployment. The findings indicated that as well as the usual array of normative stressors the adolescents expressed critical concerns that would dramatically alter their lives. Many of the research findings were of direct relevance to Australian educators. For example the study reported that while adolescents recognised their own needs for support they perceived a lack of understanding of their needs by teachers and school counsellors.

Huebner and Mancini (2005) concluded that an intentional focus on adolescents' needs was needed from key support people in young peoples' lives. Huebner and Mancini (2008) followed up on the report with a paper offering specific support strategies for use by professionals working with youth during a parental deployment. This work was further supplemented by a literature review by Esposito-Smythers et al. (2011) that identified specific stressors for youth at different phases of the deployment cycle and offered evidenced based practices to support young people to manage their deployment related challenges. Findings

from these studies resonated with the first hand experiences of DSTAs and provided useful strategies for DSTAs in incorporate into their practice.

Further research building on Huebner and Mancini's initial report has focussed on deployment related responses of children across all age groups. Studies have drawn on a variety of data sources including educational and health data bases, standardised psychological instruments and qualitative data. In total this body of research indicates that students of all ages have increased support needs during a parental deployment. Many of these published papers have recommended an increased level of community-based support for children during parental deployments.

Another important paper, published by De Pedro et al. (2011), recognised the knowledge gap in education research regarding school based support for students with parents who are deployed. De Pedro et al. (2011) reviewed findings from numerous research studies that were conducted in non-educational disciplines but were nonetheless of direct relevance to children's education. The literature review concluded that parental deployment was a stressor that impacted on children's educational outcomes. In addition De Pedro et al. (2011) proposed a heuristic model to guide the direction of future educational research from a range of perspectives.

Since the publication of De Pedro et al.'s (2011) literature review a number of papers relating to children's schooling during parental deployment have been published. For example the *Future of Children* journal (Fall, 2013) published several conceptual papers in a special edition dedicated to students' deployment related needs. These papers contributed to an increased understanding of the broadly based professional responses needed to ensure that children's deployment related needs were identified and addressed.

Several research studies accessing educational data bases have provided an additional understanding of students' deployment related needs. Using data from state based testing results across two states Richardson et al. (2011) demonstrated that the grades of students dropped when their parents were deployed for a total of 19 months or more. Another study conducted by De Pedro et al.(2015) used data from the Californian Healthy Kids Survey finding that while military connected students experience more negative mental health outcomes in comparison to civilian students multiple components of a positive school climate, such as positive teacher student relationships and peer support, provide protective factors for students' wellbeing.

Two qualitative studies conducted with school staff have also contributed an understanding of how some American schools are supporting students during parental deployment. Garner et al. (2014) interviewed 74 elementary school staff members in focus groups. The study reported discovered that none of the eight schools involved in the study collected deployment related student data and only 38 percent of teachers reported that they felt emotionally equipped to support the emotional needs of students with a parent who is deployed. Garner et al. (2014) called for increased school-wide sensitivity to students' deployment related needs.

De Pedro et al. (2014b) interviewed 31 stakeholders involved with the education of military connected students to investigate the nature of school based deployment support. "Home grown practices" (De Pedro et al, 2104b, p.12) such as student support groups, were discovered to be existing in some American schools. However, as yet the effectiveness of these practices has not been evaluated. The study concluded that in general American schools, at the time of publication, did not cater well for the needs of students during parental deployment.

The availability of contemporary research assisted me to identify my research problem and to also identify a gap in the current knowledge. Currently there is a lack of research documenting how schools support students during parental deployment (Brendel et al., 2013). Furthermore research in this field representing the context of Australian schools is both lacking and required. From my professional role as a REDLO I had developed a tacit understanding of the research context. This knowledge assisted me to design an appropriate study to achieve my study aim of gaining a greater understanding of effective school based deployment support strategies. In addition within my REDLO role I had potential access to study participants and internal DCO knowledge.

7.4 Research Design

As the DSTA program had received high satisfaction ratings from parents, school principals and military commanders (DCO, 2007; DCO, 2011) I selected the DSTA program as the unit of analysis for a qualitative research study. The aims of my study were to:

- gain an understanding of specific school based processes and practices that support students during a parental deployment;
- identify those programs and strategies that are employed by DSTAs and contribute to a sense of student wellbeing during a parental deployment;

- identify processes used by DSTAs to encourage students to develop strengths that enable them to fully participate in their educational program during their parents' absence.

