Leading Improvement in Small Schools:
A Comparative Study of Headship
in Small Primary Schools in Iceland and England

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For my parents who brought me up
to believe that education is a worthwhile enterprise


Preface

The sources of this thesis: *Leading Improvement in Small Schools: A Comparative Study of Headship in Small Primary Schools in England and Iceland* (July 1995) are as follows:

The information on which Chapters One and Two are based is derived from books and articles on school improvement, headship in primary schools and small schools. All of them are referenced and appropriately acknowledged in the text.

Chapter Three is based on data derived from interviews with eight headteachers in small primary schools in England and Iceland. The findings presented in the chapter, the discussion of them and the conclusions and implications presented in Chapter Four are my own original work, but where supported by the literature it is acknowledged in the text and referenced in the list of References.
I would like to acknowledge the Icelandic Ministry of Education and Culture for granting me the sabbatical year that enabled me to attend the M.Phil. course out of which this thesis has arisen, and The Teachers’ Union of Iceland’s Fund for School Development and Research from which a grant made my fieldwork in Iceland possible.

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Schools, even small ones, are in many ways complex institutions. Their organisational structure is often described as a set of loosely coupled systems (Hoyle 1986 Chapter 2) where each class or subject teacher has considerable autonomy over her or his territory and perhaps not much contact with colleagues. It further adds to this complexity that as providers of public education schools are subject to pressure from various pressure groups and have to conform to the political agendas of governments. Educational policy is by nature controversial and schools often find themselves caught in the middle of a political controversy over the philosophy and general aims of education.

Over the last decade schools in most western countries have had to cope with unprecedented pace of educational change in most cases imposed on them by the political agendas of governments. To take an example, English schools have, only since 1988, had to implement a national curriculum, respond to Local Management of Schools (LMS) profoundly changing their relationships with their Local Education Authorities and governing bodies, and implement various mandated improvement strategies such as school development planning and teacher appraisal as well as being subject to a new system of school inspection.

In Iceland similar changes are under way. A new Education Act (1995) for the primary school sector has introduced what I will in this paper call ‘community management of schools’, devolving financial and professional responsibility for primary schools to the local community councils and governing bodies. The government has also declared its policy to reduce the flexibility of the National Curriculum, require schools to adopt school-based evaluation and build an official system for external evaluation of schools’ performance. [For a more detailed account of the Icelandic context see Appendix 1].

Headship in this situation is an increasingly demanding job. Having to understand, lead and cope with what Fullan (1991;1992) describes as an overload of change, respond to increasing demands of accountability, acquire new skills for budgeting
and financial management and be in charge of implementing mandated school improvement strategies has brought about substantial changes in the task of the headteacher. Particularly challenging, however, is the role of headteachers in small primary schools, who have had to add the load of recent reforms to their substantial amount of class teaching, inevitably resulting in an increased tension between their roles as leading professional inside their schools and chief executives of the local management of their schools (Dunning 1993; Hellawell 1992).

My interest in small primary schools stems mainly from the fact that my experience as a headteacher is in a school of that kind, and will continue to be so for at least the near future. Apart from that, small schools are a very prominent feature of the Icelandic primary school system. Of the 207 primary schools in the whole country and the 147 primary schools outside the capital area, 94 schools have 100 or fewer pupils on roll and organise their classes with two or more year age groups together.

Until recently small schools did not attract much interest in Iceland. Closure proposals were rare as their existence in the many small fishing villages along the coast and in the sparsely populated agricultural areas was accepted as inevitable. They were, however, referred to in a negative way as inadequate versions of larger schools rather than being valued in their own right as unique organisations (Bell and Sigsworth 1987). The objections to their viability were of a similar nature to those voiced in Britain (Bell and Sigsworth 1987; Dunning 1993; Galton 1993): inefficiency, isolation of both teachers and children and in particular curriculum delivery in mixed age classes was thought to be problematic. This view was even shared by some of the teachers working in small schools who often referred to their schools as inferior and even inadequate and their working conditions as more difficult and problematic than those of their colleagues in urban schools.

