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Small Primary Schools in the Shetland Islands

Abstract

Under a policy of consolidation, Prince Edward Island closed all its small (one- and two-teacher) elementary schools in favour of much larger, purpose built-ones. In sharp contrast, Shetland Islands have chosen to keep open all their small primary schools. Using the same criteria in both cases, the author demonstrates that the policy of the Shetland Islands is a viable alternative to consolidation.

Résumé

Aux termes d'une politique de consolidation, l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard a fermé toutes ses petites écoles élémentaires (composées de un ou deux professeurs) pour ne conserver que les plus importantes, construites dans un but précis. Par contre, les îles Shetland ont choisi de conserver toutes leurs écoles élémentaires. En utilisant les mêmes critères dans les deux cas, l'auteur démontre que la politique des îles Shetland est une solution viable par rapport à la consolidation.

The Shetland Islands, sometimes called Zetland Islands, lie on the most northerly frontier of Europe, 340 km. north of Aberdeen and 210 km. north of the Scottish mainland. In all, there are over a hundred islands, but fewer than twenty are inhabited. The largest island is called Mainland, adjacent islands being accessible by ferry or (more rarely and infrequently) by plane. Total population in 1991 was 22,017. The total land mass is 1,468 square kms. The population density of 16 people per square kilometer is among the lowest in the United Kingdom.

The chief sources of livelihood are the oil industry since 1970, centred on Sullom Voe, the largest oil terminal in Europe; fisheries (harvesting, processing, and salmon farming); agriculture (mainly sheep farming); knitwear; and a fast-growing tourist industry.

Responsibility for administration rests in the Shetland Island Council of 25 locally elected members. It is a statutory, all-purpose local authority with wide-ranging powers and functions, including those for education.

Rationale of the Study

In the last thirty years or so in Canada, many small (one- and two-room/teacher) elementary schools have closed their doors under policies of consolidation into larger, purpose-built schools of up to 500 pupils. The prevailing arguments for such closures included the following:

Accommodation. The premises were old-fashioned and falling far short of modern standards in structure, heating, lighting, ventilation, and sanitation. In particular, washroom facilities were primitive and outdated both for children and (where they existed) for staff.

Instructional Resources. Small schools lacked many of the instructional resources required to implement a full curriculum. By contrast, large purpose-built schools with libraries, audio-visual materials, computers, and purpose-built gymnasias afforded appropriate curriculum enrichment.

Staffing: Permanent and Consultative Staff. The teachers in small schools tended to be minimally qualified, and, because they were in front of a class all day, were denied the opportunity to meet with other teachers to exchange ideas or practices. Opportunities for updating their skills were inevitably denied them; nor did they have any secretarial assistance provided to help cope with necessary daily administrative procedures and returns.

Support services from qualified consultative staff were not available, not only in terms of specific curriculum subjects, but also in terms of children experiencing learning difficulties or having special needs. *Pari passu*, enrichment education for the gifted child was unlikely to be provided. Another criticism was that because of small numbers in each chronological age-group, children were socially disadvantaged by the simple fact of lack of opportunity to interact with peer groups, as, for example, in such organized activities as field-games or concerts.

Curriculum. It was impossible to offer children a holistic curriculum. One or two teachers could not be expected to "cover" with equal expertise

as many as ten subjects, i.e., English, math, science, technology, art (including design), music, history, geography, physical education, and religious instruction. Inevitably, some of these subjects would not be taught adequately, if at all.

It was on such grounds as these that one island, Prince Edward Island, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, was led to close all its small rural elementary schools. The last one was closed in 1976. The children of elementary school age (6 to 12 years) are now bussed daily into large, newly-built schools of up to 500 pupils. This paper does not concern itself with an examination of the results of that policy, but simply poses the question: "Was there any alternative policy worth pursuing?"

It so happens that there was. We shall examine another system that has kept open its small schools.

In contrast to Prince Edward Island, the Shetland Islands Council has adopted a policy of keeping open **all** its primary (elementary) schools, no matter how small. Off-island schools of respectively 2, 3, and 4 pupils may be cited as exceptional perhaps; but, in all, there are still 19 primary schools open, nine with one teacher and ten with two teachers in them. How has this alternative policy of rationalization been carried through? What is it like to be in the schools? And finally, "Are Shetland's small primary schools providing the right setting for delivery of a holistic curriculum?"