I selected a qualitative research design to address the study's aims. A naturalistic inquiry as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered an emergent design using qualitative methods to generate themes to map onto a theoretical framework for explaining the data. A naturalistic inquiry utilised tacit knowledge to reveal the nuances of multiple realities. As the influences on students' responses to parental deployment came from multiple influences I selected participants from the key stakeholders groups of parents, teachers and DSTAs to participate in the study. Participant selection was completed in negotiation with school principals. I kept the principals informed of the study's findings as they emerged from the data.

The DSTA program is integrated into both the military community and the education community and this is reflected in the study's design. The inclusion of perspectives from parents and teachers, as well as DSTAs, represents the broad based community investment in supporting students during parental deployment. To represent the nature of the DSTA program and DSTA work holistically Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) guided the study and acted as a lens through which to view the findings.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development postulates that proximal processes drive human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Proximal processes are described as enduring forms of interaction between characteristics of the developing person and elements of the environmental context. The environmental context is conceptualised as interrelated systems and is situated within a specific historical context. Furthermore when there is a perceived congruence between the systems, such as home and school, student outcomes are strengthened. Bronfenbrenner's theory was particularly relevant to this study as it recognised the critical influence of the family context and proximal processes on children's educational engagement and general development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

As my previous professional experience and tacit knowledge contributed to the research task the axioms of a naturalistic research design (Chapter 3.3) supported the study's aims. Furthermore the development of a theoretical framework would assist to guide DSTA deployment support work. The emergent design employed for this study offered design flexibility that enabled the research process to progress smoothly.

7.5 The Dissertation

The major document in this portfolio is a 50,000 word dissertation documenting the entirety of the research process. The research design reflected the ecological framework of the DSTA program and the findings reflect my current understanding of the research problem. The work conducted throughout this research built on and integrated with my professional knowledge and experience gained while working as a REDLO with DCO North Queensland.

The first two years of the study were conducted part-time while I was working as the REDLO for DCO North Queensland. As this study was beneficial for DCO as an organisation my manager approved study leave allowing me time to conduct the data collection interviews during work time. I completed the final two years of the project full time to allow sufficient time to attend fully to the research tasks.

My employment at DCO assisted me greatly in establishing and conducting the project. My professional relationships with school principals were particularly helpful in facilitating access to study participants. Employment with DCO gave me familiarity with DCO policies and relevant professional resources such as access to the defence library and internal websites. Professional involvement in the establishment of the DSTA program provided me with valuable “insider” knowledge of the philosophy and operational intent of the DSTA program. Moreover my work with ADF families had familiarised me with aspects of the ADF lifestyle.

The concept of an identifiable ADF family culture emerged from the data. In this context culture is defined as the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular group of people that distinguishes them from other groups. Furthermore through their work with students and parents DSTAs had integrated aspects of ADF culture, such as pride in ADF service, into their work with students. The degree to which DSTAs have recognized ADF culture is recognized in the major theme that emerged from the data: *DSTA bridge the cultural gap between ADF families and schools.*

The research findings have been discussed and negotiated with study participants and school principals throughout the research process. The findings presented in the dissertation are accepted by the study participants as an accurate representation of their contributions to the study and an accurate reflection of DSTA support offered to students throughout a parental deployment.

7.6 Journal Paper

Since my enrolment in the Doctor of Education degree I have had a paper published in the *Children Australia* journal (Macdonald, 2016). This paper, titled *Schools based support for students with a parent on military deployment*, was written during the early stages of data analysis and described school based support offered to students during a parental deployment from the perspectives of parents, teachers and DSTAs.

7.7 Conclusion

This study concluded that DSTAs capitalise on existing school processes to address the specific needs of students from ADF families during a parental deployment. This was achieved by offering a culturally aware point of contact in the school for parents, practical support to teachers, and a readily available source of support for students. The Defence Room offered students a safe environment where students gathered to meet with other students and DSTAs to engage in supportive processes. DSTAs were able to provide a continuous culturally aware service to all members of the school community as they were employed as a member of the school staff and participated in school processes.

