

Chapter 5: Staffing Small Schools

This chapter has four parts. It discusses (a) the minimum number of staff required by a school, (b) the types of teachers that are needed, (c) teacher training systems for small schools, and (d) recruitment and retention of staff in small schools.

(a) Minimum Staff Numbers

Single-teacher schools are very common, and are the model for the smallest school in most countries.

In some countries, however, single-teacher schools have been phased out. Policies in Sri Lanka and the Republic of Ireland, for example, require all schools to have at least two teachers. Similar policies have been adopted by some state governments in India.

These decisions have been based on four main considerations:

- * *School Vulnerability*: In staffing matters, small schools are particularly vulnerable. It is true of all schools that when the teachers are good then the schools are fortunate, and when the teachers are bad the schools suffer. But when the teacher in a one-teacher school is bad, there is no one else to compensate for her/his weaknesses.
- * *Teacher Isolation*: Staff in single-teacher schools may also suffer from professional isolation. They have no colleagues in their own institutions, and because they are likely to be in remote areas the central authorities are unable to provide close supervision or support. Problems can be greatly relieved if teachers have at least one colleague.
- * *Staff Continuity*: When the teacher of a single-teacher school is transferred, all staff continuity is lost. If there are two teachers, continuity is easier to arrange.
- * *Teacher Absenteeism*: This has particularly serious effects in

small schools, and also tends to be more common. The headteacher often has to leave to attend to administrative matters, and other teachers take the maximum leave to which they are entitled in order to escape from their isolated environment. Even in Sri Lanka, where each school now has at least two teachers, there remain severe problems. It is said that:

a teacher is entitled to leave for nearly 20 per cent of the school sessions. This means that if both teachers in a two-teacher school take by turns the leave to which they are entitled, the school gets reduced to a one-teacher school for 40 per cent of the school sessions.

And although staff can set assignments, one-teacher schools generally close down entirely when the teachers are away.

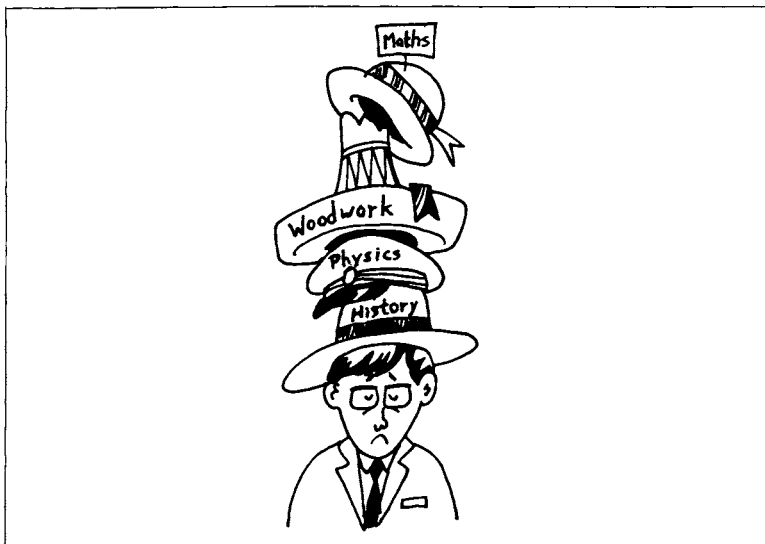
Although insistence on a minimum of two teachers for each school seems desirable, however, few governments can afford it. And even if they have the money, they may not have enough suitably qualified staff.

(b) The Types of Teachers Needed

All teachers, of course, need sufficient knowledge of their subject curricula, and require basic skills in teaching and classroom management. The best teachers also have positive attitudes: they enjoy working with children, with their colleagues and with parents, and they feel that their work is worthwhile.

Teachers in small schools need some additional attributes:

- * In many schools, teachers have to take multigrade classes. This demands extra preparation and organisational ability.
- * Biennial and triennial intakes avoid the need for multigrade teaching; but the teacher may still be faced with a wide age range in a single class, which requires group work and careful preparation.
- * The fact that teachers in small schools have few colleagues and have less supervision or support from the central authorities requires them to be more self-sufficient.