A Comparative Commentary

After all the prerequisite facilitating permissions had been obtained, and with the help of the Education Department of the Shetland Islands Council, a sample of nine schools was selected and visited for this study. Four were one-teacher schools, five were two-teacher schools.

Using the criteria already mentioned above in respect to the closing of Prince Edward Island's schools, the following comparative comments are made.

Accommodations

All the primary schools visited have a generous provision of classroom space. The one-teacher schools have a large central room as a work area, sometimes with a smaller adjacent room. The two-teacher schools all have two separate classrooms, in some cases three. All rooms are furnished with desks and chairs of appropriate size according to age. Shelving for books and display space for expression work are amply provided.

All schools have a dining area with a kitchen incorporated where the (statutory) mid-day meal is cooked or (more rarely) brought in from a central kitchen. Separate indoor washrooms are provided for the boys and girls, and every Head Teacher has a separate study provided - properly furnished and with its own washroom *cum* cloakroom for staff. Though ample natural light exists in all classrooms (all have at least one large window facing out), modern systems of controlled lighting, heating, and ventilation have been installed.

A paved playground adjoins each school, big enough for impromptu team games at mid-morning break and at the noon hour. Fixtures are sparse, but a basketball hoop was common, with a jungle gym in one case. Exterior maintenance of school fabric is good. Inside and outside decoration (painting) is done at prescribed regular intervals, or when needed. Several improvements (renovations) were being carried out at the time of this study.

All schools are on the telephone, and electronic mail service facilitates contact between schools and the Divisional Education Office.

Instructional resources

Instructional materials in the classroom. All the schools visited have an ample supply of reading and graded readers at the infant stage, supplemented by sundry (often well-illustrated) background readers. Sense-training apparatus includes small and large toys. At the junior stage, there is plenty of good quality fiction, poetry, biographies (often related to local history), reference books, and at least one good dictionary. All children have access to an adequate supply of pre-mathematic and mathematical materials. In this respect, special mention must be made of the provision of computer programmes (soft-ware). Art materials are also well in evidence. Some constructional apparatus is noted, but much more would seem desirable in view of the current emphasis in the National Curriculum on science and technology at the primary level.

Every school has at least one television set with VCR and tape-deck. Some had two sets. All schools have one computer, most of them have two, and one school has three. Some schools have listening headsets for group use. All schools have on display colourful posters about the school. There is a photocopier in every school, primarily for use by the Head Teacher, but also made use of by pupils in their project-work.

Other instructional facilities. All schools have access to a mobile library service for exchange of books (fiction and reference). The services of a larger central library in Lerwick are also made available on request.

Special mention must be made of the Leisure Centres, so-called, one on Yell, one on Unst, two on Mainland. Facilities include a swimming pool (with qualified instructors) and a fully equipped gymnasium also with well-qualified personnel. Every school is allocated one half-day attendance every week.

Briefly, these centres are not funded by the Shetland Recreational Trust. Shetland has wisely invested monies received from oil-related revenues and will be well-placed whenever the oil supply from the North Sea dries up. It should be noted, however, that as education is a statutory responsibility for the Council under various acts, trust monies cannot, and are not, used to provide education services. So the Council buys educational services from the Leisure Centres. The consequential advantages to the small primary schools on the island cannot be over-estimated, in terms both of social interaction and curriculum enrichment.

One other opportunity-incentive the schools have is an allotment in their annual school budget for school outings. Head Teachers have considerable discretion here. Visits to interschool concerts and musical festivals are a fairly common occurrence. But two Head Teachers of one-teacher schools had plans to take all their pupils to the Scottish mainland (assisted, no doubt, by parental contribution and support), thereby widening horizons for island children—and parents!

Staffing

Four different forms of staffing are discernible, though in practical terms each interacts with the other in forwarding the learning process.

School permanent staff. The Council does not operate a “closed shop” policy and, in terms of legislation, all Head Teacher-promoted posts must be advertised nationally, i.e., within Scotland. Out of a total of 36 schools (primary and secondary) under the Council, 16 are “incomers” and 20 are local appointments, which is a nice balance. By far the greater number of teachers in the small schools are women. Of the schools visited, two were men Head Teachers of one-teacher schools, two were women Heads of one-teacher schools, and the five two-teacher schools were all staffed by women.