DSTAs generated supportive processes within the school community through sharing cultural knowledge with teachers and facilitating whole school projects and presentations to the student body. In turn the school community gained a greater awareness and understanding of the needs of students during parental deployment. Group activities facilitated by DSTAs generated supportive peer processes amongst students with parents who were deployed. In addition the strategies employed by the DSTAs to support students from ADF families are also relevant to other groups of students experiencing challenging family circumstances.

The major stressors experienced by students with parents who are deployed are separation from parents for long periods of time and concerns for parent safety. Similar stressors are experienced by students with parents employed in other dangerous occupations such as emergency services and bush firefighting. Furthermore students experiencing family separations for other reasons, such as family breakdown or parents employed in fly-in, fly-out roles, would benefit from additional support at school.

The teacher participants recognised the benefits to their own practice of enhanced cultural knowledge gained from working with the DSTAs. Increased cultural awareness gained by teachers helps students to feel understood and supported. Attention to students' cultural, social and emotional needs supports students' holistic development. Furthermore interactions

with aware adults can assist students to make sense of their experiences and feelings. In addition teachers' access to cultural expertise contributed to teacher participants feeling supported in their primary roles of education students and communicating with parents.

Peer support from other students with a parent who is deployed was demonstrated to be particularly helpful for students. This finding suggests that students from other identifiable cultural or minority groups within the school would also benefit from opportunities to engage with students in a similar situation to themselves. For example students from particular ethnic cultural groups or mobile students are likely to benefit from facilitated activities that enable them to meet other students in similar circumstances to themselves.

Further Australian research into the needs of students from ADF families and the work of DSTAs would arguably assist schools to further explore the needs of students experiencing stress within the family. Moreover this research would be enhanced if accompanied by an investigation of teachers' related professional development needs. While teachers gain awareness of the ADF lifestyle from their work with DSTAs, a deeper understanding of teachers' professional development needs is required. Moreover DSTAs' professional development requirements need further identification and attention.

The portfolio submitted for examination reflects my investigations into school based student support during parental deployment. My investigations have built on many years of professional experience and a growing body of international research in similar and related fields. In total this portfolio of work makes a valuable contribution to the growing body of knowledge related to student support during parental deployment.

The prepared documents are closely linked to my previous employment as a REDLO with DCO North Queensland. In my REDLO role I worked closely with DSTAs and provided them with professional guidance and support. Therefore gaining a conceptual understanding of DSTA work, through a research process, was advantageous to the REDLO role. A conceptual understanding of deployment support will also assist school principals as they guide DSTAs in their professional duties. In addition this research knowledge will assist DSTAs and their supervisors to explore the professionalization of their roles.

The work contained within this portfolio contributes an Australian perspective to the current body of knowledge related to student support during parent deployment. This is the first study to investigate the nature of DSTA work and its contribution to ADF families and schools through a rigorous qualitative process. This body of knowledge is an area of growing concern

in Australia as ADF and allied forces are faced with continuing requests for international military support to countries in need. In the current historical context it is likely that children from ADF families will continue to be called upon to play their part in supporting the quest for international peace. As such the findings from this study will assist school communities to build their capacity to assist students from ADF families to manage the challenges associated with parental deployment.

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Appendix A: Focused Code Summary

Coordinating resources

Seeking information, collating data, sharing knowledge

Recognising student needs

Age-related responses, gender-related responses, recognising special needs, individual support needs, recognizing family factors

Conducting professional relationships

Communicating with parents, communicating with teachers, responding to students, parents and teachers, negotiating with teachers, advocating for students, anticipating students' needs, providing practical support to teachers, collaborating with teachers

Understanding the deployment cycle

Creating safe space, providing emotional support, anticipating and responding to transition needs, reframing misconceptions, recognizing family dynamics, promoting self-care strategies, promoting communication, encouraging help-seeking, facilitating peer support opportunities, facilitating whole school projects

