

3 The Professional Development of Educational Personnel

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In writing about the professional development of educational personnel in small developing states, Charles Farrugia draws attention to the complexity of educational processes. He notes that the spatial and demographic scale – together with the relative isolation and dependency experienced by such states are influential variables in respect of the operation of education systems.

He considers the major factors which require the professional development of educational personnel in small states to deserve special attention, highlighting the benefits and limitations of smallness of scale. Professor Farrugia offers suggestions as to how small nations can turn the scale variable to their advantage. In confronting these issues he refers to two central points. First, that the systematic study of small states is at its embryonic stage and therefore at its most hazardous in respect of reaching conclusions and offering prescriptions. Second, small states are similar in many ways, but also very different in others. Therefore, one needs to be extremely circumspect in respect of generalising about this category of country. Between Lesotho and Nauru, for example, there is not only a vast difference in demographic scale, but also in terms of political geography, culture and economy.

The quality of personnel needed

Small states, like their larger counterparts, want schools that have competent and committed teachers and administrators. They want teachers who possess professionally based knowledge in the theory and practice of education, and who find job satisfaction in the belief that they are making an important contribution to the social, cultural and economic development of their country. Such teachers, it is believed, are better able to understand students' abilities to exploit the educational benefits of the social context within which they live and learn, and to assist students to reach their full intellectual and social potential. They need to have mastery over their subject matter and should be competent in marshalling evidence on which reasoned pedagogical judgements can be reached. They should have the communicative competence to share knowledge and skills with students and colleagues, and possess the ability and motivation to further their own professional growth.

In addition, small states, like their larger counterparts, want headteachers and educational administrators who are well acquainted with the requirements and objectives of the national educational system, and who have the competence to actualise them through sound educational and school management techniques. Such personnel are usually able to encourage and enhance the professional competence and commitment of the teaching staff and are more likely to motivate and facilitate the work of those in their charge. The ideal situation is one in which teachers and administrators work harmoniously, experience confidence in their job and in each other and have full occupation satisfaction which is reinforced by adequate salaries and working conditions.

Difficulties in securing high quality personnel

Many small and large developing countries work and aim towards such a model educational service manned by extremely competent specialist staff. In reality, however, they inevitably experience obstacles that limit or thwart their objectives. In this respect the

structures and handicaps faced by small, developing states are often similar to those encountered by large, developing nations. They tend to have an ex-colonial past. Their economic base is volatile and depends on the vagrancies of highly industrialised countries and multinational corporations. Their infrastructures are fragile, with limited financial resources that need to be shared by many more necessary national projects than a developing country can really afford. The majority of their people are at best relatively poor, but regard education as a means of improving their cultural and material well-being, and good schools as ensuring a better future for their children. Despite these constraints, people tend to demand a great deal from their teachers, whom they see as instrumental in aiding the upward social and economic mobility of their children.

Their geographical size and relatively small populations are enduring factors that render small developing states different from their larger counterparts, and which can both enhance or inhibit their educational development. For example, communications in some small states do not necessarily present a problem, except in archipelagos where inter-island contact can be difficult. Because the number of inhabitants is small, a closely integrated society tends to develop a wide network of personal relationships. People are well known to each other so that ministers, high government officials, churchmen, influential businessmen, and their functionaries are easily accessible either formally or unofficially at receptions or family reunions. Thus, ideas, views, requests and complaints are communicated to the appropriate officials quickly and most likely personally. People know the abilities, the needs and the idiosyncrasies of each other (or know someone who knows) and act or react accordingly. Through close personal contacts political and administrative decisions can be taken and implemented rapidly. Equally important, the policy making and implementation process cannot remain anonymous. As a result, many necessary actions are neutralised by gradual modifications due to community pressures. The problem the educational administrator faces is to capitalise on the advantages of these close personal contacts and seek to reduce their disadvantages.