In a small secondary school, each teacher must teach several subjects. He must wear several curriculum 'hats', and may find this difficult.



But in a larger school, teachers can specialise. They may find this easier.

- * Teachers in small secondary schools must be able to teach more than one subject.
- * In their personal lives, teachers in remote areas may have to accept that their husbands or wives may find it hard to secure suitable jobs; that their own children may have limited educational opportunities; and that hospitals, recreational facilities and other amenities are scarce.
- * The fact that staff in small schools are likely to be prominent members of the community requires them to have extra skills in communication and leadership.
- * Staff in remote schools may also have to accept that when they first arrive they are regarded as outsiders by the community, and thus are rather isolated. Moreover, they and their families may have much less personal privacy than they would have in a town.

Mobile Teachers

Many governments also employ mobile teachers. They are specialists in subjects like music, drama and physical education, and can supplement the normal staff of small schools. They may be found at both the primary and secondary levels.

A few governments take this idea further with 'part-time' schools, in which mobile teachers are the *only* staff members. Each teacher serves two schools. He goes to the first at the beginning of the week and then sets homework to be done while he is in the second school for the rest of the week.

Part-time schools were first opened in Norway, and were later adopted in Australia and New Zealand. They may still be found in China and Thailand. However, they have two big disadvantages: (a) few teachers are willing to travel so much and to split their homes between two communities, and (b) the children are disadvantaged in the small amount of direct teacher instruction that they receive.

(c) Teacher Training for Small Schools

(i) Multigrade Teaching

Although multigrade teaching is very common, few training colleges give it adequate attention. One survey of eight Asian countries, for example, found no pre-service courses in multigrade work. Two reasons for this were:

- * Although multigrade classes are common, they are a minority. Teachers' colleges tend to cater for the type of situation in which the majority of their trainees will work.
- * Teachers' colleges are usually sited in towns. They find it too difficult and expensive to send trainees to remote schools for teaching practice.

But although the social environment of a remote small school is hard to simulate, the techniques of multigrade teaching can be taught anywhere. In New Zealand, for example, all training colleges have model small schools. The staff of the schools are paid slightly higher salaries in recognition of their special role, and the good quality of instruction removes any parental misgivings about children being in multigrade rather than single grade classes. The schools enable trainees to observe and participate in multigrade teaching without travelling long distances.

At the same time, authorities should guard against the danger of 'branding' individuals as multigrade teachers, and thus of reducing their chances of ever getting a job outside a small school.

(ii) Teacher Specialisms

In small secondary schools, most staff have to teach at least two subjects. Their scope for specialisation is limited.

To meet this need, teacher training colleges can require each trainee to develop skills in at least two subject areas. An education system with many small schools should train *all* teachers in at least two subjects. Even in larger systems this strategy might be a wise one.

(iii) In-Service Training

Because they have few colleagues in their own institutions, staff in small schools also have particular needs for organised professional enrichment.

- * Some governments organise special courses for teachers of small schools. The courses are taught either by correspondence, sometimes backed by radio broadcasts, or in residential sessions during vacations.
- * Alternatively, many governments assist teachers to visit other

 * **How well does Training Prepare Teachers for Small Schools?** *
 *

* *In Western Australia, about 25% of schools have fewer than 100* *
 * *pupils, and about 40% have fewer than 200. Each year, about 70% of* *
 * *primary and early childhood teacher trainees are immediately posted* *
 * *to small schools. One researcher (Lake, 1985) conducted a survey to* *
 * *assess the effectiveness of teacher training.* *

* *The survey covered 186 teachers, who represented 84.9% of staff* *
 * *who had less than three years' teaching experience and who worked in* *
 * *communities of 1,000 people or less. The table below indicates their* *
 * *views on the adequacy of their training:* *