Teachers must hold the basic qualification of a three-year College of Education course (which includes an internship in small rural schools). This qualification is now being replaced by a Bachelor of Education degree. All

teachers had previous teaching experience. All were obviously deeply rooted in a Shetland way of life and this sense of cultural heritage, so prevalent everywhere, is being passed on to the children.

In-service training is provided by the Education Department of the Council, five specific (closure) days being set aside for this purpose. Many of the wide-ranging courses in pedagogy offer follow-up work, and if this necessitates absence from school, the Council pays the cost of substitute teachers. Other professional development (PD) courses take place after school hours. In general, the need for such training is commensurately greater in small, more isolated schools, where school development plans and monitoring of progress are under constant review.

Specialist subject teachers. However versatile and informed a classroom teacher may be, none can reasonably be expected to have equal mastery of the ten subject areas prescribed in the National Curriculum. The provision by the Council of a number of visiting specialist subject teachers has been a highly effective answer. Subjects so taught include physical education, art, music, and knitting and traditional fiddle, both indigenous crafts in Shetland. All being master teachers by careful selection, they enrich the day-to-day teaching of their subject, using up-to-date techniques.

One single recommendation might be that consideration now be given to the appointment of specialist teachers in science and technology, both key areas in the National Curriculum.

Learning support and special needs teachers. The Council provides schools, upon request, with the services of specialist visiting teachers who provide supplementary education (once called remedial education) for children having learning difficulties in class. Children with "special needs" receive tuition on a one-to-one basis, two observed instances being one with a child with Down syndrome, and another with a hearing-impaired child. (The latter, incidentally, was flown to a special school in Aberdeen for part of the school year.)

Local inspectors and advisors. These officers, some 19 in all, constitute the so-called advisory arm of the Education Department. Being almost without exception promoted Head Teachers, they are rich in teaching and administrative experience, and can offer advice on a wide range of curriculum concerns. Two of them have training in psychology and offer advice on request to any school having problem children in class. One advisor is specifically allocated to Learning Support and Nonschool Educa-

tion, i.e., education for children, for example, who are unable to attend school for extended periods, as during convalescence after a serious illness.

The brief of the advisory arm is to monitor standards in schools by systematic visitation, and to support schools in the management of change. The change-process in Scottish education today is of supreme importance, five specific areas having been designated. The vast amount of paper work relating to these, now flowing into schools, is a major concern for teachers, most particularly in these small primary schools where teachers are in front of a class all day. The advisory arm has overall responsibilities for the planning of in-service courses and, as such, can provide a most useful service to teachers in interpreting change in practical terms, e.g., in assessment methods of school progress. There is always a great need for this.

The advisory team comes directly under a Divisional Education Officer, whose wide experience of small schools enables him to coordinate their efforts most effectively.

Nonteaching staff. This infrastructure of the island-education service is sometimes overlooked, but not so in the case of Shetland. Such staff includes school-meals staff, school secretaries (each Head Teacher being allowed one for one half-day a week), playground supervisors, school bus drivers, and school cleaning staff. Together, they represent an important source of local employment, providing permanency and stability in small island communities.

Community support

Though community support is a desirable feature of all schools, it is particularly apparent in the case of Shetland primary schools. Individual parents "drop by" to see the Head Teacher on occasion. Donation of an extra television set and/or of a computer by parent groups is not uncommon. A high level of attendance at school by the children is another indication of parental support. The schools themselves return the compliment by their own participation in public performances, as in the traditional *Up-Helly-Aa* Festival, concerts, and the annual nativity play. Many village social activities take place in the school (in one case, all of them). The School Boards Act (Scotland) of 1988 made provision for all schools to have a school board, and all the schools visited in this study had one. These governing boards, made up of representatives of parents, teaching staff, the community, and the Council have provided support for teachers in many ways, not least in their support of the "opting out" clause in the case of the otherwise

statutory *School Attainment Tests* (SAT) at the age of 7. Opinions will vary as to the wisdom of this with the need for some national yardstick of measurements of children's progress in English, science, and mathematics being so desirable. But parental support for teachers in Shetland cannot be gain said. (Ninety-eight percent of schools "opted out" of using the attainment tests at this age.)

