

Chapter Seven

Administering Educational Resources

This final chapter deals with the administration of material resources. It suggests procedures that small states can adopt to establish needs, to determine priorities and to procure the required equipment. It also suggests measures that senior educational administrators in small states can take to avoid unfair practices which create suspicions of malpractices and cause unnecessary tension in situations where incomplete information and rumours travel fast. In the confined circumstances of small states, rumours create doubts about correct procedures and raise questions on the credibility of honest officials. Finally, it deals with the merits of small school-based resource units and the need of avoiding dependence on restrictive foreign sources.

Encouraging Innovators

A major challenge facing the senior education administrator in small states stems from the chronic shortage of funds for the resources required by the various sectors of the educational system. Administrative attitudes and bureaucratic procedures which are often a relic of the bigger ex-colonial power compound the problem. These render most cumbersome the process of acquiring and distributing available resources. Some officials are so obtuse that even when clear evidence that educational materials provide valuable and long-term effects, and that equipment compensates for the dire shortage of staff, they still obstruct or delay procurement. Such behaviour usually originates from officials who:

- a. Have conservative views and reject innovations;
- b. Do not fully understand and appreciate the value of the equipment and therefore do not see the need for it;
- c. Lack the required knowledge and skills to operate new equipment and see it as a threat;

- d. Are too lazy to carry out the necessary work and hide behind bureaucratic red-tape.

Two or three obstructive officials can clog the resource plans of a small educational system and, therefore, it is up to the responsible senior education administrator to encourage the more enterprising officials and to neutralize delaying tactics. The latter should not be allowed to wear out the enthusiasm of their progressive colleagues.

Preserving the System

The insecurity of managers often stems from fear of the unknown and discomfort with ambiguity. This leads to a lack of flexibility and many rigid rules and regulations. Preserving the system tends to be more important than serving the customer and getting the job done. There is an unwillingness to take risks; when decisions have to be made, the data will be analyzed, debated, and worked for fear of making a mistake or hope that the problem will go away....

Individual barriers may be supported and perpetuated by organization norms and values, either explicit or implicit. For example, an activity orientation, instead of an organization-results orientation, supports an emphasis on individual functions: managers think only of their unit or themselves and are not committed to the success of the whole organization. When this condition exists, there is considerable blaming and little co-operation.

Beck, A.C. and Hillmar, E.D., (1986), *Positive Management Practices; Bringing Out the Best in Organisation and People*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

— If you examine your own attitude to innovation, can you trace elements of insecurity? How widespread are such attitudes among your colleagues? What can you and your colleagues do to minimize barriers to innovation?

Resources Advisory Committees

Even when senior education administrators themselves are aware and appreciate the value of educational resources, they may not find the time to look into details of selecting, obtaining and distributing the required equipment and software. In the circumstances, one is tempted to rely on the knowledge and advice of friends and trustworthy colleagues. These, however, may or may not be the best source of advice. A more practical approach will be to establish an

advisory group of experts drawn from the state's general civil service, the educational sector and the community at large. High officials in small states are able to establish reliable contacts within the mini-society and soon become acquainted with the major sources of expertise in the country (or know someone who knows someone who is an expert) and who, through personal or official contacts, will accept to serve on advisory committees.

It will be prudent to take two main precautions here:

- a. Members serving on advisory committees which deal with the purchase or hire of materials should not themselves have any financial interests in the firms that are likely to be involved in the award of contracts. In a small country where the number of experts in any particular field are few, such a rule will limit even further the choice of individuals. In the long run it will save much speculation and litigation about malpractices. The real worth of an advisory group's work rests in the assurance that it provides genuine expert knowledge and has ethical credibility. The committee and the educational service must not be suspected of foul play.
- b. The advisory group's time and energy must be vigorously protected so that members can concentrate on the important tasks of establishing policy, setting priorities, distinguishing between the real against the simulated urgency of requests, and determining the type of equipment that provides the best service within the current budgetary constraints. Therefore, senior education administrators who wish to retain the service of advisory committees, ensure that the terms of reference will not include involvement in the detailed execution of policy since the more high-powered the members, the more pressing are the demands on their time. Junior officials in the educational service should be able to carry out the preparatory details, such as establishing the availability and operational conditions of existing resources. The latter should also be able to carry out any follow-up action recommended by the advisory group.