Since its foundation in 1988, the Organisation of Small Schools in Iceland has made an effort to reverse this trend and point out how small schools can actually capitalise on their unique features for the benefits of their children: how they have the potential to create a warm, family-like atmosphere, how the smallness can enhance the opportunities to meet individual needs, how the mixed age classes create no obstacles to individual or co-operative learning and the small size enhances opportunities of collaboration between teachers that is likely to foster experimental and developmental work.

The potential contribution of these schools to the maintenance and growth of the communities they serve has also been an issue. Many rural parts of Iceland have suffered a severe decline in population and some of the smallest and most remote
areas even face the threat of being deserted. A good school which parents can trust for their children’s education is increasingly acknowledged as one of the factors that contributes to the maintenance of these communities. If the school disappears so will, eventually, the inhabitants.

It seemed therefore almost self-evident, when I decided to study headship in the 1990s, to relate that study to small schools. Being in the fortunate situation to have the opportunity to visit small village schools in England and interview their headteachers, and to visit some colleagues in Iceland for the same purpose, gave me a valuable opportunity for comparison. My interest in the comparison was further enhanced by the impending changes in the Icelandic primary sector that I have already mentioned. It seemed interesting indeed to look at how the recent legislation in England has changed the lives of headteachers, and address the question whether there were lessons to learn for their Icelandic colleagues.

My study falls into four main chapters. In the first chapter I draw on some evidence from the two dominant paradigms of educational research, school effectiveness and school improvement, to make the case for the central importance of headteachers for school improvement. From there I turn in Chapter Two to the day-to-day realities headteachers face in their schools and make an attempt to draw up a synthesis of some of their most important roles and responsibilities.

In Chapter Three I give an account of my enquiry and report and discuss the main findings from it, while in Chapter Four I offer my conclusions and consider the implications, in particular for Icelandic headteachers.
Chapter 1

Headship and School Improvement

We are no longer in any doubt that schools matter; they do make a difference for the future of children and teenagers, whatever their social background. There is no doubt either that schools differ in the impact they have on children and that the quality of the education they provide – the outcomes the children take with them from the school – can be improved (Stoll 1991; Reynolds 1992).

Not surprisingly, therefore, educational reform is regarded as a top priority across the world. The nature of this reform has been somewhat paradoxical. Whilst governments have imposed on schools centralised prescriptions of curriculum, standardised testing and mandated improvement strategies they have devolved the responsibility for the implementation of these prescriptions and financial and staff management to headteachers and governing bodies of individual schools (Dempster et al. 1994; Fullan 1991:200-203; West and Ainscow 1991:3-15).

The success of reform projects, whether they are characterised by prescription or devolution, and, indeed, the quality of the schools and their capacity to improve, is dependent on many factors. Central to them all is the role of the headteacher. It is now fairly well established in the literature that schools will not be improved by legislation and centrally imposed policies, and reforms do not come about ‘flying on autopilot’ (Fullan 1991; Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991; Hopkins et al. 1994; Stoll 1991). To be sustained, external changes need to be integrated with the existing practice, vision and culture of the school and this process is again to a large degree dependent on the headteacher and the management arrangements (Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991 Chapter 3) for which he or she is responsible. Failure to recognise this is probably the main reason for the long story of failed attempts to reform schools (see e.g. Fullan 1991).

In a decentralised system where the responsibilities for decision-making and the management of the school at large are devolved all the way to the school level the head plays an equally important, albeit different role. The head’s leadership and management role, on which success depends, becomes more explicit and as central...
or local governments are no longer in control of the schools the head is officially held responsible for the school’s performance. Such accountability inevitably requires some means of both official and public monitoring of schools’ performance. In England and Wales this has partly been accomplished by league tables of exam results and official school inspection.