In the somewhat more open societies of small states, minor issues that are easily absorbed in larger countries often assume national dimensions. Minor divisions that are allowed to spread eventually pervade every sector of the population. In communities where practically everyone knows everyone else, where individuals' utterances and actions become public knowledge, it often happens that once a position is taken, one finds it difficult to retract. The close personal interactions within such societies belie the suspicions and antagonism that often exist between different groups, even families. Consequently, once rival positions harden it becomes extremely difficult to avoid the polarisation that ensues. Furthermore, disagreement on one issue may be extended not only to related matters but also totally unrelated issues. When this happens friendships, family loyalty and community pressures can interfere with the decision and implementation process.

The development of a two-party political system has sometimes exacerbated such issues. In a hostile scenario such rivalries can have two major outcomes. It may lead to declared or subtle boycotts of any ideas or projects emanating from the rival group with the result that only a fraction of the available talent is utilised. Furthermore, rivalry leads to duplication of efforts and costs, and a depletion of the limited human and material resources available. The second negative outcome is more pervasive as it undermines local initiatives and perpetuates the already marked, external dependency evident through the inhabitants' greater trust in ideas, programmes and products that originate overseas. In the field of education, this tendency usually results in the neglect of indigenous instructional programmes in preference for the importation of pedagogical content and methods that are alien to local needs.

The challenge which the administrator in a small country faces is to capitalise on the advantages of these close personal contacts and seek to reduce the problems they present. Another positive factor of size is that the educational problems of small nations might not always be as prohibitive as they may appear initially. The number of people, the geographical area and the finances involved are usually too small

to present real difficulties. For example, the size and population of small states are normally equal to those of a small or medium-sized town in larger countries, and their problems have to be seen in that proportion. Nevertheless, there are important exceptions. The first arises when the population, though small in total, is widely scattered such as in archipelagic nations like The Bahamas or Tonga, or those with large areas of land and small populations, like Guyana or Botswana.

Another most important exception arises from the fact that small nation states are also members of the international community and have to look after their international obligations as well as their domestic responsibilities. This dual domestic and international role of officials in small states weighs heavily on their country's limited human and financial resources. Indeed, the shortage of personnel and other resources required to fulfil the many local, national and international tasks is a recurrent theme that must be taken into serious account when considering or planning the development of professional programmes for educational personnel, whether these operate as teachers in schools or in an administrative capacity. Incidentally, such demands for personnel tend to affect the teaching profession more than others, since it is not only the largest source of high level manpower in small states, but the profession has traditionally been seen as the most likely recruiting ground for a range of senior administrative personnel.

The professional development of teachers

The main thrust in the professional development of educational personnel in small states is directed towards initial teacher education programmes on the premise that the more and the better quality of teachers, the better the educational service. As a result one sees in small developing countries (as in larger ones) a gradual lengthening in the duration, and a progressive up-grading of initial teacher education courses, with some states aiming for an all-trained teaching corps. But such a goal is often difficult to achieve, especially by small

nation states, because there are often a range of factors which have to be taken into consideration, including those listed and discussed below.

Stage of educational development

A nation's current state of educational development dictates the level of teacher preparation which it is able to provide. For example, a country that enjoys a long history of universal secondary education and has a high number of qualified young people wanting university education is in a better academic position to aim for a trained teaching corps than the state still struggling with providing universal primary education. The latter might simply not find the qualified candidates to pursue teacher education, even if the actual number of required candidates is relatively small. Furthermore, in states where the number of academically well qualified people is limited, their services will be required to serve other sectors besides education.

Educational priorities

When finances are extremely limited and the national resources are scarce, as in the case of most small states, the benefits derived from extending and up-grading the initial teacher education programme have to be balanced against other educational or other national requirements. One has to consider, for example, whether the extra resources required to lengthen or upgrade the initial teacher programme can be better utilised to train a larger number of teachers and reduce the pupil:teacher ratio, whether to train more specialist subject teachers, or whether to improve the educational provisions for the handicapped. Alternatively, the extra expenses can be diverted to provide better support facilities, extended in-service programmes, more audio-visual material, improved school environments and more attractive salaries for teachers. The need to develop initial teacher education programmes within a framework of national educational priorities is not exclusive to small states. However, because the implementation of policy has more rapid impact, and because the per capita loss of wasted resources is higher in small states

than in larger ones, the need for the setting of priorities and good planning becomes more acute in the former.