The Shetland Islands Council

A number of policy decisions clearly reflects a caring concern for the small island primary schools. These are summarized in the following statements.

- * In numerical terms, no classroom must have more than 25 pupils in it.
- * No class must have more than 19 pupils in it (the so-called "magic formula" of one teacher to 19 pupils). Over that number qualifies the school for a second teacher, and over 38, a third teacher, and so on.
- * In terms of staff comfort, reference has already been made to the provision of a separate study for every Head Teacher.
- * Transport is made available for any child living more than one and a half miles from the school. Transport is also provided free for school journeys to the respective Leisure Centres, and for other specified out-of-school visits.
- * The provision of a specialized teaching force—a "Learning Support Service" and a "Special Needs Service"—has enabled these small island primary schools to provide a high quality education.

No nursery school provision was available in the schools visited, but it is understood it does exist in five primary schools, and an extension of the service (pre-5 years) is envisaged. This would appear highly desirable in view of the current emphasis on the importance of a child's education up to the fifth year, but also in keeping up numbers in attendance in these small island schools.

The Curriculum in Selected Schools

Thus far, it has been possible to generalize in terms of the operation of the 19 one- and two-teacher schools, but the day-to-day life merits individual treatment. Nine schools were visited over a period from March

25 to April 3, 1992. The following short statements are descriptive profiles, vignettes so to speak, of life in each of them on an average day. Together, they represent traditional freedom of the Head Teacher and staff to fashion the school's scheme-of-work in their own way.

Bressay Primary School

This is a two-teacher school, having 25 pupils currently on roll within the customary age ranges of 5 to 12. One teacher takes the younger class of 11 pupils Primary (P) 1 - 3, the other (also the Head Teacher) takes the junior pupils P4 - 7.

The school offers a wholesome learning environment right from the start of the school day. Indeed, one 9-year-old boy had come to school early just to use the computer (one of three in the school).

On the morning of the visit, the infants class had devised their own unscripted impromptu play called *Mr. Fox and the Rabbits*, complete with self-made miscellaneous props. The animation and oral fluency displayed were quite outstanding. Expression work, some of it on the classroom walls, was also eye-catching. These were happy children, spontaneous in welcoming strangers, neither shy nor reticent in asking questions, yet equally ready to talk about **their** school.

The junior class continues this tradition, well demonstrated in excellent displays of expression work on every available wall-space: family pedigrees, for example; or individual poems about one's family (original and amusing !). A project on "Courage and the Sea" (very relevant to Shetland history) effectively touched on every subject area of the National Curriculum. It was carefully written up and vividly illustrated. The preliminary research by each of three groups had demonstrably been very thorough.

The school is well-provided with musical ensemble instruments, and they are well used. The children had won several prizes in recent interschool competitions. A multicoloured plastic meccano-set was visibly well-used in model building (part of the curriculum area of technology). One unusual addition to the staff is a volunteer infants teacher, well-qualified as an infants teacher in her own right. Good use is made of posters displayed about the school, notably in health care.

This is an excellent school in terms of providing a wholesome learning environment. A recent full inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectors

confirms this. It is worth placing on record that no school visitors could ever have received a warmer, more cordial welcome, even when, through an administrative hiatus, they were completely unexpected.

South Nesting Primary School

A one-teacher school with 12 children on roll (P1-7), South Nesting's outstanding feature must be the natural, open, friendly manner of the children from an early age, well exemplified in the following spontaneous conversation over a small group activity by three 5- to 7-year-olds.

Pupil 1: *I'll never get this right. It always comes out wrong.*

Visitor: *Well, never mind. We all make mistakes you know. Only God is perfect.*

Pupil 1: *And Jesus! (pause)*

Pupil 2: *What I want to know is, who made God? (pause)*

Pupil 3: *I think God made himself.*

Quite astonishing as informal conversation!

At the time of the visit, the infants were busy decorating frames of a picture of themselves for Mother's Day next day. In somewhat similar manner, the older children were decorating individual flower vases they had made and were fashioning paper daffodils to put in them. At their request, all nine older pupils played several pieces of music in ensemble (which had been part of a completed project on Australia). Two boys thereafter played a violin duet, then individual solos, with great assurance.