Unfortunately we know very little about the effects school size has on headship and what it takes to be a head of a small school with a substantial teaching commitment (Southworth 1990; Patrick 1990). From the PRISMS (Curriculum Provision in Small Schools) study (Galton and Patrick 1990; Patrick 1990), however, there emerges the picture of what Patrick (1990:44) refers to as the ‘all-embracing nature’ of the head’s role in a small school. It seems that small schools are even more dependent on their headteachers than other schools. There is no such thing as a senior management team, there may not even be a deputy head. The head is therefore likely to be more on his or her own with the headship duties as there are fewer people to whom responsibilities can be delegated. Small schools are therefore dependent on the head as an individual whereas larger schools have a team of senior management where the members can, at least to some extent, complement each other. Each individual, be it a teacher or the headteacher, counts more than in a larger staff group, whether it is for failure or success. Therefore a small school is likely to be, even more than a large school, shaped by the effectiveness or the ineffectiveness of its headteacher (Dunning 1993).

Writers about the quality of schools have recognised the importance and centrality of the headteacher for a long time. As early as 1977 in the well known study of ‘Ten Good Schools’ (DES 1977) leadership and ‘climate’ formed one of the seven aspects that were under review in the schools. From the study it appears that “[w]hat they all have in common is effective leadership and a ‘climate’ that is conducive to growth” (p.36). The other areas examined in the study included:

- the schools’ objectives,
- their pastoral care and oversight of academic progress,
- curriculum design and organisation,
- staff and quality of work,
- the use of resources and premises,
- links with the local community.

It seems fair to conclude that the schools’ performance in these areas was to a large degree determined by the effectiveness of their headteachers.
During the nearly two decades since the publication of ‘Ten Good Schools’ two main paradigms have guided research on the performance and quality of schools: school effectiveness and school improvement (Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991 Chapter 14; Stoll 1991,1994; Reynolds 1992). Both have underlined the central importance of the headteacher’s role. School effectiveness researchers’ main aim has been

… to find out why some schools are more effective than others in promoting positive outcomes … and what characteristics are most commonly found in schools that are effective for all their pupils. (Stoll 1994:129)

Through this type of research a picture of what an effective school looks like is gradually emerging and a prominent part of this picture is the importance of the headteacher’s effectiveness.

In their pioneering study of school effectiveness in primary schools in England Mortimore et al. (1988) identify 12 key factors that are associated with effective schooling. One of these factors is “[p]urposeful leadership of the staff by the head-teacher” (p.250). Here it seems also reasonable to conclude that effective leadership, as it is described by the authors (pp. 250-256), must permeate most of the other key factors, not least factors such as:

- the involvement of the deputy head,
- the involvement of teachers,
- parental involvement,
- the creation of a positive climate,
- the organisation of teaching and learning.

It is not enough, however, to know what an effective school looks like. We have to know, also, how to make schools effective, how to develop strategies for educational change and map the processes through which schools have to go, and the internal conditions they have to create, to bring about sustained improvement in the quality of education they provide for all pupils. That, in short, is the aim of the second paradigm of educational research, school improvement.

Hopkins et al. (1994:3) define school improvement as

… a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school’s capacity for managing change. In this sense school improvement is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support it.
The school improvement approach builds on a number of assumptions about the nature of educational change and schools as organisations (Hopkins et al. 1994:68-69). These assumptions are neatly summarised by Roland Barth (1990:45 my italics):

- Schools have the capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right. A major responsibility of those outside the school is to help provide these conditions for those inside.
- When the need and purpose is there, when the conditions are right, adults and students alike learn and each energizes and contributes to the learning of the other.
- What needs to be improved about schools is their culture, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the nature and quality of learning experiences.
- School improvement is an effort to determine and provide, from without and within, conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning among themselves.

The important message of this summary for the context of this paper is that schools will only be changed and improved from within, even though they may need support from outside, and successful school improvement rests on conditions that have to be created within the school. Thus change and improvement is initiated, implemented and sustained by those who work in the school and is managed and led by them. School improvement is therefore a learning activity which requires ongoing professional development where the school is organized as a learning community where all its members learn from each other in a collaborative manner. Central to this process is the role of the headteacher as an educational leader who, in collaboration with his or her staff, is able to arrange the management of the school to create the conditions and culture that are so central to the assumptions an which the school improvement approach rests (Fullan 1991, 1994; Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991, 1994; Holly and Southworth 1989; Hopkins and West 1994; Hopkins et al. 1994; Louis and Miles 1990).