At the initial stages, the process of setting up a resources or equipment advisory committee will appear more time consuming and cumbersome than getting on with the job oneself. However, in the long run and as the workings of the group become efficient, the benefits become apparent.

- a. The advisory committee provides the cumulative expertise of

several knowledgeable and experienced people. It is unlikely that the educational service in a small state would employ experts in all the technical and commercial aspects associated with its resource requirements. The educational service needs to draw upon the expertise available in the wider community.

- b. The group introduces an element of anonymity through collective decision making, thus overcoming the personalization and consequential pressure that face officials working on their own. In small states, as in big ones, unfair pressure can be brought to bear on officials responsible for the issue and award of tenders, purchases etc.; in small states, the pressure can be more acute owing to the proximity of the members in society. Similarly, pressure can be made by institutions or individuals to obtain resources in preference to others who need them more urgently. It will reduce pressure on individual officials if they feel shielded by the collective decisions of the committee since, in the transparent bureaucracies of small states, it is important to avoid giving the impression that one supplier, or one institution, is being preferred to others. Those who follow the rules will feel most unfairly treated when they discover that others who put pressure, have influential friends, or cry out loudest, will get the attention and procure the goods while those who need them most are ignored. Indeed, 'jumping-the-queue' or attempts to do so are contagious, and senior education administrators will do well to avoid the frustration and disgruntlement that usually ensue from unfair treatment.
- c. A committee of influential citizens and officials are able to 'persuade' lazy or unco-operative functionaries to do their duty much more forcibly than an individual official operating on a one-to-one basis. The group's influential impact takes special significance when dealing with unsympathetic or obstinate officials from other ministries who delay or obstruct the procurement of needed materials.

Having established an advisory committee, senior education administrators need not abrogate or abandon all responsibilities to it. In those small states where travel is not too difficult, it should be possible for senior officials to make occasional on-the-spot inspections. Such visits will provide them with first hand knowledge about actual needs. It would also provide the people making requests with the opportunity to justify their requirements, opinions and concerns.

Equally important, on-the-spot visits advertize the fact that the senior education administrators take personal interest in matters that fall under their realm, and that they can investigate on their own rather than follow slavishly the advice of committees. Of course, such action needs to be carried out with the greatest tact to avoid giving the slightest indication that they do not trust the committee's recommendations, otherwise they will soon discover that there are no longer any committees to provide advice.

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* How Equipment Can Work Better for You
* Any type of equipment will only do what you want it to do if:
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* — you understand the nature of the problem to be tackled
* — you have thought through what you want from the system
* — you have explained clearly what you want to (the equipment)
*   experts
* — you can afford to buy the system
* — you really want the system to do what you have asked for
* — the experts have understood what you want and how your organiz-
*   ation works
* — you can find the system that will do all that you want
* — you are willing to co-operate in obtaining, installing and modifying
*   it
* — your staff understand what the system should do
* — you are willing to adopt and adapt the new system
* — you can operate the system fully
* — the system really is designed to do what the manufacturers/experts
*   claim, and
* — it actually works
*
*   Streatfield, David and Foreman, Derek, (1987), Making It Work,
*   N F E R, Berks (UK).
*
* — Do you feel that the people you work with generally appreciate the
*   value of educational equipment, and at the same time do not regard
*   it as a superficial solution?
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Implementing Policy

Once the advisory committee makes its recommendations, the implementation process by the officials responsible for resources or stores should become a matter of routine. They would be required to:

- a. Purchase the needed equipment according to the recommended

- specifications as speedily as possible;
- b. Distribute stocks fairly and quickly;
- c. Keep consumable stocks at adequate levels without unnecessary hoarding in schools and at central stores;
- d. Follow established procedures and record keeping without unnecessary red-tape;
- e. Establish accountability to avoid waste;
- f. Regularly review projections for future needs so that parts are available when required, and so that equipment is not left idle.

The question of keeping adequate stores is complex for all states. It takes on major proportions for small educational systems which cannot afford to tie up large sums of money in replacement stocks and storage space but which, at the same time, have to ensure that valuable and limited equipment is functional at all times. Some countries insist that the local commercial suppliers who are awarded government contracts stock reasonable amounts of spare parts.