Children showed great keenness to demonstrate their skill with the computer. A seven-year-old rattled off her multiplication revision test; and a ten-year-old proudly took the visitors on a—successful!—Viking raid down the east coast of England. The Head Teacher was planning to take all her pupils on a visit to Perth on the Scottish mainland in the summer.

The reception afforded by the Head Teacher and the children alike deserves comment. Unexpected as the visitors were, none could have received a friendlier, more spontaneous welcome.

Fetlar Primary School, Fetlar Island

Two ferry journeys are necessary to reach Fetlar. The only school on the island is a one-teacher school with 12 pupils on roll, P1-7.

Formal English is based on the Ginn 360 series, and math follows the Scottish Math Series 5-14. Alongside this, the children work on individual

projects. Examples shown by the younger children included weddings, fish, and horses; and by the older, the Crusaders. With a Mother's Day approaching, other activities on an individual basis included decoration of photo-frames, vases and *papier-maché* flowers.

Initially somewhat shy, the children eventually warmed to the "off-island" visitors. As a group, they have a close relationship with each other and play well together outside school. They are also exceedingly hardy, as demonstrated by a lunch-time football game on the playground in subzero temperatures!

A full-time cook prepares and serves the mid-day meal on the premises. As additional support services, there is a fully qualified nurse resident on the island, and a doctor visits the island weekly.

Well qualified and rich in experience, the Head Teacher travels to school every day by ferry from the adjacent island of Unst. His own daughter is in the school, as is the daughter of the cook. He is completely in tune with his pupils, eats with them, and talks with them over the mid-day meal. One of his initiatives has been to take all the pupils out on a day excursion into the surrounding hills. His school requisition for 1992-93 shows his experience in yet another way, being a shrewd balance between textbooks, art materials, social and moral education, and school outings. A generous capitation allowance also bears ample testimony to the Shetland Island Council's determination to keep this school open. Efforts are also being made to develop miscellaneous community projects on the island to sustain and encourage family settlement, and so more pupils for the school.

Cullivoe Primary School, Yell

At the northerly end of the island Yell, Cullivoe is a two-teacher school with 16 pupils presently on roll, 7 in P1-3, and 9 in P4-7. The latter class is taught by the Head Teacher.

The infants room is bright, with excellent natural lighting through the windows. It is well equipped with lots of cupboard space, a sand table, a (well-used) dressing up basket, and a Wendy house. There are two television sets and three computers in the school, one being donated by grateful parents. The teacher has created a snug little reading corner, with floor cushions for seats and, all around, a wide range of picture and reading books. Her own lively imagination has stimulated the children's, as evidenced by several formidable-looking (card board) space craft about the room. This construction of three-dimensional project work is continued in the junior class. These children show a pleasing capacity to work on their own when the Head Teacher is engaged. Individual pupils demonstrated

their skill in using computer programs in English grammar and math: one 7 + girl exhibited phenomenal speed with her mensuration tables.

The outstanding feature of the morning's work, however, was a rehearsal by **all** the children for a concert to be held that same evening. They dressed up, mimed, played recorders, sang songs to the simple accompaniment on the piano by the Head Teacher. Not surprisingly, they had won prizes in recent Island musical competitions, including a first prize in the recorder ensemble.

As numbers on roll have declined below the so-called "magic formula" of 1:19 (i.e., one teacher to 19 pupils), the school is scheduled to lose the infants teacher in the fall term. She is well-qualified, and has a Master of Arts degree as well as the basic Diploma.

But the real strength of the school will still reside in the Head Teacher, as it does now. Well qualified and richly experienced, she is at the very centre of the community. Her four daughters went to the school—so do two of her granddaughters today. The school expresses in a remarkable way the rhythms of the whole of Cullivoe community. Church services are held there, as well as parents' meetings, games, club sessions, and special events such as the *Up-Helly-Aa* yearly festival.

Burravoe Primary School, Yell

At the south end of the island of Yell, Burravoe is a two-teacher school of 34 children, 15 in P1-3, 19 in P4-7. The Head Teacher takes the younger class.