	Poor training or none (%)	Training fairly/ very good (%)
* Living in a rural community	83.9	16.1
* Teaching multigrade classes	80.6	19.4
* School/community relations	60.2	39.8
* Handling exceptional children	56.5	43.5
* Administrative duties	50.5	49.5
* Utilising the environment	38.2	61.8
* Individualising instruction	36.0	64.0
* Programming	32.3	67.7
* Curriculum development	30.1	69.9
* Discipline	18.3	81.7
* Subject teaching	10.2	89.8

* *Few teachers reported problems in their subject areas or in discipline.* *
 * *However, 83.9% said that they were either not prepared or* *
 * *inadequately prepared for living in a rural community. Almost as* *
 * *many reported inadequate training in multigrade teaching, and 60.2%* *
 * *felt poorly prepared for school community relations.* *

* *These shortcomings arose despite the fact that all pre-service* *
 * *colleges in Western Australia provide opportunities for practice* *
 * *teaching in small schools, and that 50 per cent of the teachers surveyed* *
 * *had gained such practice. However, the researcher reports, "the* *
 * *experience was so structured as to limit the potential benefits". Most* *
 * *practice teaching was too short, and its impact was limited by the* *
 * *tendency for colleges to group students near large or medium sized* *
 * *towns in order to facilitate supervision and reduce costs.* *

small schools, to learn from the ideas of others and to reflect on their own experiences. Visits of this kind are valuable at least every two or three years.

Three particularly important areas for in-service training are (a) school organisation, (b) teaching techniques, and (c) community relations.

(d) Staff Recruitment and Retention

In some systems, governments have powers to assign teachers to different schools. Compulsion cannot be a wholly satisfactory solution, however. Administrators must always pay attention to attraction and persuasion. Problems of recruitment and retention are particularly severe in small schools that are remote.

Three broad categories of factors affect teachers' attitudes to small remote schools:

(i) Personal and Family Factors

Some aspects of life in a rural community can be very rewarding. Teachers are likely to be respected figures, and they can form close ties with their pupils. Many opportunities arise for leadership.

However, there are also negative sides. Teachers may find that they lack privacy, and individuals who are used to life in towns may suffer from the lack of facilities. Housing may be difficult to obtain and may be substandard; hospitals may be distant; cultural and religious patterns may be quite different; all-weather communications with towns may not exist; and the teachers' own children may not have good educational opportunities.

Although education authorities cannot do anything about all these, they can take some appropriate measures:

- try to recruit more staff from rural backgrounds, on the assumption that they are more used to rural conditions,
- during pre-service training, try to provide more opportunities to visit remote schools,
- stress the value of the teachers' community development roles,
- help with accommodation, and
- make sure that postings are fair, and that staff who do not

 * **Factors Influencing Teacher Turnover (I): A Papua New Guinean** *
 * **Study** *

* *In Papua New Guinea's West Sepik Province, half the primary schools* *
 * *have no access by road or air. In many cases, teachers must walk 10-12* *
 * *hours to reach them. Sometimes, teachers must walk up to two days.* *

* *A study by Kelly, Moipu & Weeks (1982) pointed out that teachers* *
 * *in such schools have many problems: "They are often 'outsiders' who* *
 * *do not speak the community's vernacular. They may be the only* *
 * *educated people in the area. Because the culture of the people is often* *
 * *different from their own, they sometimes suffer 'culture shock'...* *

* *"If at all, isolated schools may be visited only once or twice a year* *
 * *by the inspector, instead of the three times expected. The teachers are* *
 * *often lonely. Sometimes their wives refuse to join them (a) because* *
 * *they do not want to live in an isolated area with inadequate health care* *
 * *for them and their children, (b) because there is no one else to talk to,* *
 * *(c) because goods imported by air cost twice their price on the coast,* *
 * *and (d) because there is no market selling fresh food.* *

* *"In addition, communities in isolated schools are often poor and* *
 * *have very little cash to support the school. The teachers do not get* *
 * *school supplies, and must often take classes without the required* *
 * *materials. Letters sent to Headquarters, they claim, go unanswered.* *
 * *The cost of living is high. The K200 allowance for being in an isolated* *
 * *school is not paid on time, and is not enough... It takes a month for* *
 * *mail to arrive. Teachers often do not get their pay."* *