Other small states find it useful to keep open accounts with commercial suppliers in larger countries and only order stocks when needed. Careful budgeting may show that even if overseas phone-calls and air-freight are extremely costly, they may prove cheaper than storing expensive spares that may never be needed. Such procedures may sound strange to officials who are more accustomed to traditional procurement and storing policies. Indeed, in some instances it may be necessary to alter established public service regulations. However, it will be worthwhile for small states which require only limited number of certain items, to benefit from improved communications with larger countries and alter their purchasing procedures accordingly.

National Resource Centres

Dilemmas arise with decisions about whether to set up a national Resource Centre that is strategically located and equipped to cater for all teaching and learning resource needed in schools. Thus, for example, if a school requires enlarged or reduced photocopies, or special stencil-cutting, or a set of charts, the Resource Centre could provide the service. In theory this sounds admirable; in practice things do not always work very smoothly. Bookings for services, travel to and from a centre especially in widely dispersed areas, waiting for one's turn, and arguments about work that is not carried out as requested, often drastically reduce the Centre's effectiveness.

Teachers' Resource Centres

A function of the work Teachers' Resource Centres could be to provide a resource area, space within the Centre, where a collection of teaching resources could be displayed, stored, worked with and possibly borrowed. Classification categories of such a collection might include:

<i>Printed</i>	<i>Individualized</i>	<i>Curriculum</i>
<i>Materials</i>	<i>Study Materials</i>	<i>Materials</i>
Books	Topic boxes	New curricula
Periodicals	Resource boxes	New curriculum materials
Newspapers	Prepared units of work	
Clippings	Work cards	
Documents	Starter units and ideas	
***	***	***
<i>Protected Media</i>	<i>Large Scale</i>	<i>Media From Real</i>
	<i>Visual Aids</i>	<i>And Simulated Life</i>
Filmstrips		
Slides	Maps and globes	Models
Tape-slide programmes	Charts	Artefacts
Loop films	Posters	Specimens
8mm and 16mm films	Drawings	Manipulative toys including puppets
Video tapes and cassettes	Pictures	Instructional games and puzzles
Audio tapes and cassettes	Paintings	
Records	Photographs	

Kahn, H. (1984), *Handbook on Teachers' Resource Centres*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

— Does your country have a national resource centre for teachers? To what extent is the provision of the above services catered for in the education system?

Overhead costs for the maintenance of the physical plant and the salaries of permanent personnel can incur hidden costs that offset the advantages of centralization. Some small educational systems have discovered that with the availability of minaturized and modern electronic equipment (where it can be installed) it is more advantageous to develop small school-based resource centres. National Resource Centres may serve as showpieces to impress foreign visitors and can be handy to produce propaganda material for the Department, but they rarely serve the needs of individual schools to the extent that is originally planned or hoped for. Furthermore, central facilities often syphon off valuable personnel and funds from the schools, while the possibilities of centrally supplied 'specialized' services may actually inhibit or discourage local initiatives.

National Resource Centres do offer certain advantages, such as the services of video, film and record libraries, as well as specialist advice and repairs of equipment. However, small educational systems might well investigate the advantages and disadvantages of establishing or maintaining their services and running costs in contrast to the possibility of establishing smaller school-based units, particularly if the latter serve to encourage local initiatives and self-sufficiency.

Foreign Aid

Most developing countries rely on foreign aid as a major provider of educational resources. However, the supply of free or low-cost educational hardware and software can have mixed blessings. It does release pressure on the shortage of funds, and allows developing countries, especially small developing countries, to acquire resources which otherwise they would find difficult to purchase.

At the same time, it is often the case of accepting what is on offer, rather than what is really required and is most suitable for their needs. Senior education administrators negotiating foreign assistance soon discover that it can be one of their most sensitive and delicate responsibilities. They have to exercise great tact and caution to obtain the best possible resources their country needs and, at the same time, do it in a way that will not sour the relations with the aid agencies. They have to avoid arrogance so as not to offend the donor countries, and be equally careful not to beg — a stance that could offend national pride.