Work in the two classes shows a natural progression, in particular in the widening scope of project work. In both classes, colourful expression work is on display around the walls: friezes on families—families of trees and plants, families of musical instruments (ingeniously portrayed). A project on "Children during World War II" had included three-dimensional artifacts with great effect. Choice of poems by individual children again showed a pleasing variety, all of them also showing careful penmanship. A pleasing integration of some of the National Curriculum subjects was being achieved: English, math, history, geography, music, art, science. The keen interest of the older children in environmental studies was apparent in wall charts about protection of plants, birds, and animals; also in a small arbo-retum of home-grown saplings in pots.

No less pleasing was the remarkable achievement of some pupils in knitting, one of the Shetlands' indigenous crafts. Thus, in a lesson with the

visiting teacher for knitting, one seven-year-old boy was well on the way to completion of a sweater in a pattern of self-chosen and pleasingly complementary colours. The Head Teacher also teaches knitting to the younger children, P1-4.

From a very early age, these children are introduced to the joy of painting, using large sheets of rice-paper on easels. Some very colourful—and amusing—self portraits were on display. Many carefully graded reading books on a wide range of topics (and most judiciously displayed) help the children develop wider horizons by their “reading round” specific subject matter. A sequence of projects has helped develop good research habits and good writing habits.

No less noteworthy is the burgeoning musical tradition in the school. It is the Head Teacher’s justifiably proud boast that no one leaves Burravoe without mastery of at least the recorder, and one other musical instrument of the pupil’s choice.

The visitors were fortunate enough to hear a rehearsal for an interschools concert in the evening. The 20-minute program included ensemble, recorders, and songs by the whole of the junior class. Precision of fingering on the recorder playing and on ensemble instrumentation was a joy to see and hear, as was the clarity of tone in the singing. Nor was this a “one off” occasion. A video-cassette of the school’s nativity play at Christmas before a local parish church congregation showed originality of presentation by the children and was well sustained as a play for close to three-quarters of an hour. This ease of communication extends to the children’s own interests. At the lunch hour break, a few of the older pupils had organized a whist session, with lots of conversation. Hearing that visitors were coming, they had done research on their Canadian island, using pictures, maps, and books (not least the evergreen *Anne of Green Gables*); and many were the questions about Prince Edward Island. As might be expected from the high quality of music in the school, the children have access to an astonishing range of musical instruments of many kinds.

A successful initiative by the Head Teacher has been to offer to take in to school for short periods on four days a week the four-year-olds due to come to the school in the following September. This was working well; two four-year-olds were obviously already very much at home in the school.

Haroldswick Primary School

This is a two-teacher school, with 22 pupils on roll, 11 being P1-3, and 11 in P4-7. The Head Teacher takes the younger class.

The school day begins reverently with short prayers in the infants class, the Lord's Prayer in the junior one. The infants receive an excellent introduction to school life. Opportunities are provided for them to use the sand tray, water table, and Wendy house. Their introduction to reading is through pre-readers (picture books) and nicely graded readers with plenty of supplementary books for widening of horizons. The Head Teacher had made an ingenious simplified adaptation of a computer program whereby beginners could start to build up individually their own vocabulary and sentence patterns. Expression work was on display around the walls: in particular was an eye-catching modern personalized version of "A Teddy Bear's Picnic". Three-dimensional work on display included a vivarium containing grasses, twigs, and stick insects; and an Easter Day garden complete with mosses, soil, gravel, flowers, and a roll-away stone. (The one in St. Paul's Cathedral was no better, even if bigger!)

Activities by the juniors reflect a similar creativity. One truly outstanding example was a quilt hanging on a wall—each child had designed and made a panel. Very deservedly, the quilt had received both a community and an interschool award. Two computer-assisted projects were respectively on Vikings; and on the world in general, Japan being the current focus. The children also showed familiarity with their computer math programs.

Quite spontaneously, the class had found Prince Edward Island on the world map and were agog to ask questions about it. Other aspects of classwork included poems, drawings, and three-dimensional models, the authorship of each and all being readily acknowledged and expanded upon.

On the day of the visit, a mobile library called, giving the children an opportunity to go out and exchange their reading books and/or ask for new ones for work on their projects.