* *The researchers added that not all teachers were 'complainers': that* *
 * *some enjoyed the challenge of pioneering. But the problems were* *
 * *formidable. Six ways to improve the situation were suggested:* *

- * *1. Give remote schools first priority in distribution of supplies,* *
- * *2. Double the allowance for work in isolated schools,* *
- * *3. Give inspectors incentives to go to remote schools by counting* *
 * *such visits as worth twice ones to normal schools,* *
- * *4. Provide more in-service training,* *
- * *5. Assign better teachers — do not use remote schools as* *
 * *'punishment' posts, and* *
- * *6. Give every isolated school a two-way radio so that they can* *
 * *communicate with HQ at a fixed time each day. This would help* *
 * *deal with emergencies, order supplies and reduce teacher* *
 * *absenteeism.* *

wish to stay in rural posts are transferred out on a strict rotation basis.

(ii) Economic Factors

Small schools cannot justify many promotion posts, so their staff are often on lower salaries than those in large schools. Staff in rural areas also tend to have lower salaries because they are younger and less experienced than colleagues in the towns.

In some societies, these factors are equalised by a lower rural cost of living. But in other societies life is more expensive in rural areas — particularly for those with urban backgrounds who like to consume goods that have to be transported over long distances. Teachers may also find it costly to visit urban friends and relatives,

 * *Factors Influencing Teacher Turnover (2): A Canadian Study* *
 * *
 * *Teachers in remote Canadian schools have tended to be very* *
 * *mobile. However, not all schools have been affected equally:* *
 * *some have experienced greater turnover than others.* *
 * *
 * *Haughey & Murphy (1985) surveyed 528 teachers to* *
 * *investigate the reasons for this. They wanted to know why* *
 * *some teachers stayed and why others moved.* *
 * *
 * *The teachers who had decided to remain in remote schools* *
 * *placed particular emphasis on salary benefits, housing, the* *
 * *support of the principal, and the teaching philosophies of* *
 * *colleagues. Some also mentioned good community spirit, small* *
 * *class sizes and good student attitudes.* *
 * *
 * *The teachers who intended to leave particularly stressed* *
 * *isolation from friends and family. Some also emphasised poor* *
 * *community support, lack of cultural activities, lack of* *
 * *professional contacts, and lack of shopping facilities. Most* *
 * *said that salary incentives were not important to them, and* *
 * *relatively few stressed lack of medical facilities, lack of* *
 * *employment opportunities for spouses, or lack of educational* *
 * *opportunities for their own children.* *
 * *
 * *However, the researchers also found that a generally harsher* *
 * *economic climate had reduced alternative job openings, and* *
 * *had sharply reduced the extent of teacher mobility.* *
 * *

and have to send children away to school. If the teachers' spouses cannot find suitable jobs, the families have to sacrifice some income.

To reduce this problem, many governments offer salary bonuses for remote teachers. Some also help with accommodation and other costs. Often, however, the special allowances are inadequate even to meet the higher cost of life in rural areas, let alone to provide an extra incentive.

(iv) Professional Factors

Remoteness and isolation affect the quality and quantity of professional facilities available to teachers. Staff may be frustrated by the lack of classroom materials, and the official curriculum may seem irrelevant. There may be greater chances to become a head-teacher at a younger age, but general promotion may be restricted by the fact that inspectors visit only rarely. Also, secondary schools may be too small to have department heads or more than one deputy headteacher. Many rural schools are so small and isolated that teachers lack contact with other teachers.

In this sphere, the education authorities can do several things:

- sponsor professional meetings and pay the teachers' travelling costs,
- pay the membership fees for independent professional associations,
- when distributing supplies, deal first with the needs of remote schools and only then deal with the other schools,
- make sure the inspectors get to the remote schools, perhaps by giving the inspectors themselves extra credit, and
- offer stronger promotion prospects to staff who have worked in remote schools.