When contemplating requests for aid, it will be helpful to consider the following questions:

- a. Does the educational system really require the equipment/resource material, or is it desired as a status symbol, or simply because it is free?
- b. Is the equipment/resource material compatible with that already in use?
- c. Does it create the need for new types of expensive spares that are different from the existing ones?
- d. Will the use of the new equipment/resource material involve staff in lengthy and expensive re-training programmes that do not justify its acquisition?
- e. Does the agreement contain specified or hidden conditions to purchase spares from one supplier or from one country with substantially higher costs that neutralize any initial savings?
- f. Will the donations tie down the small state to one type or one supplier of software and hardware, thus limiting the benefits of wider and possibly better sources?

Bearing Gifts

Great care is necessary to ensure that any educational project for which aid is being sought will be cost effective. While the capital cost of a project might be met from an external source, the recurrent cost has to be found locally. Therefore in any educational project attention must be focused not only on the size of the external aid packet but also on the long-term financial commitment which this is likely to have on the recurrent budget of the country.

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The fact that these nations are so small and yet enjoy political independence is likely to increase the desire of larger nations to seek a diplomatic 'quid pro quo' for any help that they might offer. This increases their vulnerability to external forces and the agencies of the more powerful nation states, as well as large international organizations.

Bacchus, Kazim and Brock, Colin (eds) (1987), *The Challenge of Scale - Educational Development in the Small States of the Commonwealth*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

— To what extent do these observations apply to your country? Can you think of specific examples to support your views?

Offers of foreign assistance can be made with the best intentions. However, where it is not in the country's best interest to accept aid,

the senior education administrator had better aim to obtain aid in the form of funds with no strings attached. This would enable the small state to procure the equipment and resource material that it requires most, from sources that are most suitable. Such a policy would be in line with the aim of reducing, not increasing, material and intellectual dependence on larger and more developed countries.

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 * ***Diversity of Choice*** *
 * Nationally there is a need to widen small countries' area of choice by *
 * maintaining their options and diversifying the range of possibilities *
 * open to them. Maintenance of options includes taking care to avoid *
 * committing themselves to specialized courses and facilities whose *
 * output and use cannot be adapted to other purposes as change takes *
 * place. They should also beware, for example, of loading themselves into *
 * inflexible types of specialized equipment such as educational *
 * computers for which only one form of software of a non-interchange- *
 * able variety is available. Diversification will involve attempts to lessen *
 * dependence on particular sources of supply of goods and materials used *
 * in the education system or on particular overseas assistance donors. *
 * Small countries must search for alternatives and exercise choice if they *
 * are to gain greater control over their own destinies. *
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 * *Educational Development: The Small States of the Commonwealth,* *
 * Report of a Pan-Commonwealth Experts Meeting, Mauritius, 19- *
 * 27 November 1985, Commonwealth Secretariat, London. *
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Overcoming Material Limitations

Most small states find themselves in constrained economic situations which make it impossible to acquire the amount and the type of material resources they desire and require. Such constraints cause great frustration where one estimates, for example, that one piece of sophisticated hardware can substitute five or six individuals, who in turn can be released for more 'human' related work. Wishful thinking, however, will neither solve the problem nor make it go away.

Senior education administrators in most small states accept the fact that they have to make do without many of the sophisticated and elaborate services that more affluent countries afford. At the same time, many recognize that they can overcome some of the limitations, especially those imposed by scarce material resources, by resorting to the ingenuity, the initiative and the sheer hard work of their staff. Many senior education administrators in small states manage to

achieve educational and administrative goals by supporting and reinforcing human endeavour. For example:

- a. They encourage individual and institutional growth through regular evaluation exercises of the various sectors in the system in order to identify both strengths and weaknesses. As early as possible, they take the appropriate action to publicize the strengths and remedy the weaknesses.
- b. They attempt to overcome restricted promotion openings by introducing short-term contractual agreements with individuals who are assigned specific tasks against extra remuneration. They encourage innovations to come forward with ideas for which they are rewarded, as well as reinforce the principle of accountability among those who are tempted to slack.
- c. They encourage staff to participate in professional development programmes as an investment in their personal growth and that of their institution. They accept that such investment can include time, energy and ideas as well as money spent, say, in fees for courses.