Both teachers of this school are qualified and experienced. The Head Teacher has a strong interest in history and had completed a short, well-illustrated history of the school since it was first built. The old registers are still kept in the school, and none knows the families shown, past or present, better than the Head herself.

Uyeasound Primary School, Unst

The children at this one-teacher school, with 11 pupils on roll (P1-7), were observed just as they were preparing to be bussed to the junior high school at Yell for the mid-day meal and, thereafter, for an afternoon at the adjacent Leisure Centre. It was not possible to make any comments on the curriculum of this school.

The Head Teacher has previous experience in several small schools in different parts of the world. Plans for the summer included a trip with her pupils to Edinburgh. In part due to her support, a hamper of tinned food stuffs, destined for Albania, was being parcelled up by two boys in the school. It was part of a larger community effort involving sending two ten-ton trucks with parcels of food and clothing to Albania.

Olnafirth Primary School, Voe

This is a two-teacher school with 33 children on roll, 17 in the infants class (P1-3), and 16 in the junior class (P4-7). The Head Teacher teaches the junior class.

After morning prayers—an assembly is held occasionally—both classes turn to individual or group assignments, with lots of expression work to show for it. In the infants room is a magnificent *papier-maché* green dragon, put together by the children. Individual booklets about this mighty dragon were on display, including an exhibition of dragon eggs, with an appropriate warning: “Do not touch.” Of such is the stuff of infants’ imagination! In a sewing lesson with the teacher, the infants were doing different patterns of stitching on plain cloth. There is also a “Listening Corner” with headsets available for the children’s use.

The range of imaginative work in the junior classroom was most varied and most colourful. Three projects had been completed (*Beowulf*, “Religions of the World,” and “Fire”). All of them showed careful preliminary research of sources and had clearly captured the children’s interest, as multi-media displays in the classroom and hallway demonstrated. (The fatal dragon in *Beowulf* seemed ten feet high!) Self-composed poems had been preceded by word-reviews to eliminate boring words, with the result that some of these poems exhibited a remarkable vibrancy of vocabulary. Another activity had been their own short biographies, complete with photographs. Friezes of colourful art patterns lined the upper classroom walls.

The pupils also showed a keen interest in nature study and care of the environment. A small garden beside the playground had been judiciously planted and seasonal growth recorded. Concerning a Whaling Conference in Glasgow, the children had written letters to the prime minister of Japan, asking him not to lift the ban on whaling. One such letter had been sent to him via the conference. A hedgehog letter had also been composed under a “Save My Park” theme. A group exercise by the whole class had produced a large three-dimensional natural life collage in minute detail. The pupils had taken part in a sponsored anti-litter campaign by the community. Within the school, empty soda cans were collected, crushed,

and dispatched for recycling. A promising project on "Clean Air" was just about to begin.

One other child-centered interest is worthy of note. Each pupil was knitting a Florentine tapestry in self-chosen colours. Every pupil also kept a self-directed workbook for use in free time or when the Head Teacher was occupied. The school had a tradition for excellence in handwriting and had won trophies, before the interschool competition was discontinued.

Quarff Primary School

A one-teacher school, Quarff originally had 14 pupils on roll (P1-7), though it now has only 9. The pupils work individually on graded workbooks which are handed in for regular correction by the Head Teacher. At the time of the visit, a project on wild birds was beginning. There is a strong tradition of music even in so small a school. At a recent interschool festival, the pupils had won three prizes. In the class, an 8-year-old girl played the violin with great verve, even though she had only been learning for 18 months.

On the day of the visit, it transpired that the usual peripatetic art teacher had been taken ill. It speaks much for the Council's efficiency and concern for its small schools in that a lively replacement art teacher still visited the school on time, complete with her own carefully prepared resource materials.

The school is well-equipped, having a generous book allowance that is judiciously spent. The photocopier in the Head Teacher's room was used with ease by pupils developing project work.

The Head Teacher is well qualified and has a wide experience of teaching in very small schools. On the day of the visit, a Head Teacher from another small primary school paid a short visit over lunch. As he suggested, such contacts help combat feelings of isolation in the one-teacher school.

Pupils' Perceptions of the Learning Environment

Visitors to small schools may soon detect some of the pupils' attitudes to their learning environment. Observed examples were the children's ease of relationship with each other in the classroom; their openness in conversation and readiness to talk about their individual work; their ability to work on their own, or in groups; their zest for games on the playground, often involving everyone. But how to measure all of this is a very different matter. Visual observation has its limitations.