Facilitating school – community connections

Connecting with families, connecting with the ADF, liaising with ADO agencies

Appendix B: Bohm's Coding Paradigm for Exploring Themes

Context (cause)	Phenomenon (condition)	Strategy	Consequence
Primary DSTAs			
Children respond in unique ways that are influenced by their age, nature and family dynamics	Additional student needs place pressure on school resources	DSTAs monitor student wellbeing and implement targeted proactive and responsive strategies to address student needs DSTAs work with teachers to support students	Students are supported to develop positive coping skills Teachers gain an understanding of student needs and respond accordingly
Secondary DSTAs			
Students respond in individual ways	Students have increased emotional and practical needs	DSTAs provide a comprehensive, integrated and flexible program DSTAs work closely with teachers DSTAs assist students to meet their academic and social obligations	Students develop skills to meet their academic obligations and to cope
Primary teachers			
Students experience increased emotional pressures	Pressing emotional needs interfere with learning unless addressed	DSTA work compliments an emotionally and supportive learning environment	With support students learn to their potential

Context (cause)	Phenomenon (condition)	Strategy	Consequence
Secondary teachers			
Teachers find a balance between expectations for students to reach their academic potential and addressing student vulnerabilities	Adolescents have unique and complex needs that need to be addressed and supported	Principal leadership is vital DSTAs assist students to reach their potential through flexible structures DSTAs provide professional development for teachers	Students continue at school to complete year 12 DSTAs support teachers Student support is integrated holistically
Parents			
Families undergo major ecological changes	Family members adjust to environmental changes	The DSTA program offers social and emotional support for students and parents within the school environment	Students develop positive coping skills within emotionally and socially supportive family and school environments Students remain engaged in academic program

Appendix C: Example of Charmaz’s Axial Coding Paradigm for Exploring Individual Codes and Themes

Causal conditions	Context	Actions / Interactions	Consequences
<p>Significant family changes, parent absence, changed dynamics, busier parent</p> <p>Individual student characteristics eg. nature, age, gender, special needs</p> <p>Parents alert school</p> <p>Parents maintain contact with DSTAs</p> <p>Changes in classroom behaviours</p> <p>Higher needs</p> <p>Level of communication with parent who is deployed</p>	<p>Teachers alerted</p> <p>Regular individual monitoring</p> <p>Group activities</p> <p>Small groups</p> <p>School projects</p>	<p>Continuous dialogue between school and families</p> <p>Student misconceptions identified at school and communicated to family</p>	<p>Students are identified early and supported</p> <p>Students have point of contact for additional support</p> <p>Parents have point of contact for additional concerns</p>
	Phenomenon	<p>Teachers alerted to student concerns</p> <p>Students’ classes informed of deployment</p> <p>Appropriate intervention strategies employed as necessary</p>	<p>Teachers have access to practical support</p> <p>Peer support processes through group activities</p>
	Intervening conditions	<p>Schools and families work together to support students</p>	<p>Whole school awareness through projects, presentations</p>
	<p>Dialogue between family and school</p> <p>Teachers awareness and sensitivity</p> <p>Practical support for teachers</p>		

Appendix D: Themes Mapped onto the DSTAs' Role Functions

Bridging the cultural gap between ADF families and schools by:			
Reducing cultural barriers	Constructing cultural knowledge	Integrating knowledge into practice	Building school capacity
Connecting with students Engaging parents Partnering with teachers	Responding to age Considering special needs Noticing gender related responses Considering family factors Understanding the deployment cycle Recognising students' vulnerabilities	Facilitating peer connections Mentoring students Supporting high needs Helping students to make sense of experiences Collaborating with teachers	Engaging the school community Advocating for cultural needs Generating school-family dialogue Building school-ADF connections Integrating into school operations

Appendix E: Themes Mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's Theory

Process	Person	Context	Time
<p>COMMUNICATION / INTERPERSONAL:</p> <p>Bridging the cultural gap between ADF families and schools</p> <p>Connecting with students</p> <p>Engaging parents</p> <p>Partnering with teachers</p> <p>Recognising student vulnerabilities</p> <p>Mentoring students</p> <p>Helping students to make sense of experience</p> <p>FACILITATION:</p> <p>Facilitating peer connections</p> <p>Collaborating with teachers</p> <p>Generating school-family dialogue</p>	<p>Responding to age</p> <p>Considering special needs</p> <p>Noticing gender related responses</p>	<p>SCHOOL:</p> <p>Engaging the school community</p> <p>Advocating for cultural needs</p> <p>Building school-ADF links</p> <p>Integrating into school operations</p> <p>CLASSROOM:</p> <p>Collaborating with teachers</p> <p>Supporting high needs</p> <p>DEFENCE ROOM:</p> <p><i>Facilitating peer connections</i></p> <p>FAMILY:</p> <p>Considering family factors</p>	<p>Understanding the deployment cycle</p>