In conclusion, officials who work in the educational systems of small states recognize that the people with whom they work are the most valuable resource. Senior education administrators who acknowledge this fact are less likely to become overwhelmed by the limitations and the problems. They can rely on the enterprise and the resourcefulness of their staff and the community. They discover that in most cases human resources overcome serious material limitations.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Activity One:

Plan a detailed strategy for setting up an equipment procuring advisory committee, taking into account the following:

- its composition: to include members representing educational institutions which may be interested and the type of experts that should be asked to contribute (any of the latter may change, depending on the type of equipment being considered);
- its terms of reference;
- the communication processes between the committee and the bodies requesting equipment;
- the frequency, the place, the dates and the times of meetings;
- the administrative and secretarial assistance it may require;
- the procedures to be followed by the committee to communicate its recommendations;
- the non-committee officials who will be responsible for carrying out the committee's recommendations;
- whether remuneration or honoraria will be offered, and at what rate;
- date-lines that have to be met;
- possible objections from individuals or institutions against the inclusion of certain members of the committee and your answers to these objections.

Invite one or two senior colleagues to carry out the same exercise and compare notes.

Activity Two:

Obtain copies of the instructions or regulations governing the procurement, storing and distribution of stock presently employed in your educational system. Following consultations with the people involved, analyse the procedures and make recommendations to eliminate unnecessary red-tape as much as possible.

Again, discuss your recommendations with the officials involved in order to obtain their reactions and recommendations.

Activity Three:

Case Study: Computer Studies

As the Education Officer responsible for the Upper Secondary sector you have devoted a great deal of time and energy to provide adequate

Computer Studies facilities for students in these schools. You are convinced that the national education service urgently requires organized, well-run Computer Studies programmes both for the personal needs of individual students as well as for national development.

The students are certainly keen, to the extent that many of them already study the subject on their own with private, so-called Computer Schools. In fact, these are nothing more than one-room affairs where two or three machines have been installed and 'tuition' is provided by salesmen of the computer agencies who are just interested in selling their ware. In spite of their dubious educational value, private 'computer schools' are in great demand and have become quite lucrative enterprises.

You firmly believe that the educational system can provide a much better service and have been working towards this end for the last four years. Three months ago you achieved a major coup when the Minister of Education approved the allocation of the equivalent of \$100,000 to establish computer studies departments in the country's four Upper Secondaries. This sum has been matched by another \$100,000 donated by a foreign aid agency. Most of the \$200,000 can be devoted to the purchase of equipment.

Over the years, you have been working quietly creating physical space, ordering furniture, training teachers and recruiting staff. You have researched extensively and, with expert advice, identified the system that will best serve the schools' particular requirements. The computer studies programme can be launched as soon as the Personal Computers become available.

Quite suddenly all your plans and optimism have been squashed by a joint Ministry of Trade and Ministry of Finance directive prohibiting all government departments from purchasing any further computer hardware and software until a clear and definite national policy is established to ensure computer compatibility and cost-effectiveness.

Your enquiries show that many government departments have been buying computers indiscriminately from various sources and often at the whim and particular preferences of individuals. As a result, most of the machines are incompatible with the one in the next office so that programming and data for one computer practically cannot be used anywhere else. In view of the reigning confusion, you can appreciate the reasoning behind the intentions to introduce a more rational and unified approach.

What you find particularly disappointing and frustrating is that the ignorance or negligence of others will cause another very long delay before the Computer Studies programme can get under way. You find it very difficult to reconcile yourself to this fact and you have been considering four major options:

- a. Going ahead and ordering the equipment anyway, be prepared to face the storm later and hope that your arguments and the envisioned educational benefits would overcome the wrath of the officials at the Ministries of Trade and Finance;
- b. Forcing the issue by persuading the aid agency to make the donation specific hardware rather than in cash; this development would most likely force the purchasing section of the Department to limit itself to the same equipment and its software. But you have no guarantee of this.
- c. Waiting patiently until clear directions from the competent authorities are in force and hoping that in the meantime improved hardware and software would become available at a cheaper price, allowing you to provide a more extensive service.
- d. Resigning from the service, and starting your own private Computer School.

What will your choice be? Do you have any other alternative? In any case, justify your decision.

Activity Four:

Draw up a list of equipment and resource material that should be made available in small school-based resource units. Draw up one list for primary, and another list for secondary schools, categorizing resources under three headings:

- a. Essential;
- b. Highly desirable;
- c. Will-be-good-to-have.

Check your priorities with those of other heads of section and headteachers and compare notes. Consider whether your education system would benefit more from one national Resource Centre.