

Chapter 6:

Central Administration and Support

Because most small schools are in remote areas, the central authorities find it hard to provide adequate support. However, several strategies can be employed to reduce problems. This chapter looks at (a) systems for sharing resources, (b) school broadcasts, and (c) correspondence courses.

(a) Shared Resources

Because their enrolments are too small to justify employment and heavy investment, it is often hard for small schools to gain access to specialist teachers, equipment and services. One way to solve this problem is to group small schools together. For example:

- * In several Latin American and Asian countries, school clusters have been formed to give small schools access to the laboratories, libraries and specialist staff of larger ones. In Latin America the clusters exist in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala. In Asia they exist in India, Sri Lanka and Thailand.
- * In one part of Canada, four small school divisions made their own arrangements to enable pupils in Grades 10 – 12 to take courses in cosmetology, power mechanics, welding, building and food trades.
- * In parts of the USA, schools are served by specially designed mobile laboratories.
- * In Queensland, Australia, Technical Maintenance Officers travel round remote schools repairing overhead projectors, radios, televisions, etc.. They have greatly reduced 'out of action' time for equipment, and have saved the schools from needing to take broken equipment to a town.

Sharing is not always easy, however. Most of all, it depends on the cooperation of the people involved. Petty jealousies and inconsiderate attitudes can easily destroy such schemes.

Moreover, when pupils move to different institutions to make use of specialist workshops (as in the Canadian example), they consume considerable time, energy and money in travel. It is also harder for them to develop a sense of identity with their own schools.

***** * *School Clusters in Sri Lanka* *

* *Since 1981, many schools in Sri Lanka have been grouped into* *
* *clusters. Each cluster has about 10 schools, and includes both* *
* *primary and secondary institutions. Staff and other resources* *
* *are allocated to clusters as a whole, and are then distributed by* *
* *the cluster heads according to needs.* *

* *This system allows resources to be used flexibly. In* *
* *particular, small schools gain access to the resources of larger* *
* *ones. For example:* *

* — *in some cases, primary schools with teacher shortages* *
* *have gained the part-time services of secondary school* *
* *staff. Without the cluster system, the teachers could not* *
* *be shared between schools. And it would not normally be* *
* *possible for university graduates to work at the primary* *
* *level.* *

* — *in other cases, schools have shared library books, science* *
* *equipment and playing fields.* *

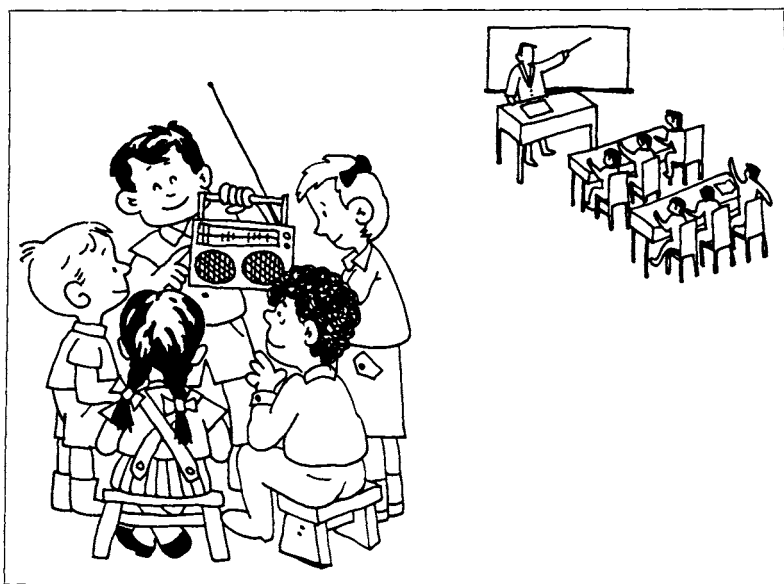
* — *school staff join together for in-service sessions. This* *
* *gives teachers in small schools more colleagues with* *
* *whom to exchange ideas.* *

* *Of course, the effectiveness of school clusters chiefly depends* *
* *on the personalities and skills of its members. There is a danger* *
* *that the cluster head will merely use cluster resources to enrich* *
* *his own institution. But experience so far has been encourag-* *
* *ing. Many clusters have worked very well.* *

(b) School Broadcasts

Many governments broadcast special radio and television programmes for schools. They are designed for all schools, but are particularly helpful to small ones:

- * Because small schools have few teachers, they have access only to a limited range of talents. Broadcasts supplement the teachers' knowledge and skills.
- * Broadcasts also liberate teachers for other duties. In a multi-grade class, some children can listen to a broadcast while the teacher attends to others



School broadcasts are particularly helpful to small schools. They supplement teachers' knowledge and skills, and liberate teachers for other duties.

Learning from broadcasts is not always straightforward, however. Some common problems are:

- * Reception is not always good. Some schools find it hard to receive clear signals, even in good weather.
- * Radios sometimes break down, and remote schools cannot easily get them repaired.
- * Remote schools may find it hard to get batteries for the radios.
- * Lessons which operate in a sequence are sometimes hard to use. If pupils are absent for some time, e.g. for farm work, they may be too far behind to follow the broadcasts.
- * Schools have to adjust their timetables to match the broadcasts, even though it may not be very convenient.
- * The broadcasters rarely have enough feedback on how well pupils can understand the lessons.

But these factors do not destroy the value of school broadcasts. Problems of pupil absence and of timetabling can be solved by using tape-recorders. Broadcasts can still be very useful, especially to small schools.

(c) Correspondence Courses

Many governments use the postal system to run correspondence courses. The courses are mainly designed for:

- children who cannot attend normal schools because they are handicapped or because they live in very remote areas,
- children who have completed primary school but did not achieve sufficiently high examination scores to secure secondary school places, and
- youths who have dropped out of school for personal reasons but who wish to continue their education.

But correspondence courses can also be taken by children in normal schools. They are particularly valuable to small schools that cannot provide specialist teachers.

Enrolment of this type of child also helps the correspondence school. It increases the number of pupils taking correspondence courses, and so enables the correspondence school to achieve economies of scale.

* *Education by Correspondence in New Zealand* *
* *
* *New Zealand's correspondence school was established in 1922.* *
* *It was mainly founded for children unable to attend normal* *
* *schools because of handicaps or because they lived in remote* *
* *areas. It has established a very good reputation, and can* *
* *provide instruction at a reasonable cost.* *
* *
* *Today's correspondence school courses are also taken by* *
* *full-time pupils who are in school but who do not have* *
* *specialist teachers. The courses offered are as diverse as* *
* *embroidery, Maori, horticulture and Latin. From viewpoint of* *
* *the correspondence school, enrolment of these in-school pupils* *
* *helps create a demand for courses and reduce unit costs.* *
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