Financial implications

From the purely financial aspect there is an addition to the cost of extending and/or upgrading the initial teacher education programme; the need to increase teachers' salaries when they become better educated and trained. Without this there would be no incentive for them to improve their qualifications. Here teachers' trade unions often apply the 'dual role' strategy when in their capacity as professional associations they strive for a better qualified teaching corps, while as bread-and-butter trade unions they demand that teachers' remuneration should reflect their improved qualifications. It is often the case, therefore, that higher qualifications for teachers mean higher emoluments for the largest group of public employees and a higher proportion of the finely balanced national budget going to the salaries of teachers and to education in general.

Socio-economic considerations

The question of salary relativity between the grades of civil service as well as with employees in the private sector is a most pertinent one in the transparent societies of small states. People who have grown and studied together, who are familiar with each others' capabilities and limitations inevitably compare their placing in the salary scale and the social hierarchy, not always without prejudice or envy. It is a common occurrence in closely interrelated societies that a project by one ministry or one private firm is undermined by another because the key officials do not get on well due to personal pique totally unrelated to the project. In such communities it often happens that one official subtly refuses to acknowledge the seniority of a former colleague because he/she regards the latter's promotion as unmerited. Therefore, the upgrading of teachers' qualifications (and their economic and social standing) has to be evaluated carefully for its socio-economic implications in relation to, for example, other less qualified teachers, other members in the civil service, and the white

collar workforce, as part of an overall national income and wages policy.

Again, although these considerations have to be taken into account by all states, the need to keep a harmonious balance within the closely integrated but open societies of small states is crucial. Yet, there is no prescriptive solution, each small nation has to evaluate the needs and objectives according to its own pressing social, political and financial considerations.

Demographic changes

Slight changes in the demography of small states can have immediate and often unpredictable effects on their educational systems and teacher education programmes. For example, an unexpected outflow of young emigrants, or a successful birth control campaign will relatively quickly reduce the number of teachers needed in the primary sector. Conversely, a baby boom will lead to a shortage of primary school teachers and the need to train new recruits for that sector. Later, as the baby boom children grow older and move to secondary schools, a new shortage is felt there, while teacher redundancies occur at the primary level. Similarly, an industrialisation drive will lead to the training and employment of trade school teachers who eventually may become redundant as industrial growth leads to less labour-intensive structures. Unlike large educational systems, a small organisation cannot absorb such fluctuations easily.

In view of the need for flexibility, small states might find it more efficient to develop initial teacher education programmes on the co-ordinated approach which prepares teachers to teach at more than one sector of the educational system. This approach, built within a modular structure, would, for example, train teachers to specialise in primary education as well as in one subject at secondary school level, or in one subject at secondary school level and another at trade school level. This co-ordinated approach provides the multiple teaching capacity so necessary in the rapidly fluctuating changes characteristic of small states. The modular structure can emphasise the strong educational theory and pedagogy basis of teacher education, and it

allows the student to specialise in the subject content that he or she desires, or to take up the subject area that the education system requires.

Another problem arises in small states in which a small total population is widely scattered. In such cases teachers are often called upon to teach a number of grades, and often the training they receive does not prepare them for multi-grade teaching. This can be a serious deficiency in the training programme for teachers in such countries.

Training specialised administrative personnel

Regardless of their size, states require a basic educational administrative set-up. A country of 100,000 inhabitants needs a ministry of education, education officers, a personnel section, a special education unit, an examinations branch, a maintenance team, etc., as would a country a hundred times larger. The actual number of people employed in the educational sector will be fewer in the smaller country, but the difference cannot be proportional to the number of inhabitants. As a result the financial cost and the demands on human resources of providing an educational (or medical, or legal) service are proportionately much higher in small states than in larger ones. As with the training of teachers in such contexts, a number of important issues arise.

Multiplicity of roles

Small states attempt, indeed are compelled, to extend their resources and lower per capita costs by having education officials and facilities act in a multi-purpose way. Thus, for example, the Director-General for Education often caters also for Culture and Sports, curriculum officers take responsibility for more than one subject area, teachers in secondary schools teach more than one speciality, while primary school teachers, as was previously mentioned, are called upon to give instruction on a multi-grade basis. In some countries, teachers extend their educational role to act as community development leaders.