Appendix F: Matrix of DSTAs' Role Functions and Bronfenbrenner's Theory

DSTA role functions / Bronfenbrenner's theory	Reducing cultural barriers	Constructing cultural knowledge	Integrating knowledge and practice	Building school capacity
Process	<p>COMMUNICATION/ INTERPERSONAL: Bridging the gap between ADF families and the school</p> <p>Connecting with students</p> <p>Engaging parents</p> <p>Partnering with teachers</p>		<p>INTERPERSONAL: Mentoring students</p> <p>Helping students to make sense of experiences</p>	<p>FACILITATION: Advocating for cultural needs</p> <p>Generating school-family dialogue</p>
Person		<p>Recognising students' vulnerabilities</p> <p>Responding to age</p> <p>Considering special needs</p> <p>Noticing gender related responses</p>		
Context		<p>Considering family factors</p>	<p>CLASSROOM: Collaborating with teachers</p> <p>Supporting high needs</p> <p>DEFENCE ROOM: Facilitating peer connections</p>	<p>SCHOOL: Engaging the school community</p> <p>Promoting school-ADF connections</p> <p>Integrating into school operations</p>
Time		<p>Understanding the deployment cycle</p>		

Appendix G Letter of Introduction and Consent Form

Ms Gail Macdonald
EdD student
School of Education

Dear

In addition to my role as the Regional Education Liaison Officer with the Defence Community Organisation, I am enrolled at James Cook University as a post graduate student. I am currently embarking on a research project that will document the support provided to students when they have a parent deployed on overseas military operation. I hope to gain the perspectives of teachers, Defence School Transition Aides / Defence Transition Mentors (DSTAs / DTM) and parents. For this reason I am seeking your support to interview a teacher on your staff who has taught students whose parents have deployed and your DSTA / DTM at a time convenient to both you and them. I am also interested in interviewing school principals that have a particular interest in this topic.

Each interview is expected to take between 30 and 45 minutes. No person interviewed or their school will be identified in the final report. These interviews will help me to understand the challenges faced by students during a parental deployment and gain knowledge on the support measures provided to them in the school setting. I will report on the outcomes of programs and strategies that are seen as most beneficial by the three groups of adults who have a vested interest in the education and well-being of the students.

I have included a copy of a consent form for you to complete providing me with informed consent to interview a teacher and DSTA on your staff and to use their interview transcript as data to be analysed for the study. All participants will be offered a copy of their interview transcript for confirmation if desired. Any required changes will be made. If you are interested in your school participating in the project please contact me and/or return the completed consent form in the envelope provided. Please note that participation in this project is voluntary and is in no way related to the funding process for the DSTA program.

The conduct of this study has ethics approval from the Australian Defence Human Research Ethics Committee (ADHREC), Queensland Education, Catholic Education and James Cook University.

Please contact me directly if you would like more information. My contact details are above. Should you agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return it in the enclosed, self-addressed envelope. Please contact myself, my academic supervisor Dr. Helen Boon (helen.boon@jcu.edu.au; Tel: 47816030) or the JCU ethics committee on ethics@jcu.edu.au with any concerns or questions.

I hope you will find merit in this project and give it your support. Ideally I would like to conduct interviews during 2014.

Yours sincerely

Gail Macdonald

30 January 2014

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Appendix H: Publications

Article 1:

Macdonald, G. F. (2016). School based support for students with a parent on military deployment. *Children Australia, 2016*(Apr), 1-9. doi:10.1017/cha.2016.9

Article 2:

Macdonald, G. F., & Boon, H. J. (2014). *Student support during parental deployment*. Paper presented at the Australian Association of Research in Education (AARE) annual conference, Brisbane.