Accordingly, with the permission of the Council, a short questionnaire was offered to Head Teachers, to use with their pupils if they so wished. This pupil questionnaire was adapted from an earlier research instrument¹. Briefly, it was designed to assess the climate of learning in a classroom. It sampled pupils' opinions about school and the school experience generally. The instrument consisted of 40 simple statements, answerable by pupils on a "Yes," "No," or "Maybe" basis. Eight items were devoted to each of five variables: Satisfaction, Friction, Cohesiveness, Competition, and Difficulty.

The selected variables of the questionnaire may be defined as follows:

Satisfaction. This is the extent to which pupils enjoy their school work and school experiences generally. It is a global variable which measures a broad affective response to their overall experiences at school. Basically, the items here were worded in such a way as to find out whether the children liked school—a most important criterion.

Friction. This is the extent to which pupils do not get along well with others, if they have frequent disagreements, if they do not make friends easily, and so on.

Cohesiveness. This is somewhat the very opposite of friction. It seeks to measure the extent to which pupils play well together, like being in each other's company, and make good friends and cooperate well in their school work.

Competition. This variable is partly related to motivation. It seeks to measure the extent to which pupils want to excel, and get good marks in class. Some of the items are so designed as to measure the extent to which pupils are aware of having to compete for a desirable rank in class.

Difficulty. This variable is more self-evident. It seeks to measure the degree to which pupils find their work hard to do and not easy to understand.

Results of pupil questionnaire

One-teacher schools. A total of 24 replies was obtained from three one-teacher schools with regard to the pupils' perception of the learning environment (or social climate).

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of pupils' responses about learning environment

Variable	Mean	SD
Satisfaction	0.083	3.999
Friction	9.125	3.012
Cohesiveness	11.000	1.888
Competition	8.375	3.449
Difficulty	8.333	2.839

Two-teacher schools. A total of 73 replies was obtained from four two-teacher schools with regard to the pupils' perception of the learning environment (or social climate).

Table 2

Means and standard deviations of pupils' responses about learning environment

Variable	Mean	SD
Satisfaction	11.247	3.312
Friction	8.096	3.618
Cohesiveness	11.918	2.650
Competition	8.370	3.817
Difficulty	7.425	3.166

Interpretation of results

Since the possible range of scores for each variable is 0 to 16, a score of 8.00 might be considered to be an average and relatively neutral value for each variable. Briefly, judged by this criterion, competitiveness and degree of difficulty all hover about the mid-point. Friction is somewhat higher in

the one-teacher than in the two-teacher school. Difficulty with school work is lower in the two-teacher school, competition is about the same. Cohesiveness and satisfaction are well above the mid-point in both cases, which would indicate the children like being in school and enjoy their small school experience.

A Concluding Note on Costs

Additional research² showed that the comparative costing of the upkeep of the small one- and two-teacher primary schools *vis-à-vis* larger ones has not been discussed. Such vital questions as where the monies come from, what are the annual capital expenditures, or what are the sizes of the operating budget, have purposely been regarded as falling outside what is simply intended here as a descriptive survey of a random sample of small schools.

The one- and two-teacher schools of Shetland are good schools, but they are not cheap to maintain. It is precisely this cost factor which has prompted Local Education Authorities south of the border to pursue policies of consolidation.

What can confidently be concluded is that Shetland Council has chosen to say, in effect, "We have 19 one- or two-teacher primary schools. They represent what may well be called the primitive heartbeat of their respective communities. As such, we will keep them all open, no matter how small, offering every child an education according to age, aptitude and ability, a nourishing of personal growth in all senses of the term: mental, physical, emotional, religious, moral, and social". On the evidence provided, a fiercely independent Shetland Council has every reason to be proud of such trusteeship. It is an excellent record.

NOTES

¹ The pupil questionnaire is entitled "My Class". It was adapted from an earlier research instrument devised by Dr. Gary J. Anderson, of McGill University, to whom grateful acknowledgement is made.

² A sample of one school's expenditures (Olnafirth Primary School) may be obtained by contacting the author.

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