The major drawback of the multi-purpose function of education

officials is that their work becomes extremely diffused when they have to switch from one role to another quickly and continuously. Curriculum planners, for instance, cannot simply concentrate on their subject speciality. They are called upon also to inspect teachers, run in-service courses, lecture at the initial teacher education institution, sit on purchasing committees, chair promotion panels, attend disciplinary boards, answer parliamentary questions, attend policy meetings, and sometimes teach their subject specialisation in one or two secondary schools. Such activities are bound to broaden their perspectives and widen their insights into the many facets of the educational system, rather than restrict their concerns to the narrow sphere of their specialisation. However, the necessity of sharing time and attention with many other aspects besides their main concerns can weaken the effectiveness of their expertise. The multiple-function role can also be draining on one's mental and physical energy since it involves changing rapidly from one task to the next, from one decision-making process to another, from dealing with one group of people to another in assignments that can be totally unrelated.

Furthermore, the professional development and personal lives of education officials acting in multi-purpose roles are often placed under great stress when they find it difficult to be away from their jobs to attend conferences or courses abroad, or simply to take their leave entitlement. They soon discover that if one or more assignments are not too pressing, there are always several others which are.

The better multi-functional officials are able to delegate work to their subordinates (when they have them) and allow themselves time for developmental planning and thinking out long-term strategies. They know that it is most tempting to spend all one's time dealing with many mundane *ad hoc* problems that have to be resolved 'now', and postpone the more complex and thought provoking issues to quieter moments, which never seem to become available.

The special demands on education officials and administrators in small states, particularly the need to work in a multiplicity of roles, seem to dictate the development of new patterns of professional training. The more appropriate are those of a multi-disciplinary

nature, structured on a modular system to reflect the adaptability and flexibility so characteristic of the official's work.

Training and retraining

The extremely limited number of education officials and administrators of the same category makes it economically unviable and academically impractical to provide specialist training locally. Overseas training offers an attractive alternative. Overseas centres offer specialist courses in a variety of subjects and the opportunity to mix with scholars and practitioners from other countries. Officials can upgrade qualifications, update specialisations and generally share ideas and exchange experiences with colleagues in similar posts. Overseas training promotes professional contacts and international personal friendships that usually continue throughout the participants' career. The experience of spending some time on overseas training is particularly beneficial to officials from small states who are prone more than those in bigger nations to suffer from isolation.

However, the problems that arise from overseas training cannot be overlooked. Such programmes are usually focused on preparing individuals for higher specialised roles, and can be unsuitable for education in small nation states where there are a multiplicity of professional roles to perform, often concurrently. Secondly, such training can lead to personal and professional expectations that can be fully realised only if accompanied by expensive ancillary support services which most small states cannot provide, or afford, or need. When this happens the level of institutional and personal frustrations is heightened, while the cost in time and money spent on the specialist training cannot be justified. Overseas training also cannot be justified when it is peripheral to the real needs of the small state, when it promotes alien attitudes and values which are at variance with the local, or when it increases the small state's dependency on foreign thought and technology to the detriment of indigenous alternatives.

In countries where the chances of promotion are few and far between the temporary absence of senior officials often proves professionally valuable to subordinates who wish to demonstrate

their initiative and drive. On the other hand, junior officials can be weary of temporary promotions and prefer the *laissez faire* attitude to carry out only routine measures. In the interval, development and progress in the sector concerned are slowed down and the longer the senior official is absent, the greater the period of stagnation. In spite of its potential limitations, however, officials and administrators from small states must break away from their isolated professional environment to attend courses, workshops and conferences abroad. It is not enough to keep abreast solely through the professional literature. This does not necessarily mean going to the economically developed countries where the socio-economic context surrounding education can be so different. Much can be learnt through the staff attending conferences or training programmes held in other small nation states.

Supportive team-work under the co-ordination or direction of a senior official appear to offer a better organisational structure to overcome most of the difficulties identified above. Understudies each responsible for several tasks, or an area of responsibility which is catered for by more than one junior official, provide supportive reinforcement as well as allowing individual members of the team to be away without loss of efficiency. Experience indicates that multi-functional co-operative teams are more likely to go on functioning efficiently when the leader or co-ordinator is away than when one area of responsibility is allocated to a single individual.

Professional motivation

Promotions in developing educational systems, especially those in small states, are closely related to the individuals obtaining scholarships for further training. The officials and administrators who gain scholarships for further studies tend to be the better qualified, the more enterprising, those who show evidence of industry and initiative. These very qualities, in addition to improved qualifications on their return, place them in the best position for promotion. On this basis the specialist subject teacher of a secondary school, for example, is likely to be the most qualified candidate and is promoted to headteacher, the audio-visual specialist applies and obtains a lectureship

at university, the curriculum planner becomes the director for secondary schools, etc. In most countries this process is in the nature of things. In large, educationally developed countries which have several officials within a particular specialisation the impact of such changes is imperceptible, indeed such movements are seen to provide a healthy cross-fertilisation within the system. In small states, the promotion of an official to another post often results in the loss of the only specialist in his or her previous post, an area which can become immobile until a new person is trained and the cycle starts all over again. There is a strong case for long-term planning, for a policy on multi-functional roles and for the creation of joint posts to minimise the detrimental effects of promotion and other organisational changes within small states.

The very scale of educational systems in small states seriously limits opportunities for promotion so that many capable and ambitious young men and women feel their chances of professional growth are stunted. Such feelings tend to be strongest on their return from scholarships overseas where the opportunities for research and academic fulfilment are more promising and where career advancement and remunerative rewards are more attractive than in their countries. It is difficult to prescribe solutions to the resulting clash between the personal aspirations of the individual and the needs of the nation. Personal guarantees for return can be imposed, and scholarship donating agencies or countries can refuse continued residence on the termination of the scholarship. However, such measures cannot ensure the commitment of the frustrated or professionally unsatisfied official. On the other hand, allowing such officials to terminate their obligations with impunity will encourage others to do the same. There do not seem to be easy solutions to this dilemma which is rendered more intricate by the social nature of each particular state.

Another source of frustration among educators in a small nation state arises from the promotion of individuals with strong political connections rather than outstanding professional performance. This happens in many countries, large or small, but because of the limited

number of job opportunities in the latter, such action can prove extremely depressing for the majority of education staff.

Regional co-operation

Regional co-operation in the professional development of educational personnel has great attractions for small states. Courses can be designed to meet the specific needs of the region and can develop content that ensures relevancy and the emphasis of a local bias. The co-ordinated utilisation of resources reduces costs and reinforces a sense of self-reliance. Overseas experts can still be brought in to contribute to training programmes, with the major advantage that more locals are exposed to them than if a few selected individuals are sent to study at the metropolis.

At the same time, the limitations and difficulties in promoting regional co-operation should not be overlooked for although the concept sounds good, its implementation can be problematic. For instance the setting up of a course can be most time-consuming and demanding on the already overworked officials of the small states with the result that it is often quicker, albeit shortsighted and costlier, to send candidates to established courses in metropolitan institutions. Also, sectoral interests and rivalries can inhibit the desired co-operation, while the concentration of the most qualified personnel at a regional centre depletes the national centres of their best people and resources. Most essential of all, to be successful, regional projects in education must gain the confidence and recognition of the participants and the local population at large. These often unwittingly undermine regional or local initiatives through the ex-colonial mentality that gives greater credence and value to activities and institutions of a foreign origin, even when local courses and projects produce better results.

And perhaps that is one of the major handicaps facing small states. They tend to have a strong national and cultural identity; and yet feeling small and vulnerable, they remain intellectually dependent on larger states. They see themselves as miniature models of the larger

nations and attempt to emulate them without fully realising that as small states they have an ecology of their own. A general policy for the professional development of educational personnel in small states must reflect an acute awareness of the benefits and limitations of being small. A lack of this basic awareness often leads to rejected transplants.