**Leadership and management**

Many studies of headship and school improvement make a distinction between management and leadership (Coulson 1986; Day *et al.* 1990; Fullan 1991; Louis and Miles 1990; West and Ainscow 1991). In short, leadership is about setting the course and influencing group behaviour towards a common goal, while
management is about making sure that the course is followed, e.g. by deploying people to get things done (Louis and Miles 1990:19; West and Ainscow 1991:29).

Angus (1989:69-71) draws attention to the important distinction between transactional and transformational leadership (see also Beare et al. 1989:106). Transactional leadership

… is characterized by a form of exchange between leader and subordinates. In return for effort, productivity, loyalty and so on, leaders offer rewards of one kind or another to subordinates. (Angus 1989:69)

Transformational leadership, on the other hand, seeks to engage leaders and followers in a joint enterprise with the

… shared purpose of building the best of organizations. … The heavy responsibility of leaders … [is to] draw upon the best of motives of their subordinates and to direct these towards the best interests of the organization … (Angus 1989:69-70)

By asserting and defending particular values and visions effective transformational leaders are capable of building and conveying a sense of mission that is shared by other members of the organisation and amounts to an organizational culture (Angus 1989:70).

Louis and Miles (1990:19-20) make it clear that the distinction between management and leadership is not an easy one:

The terms are both complementary and distinctive: Leaders set the course for the organization; managers make sure the course is followed. Leaders make strategic plans; managers design operational systems for carrying out the plans. Leaders stimulate and inspire; managers use their interpersonal influence and authority to translate that energy into productive work.

A similar point is made by Day et al. (1990:2) who maintain that the process of managing, that is how the vision and goals of the school are achieved, are a neglected area in texts related to school management.

From these definitions I conclude that both management and leadership are needed, and indeed crucial, in the venture of school improvement: leadership to set the course and management to make sure the course is followed. Management is therefore not only associated with stability and maintenance, important as they are, but also plays a crucial role in any change process (Fullan 1991:158; Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991,1994; Hopkins and West 1994; Sergiovanni 1987 Chapters 1,13,16;
West and Ainscow 1991). Furthermore it seems to me that the usefulness of trying to separate these functions in the work of headteachers is questionable and it could be of more use to pose the question: What are the key roles and responsibilities of headteachers who work effectively on school improvement, and can a synthesis of such roles be derived from the literature? Some of these roles will inevitably be closer to the management function and others will be closer to the leadership functions. But if my thesis stands, there will be a management and leadership component in them all.
Chapter 2

Headship in Primary Schools: Towards a Synthesis of Roles and Responsibilities

So far I have discussed the general importance of the headteacher’s role in school improvement. In this chapter I shall make an attempt to take this analysis further and shed some light on the roles and responsibilities primary school headteachers are faced with in their daily activities in their schools and develop a synthesis of these roles and responsibilities (see Appendix 2). I do not draw an explicit distinction between the leadership and management functions of the headteacher’s task. Instead my synthesis can be seen as an attempt to identify effective leadership and management behaviour by describing what effective headteachers actually do in their pursuit of school improvement. The synthesis is divided into two broad areas: roles and responsibilities within the school, which would seem to be the most important ones with regard to school improvement, and then roles and responsibilities outside the school which have become increasingly important in the wake of legislated devolution and local management of schools.

The chapter draws on a number of sources: First, studies of headship and leadership such as Coulson (1986); Day et al. (1990); Fullan (1992); Leithwood and Montgomery (1986); Southworth (1988a, 1990). Second, studies of school improvement such as Barth (1990); Fullan (1991); Holly and Southworth (1989); Hopkins et al. (1994); Louis and Miles (1990); West and Hopkins (1994). Third, studies of small primary schools such as Bell and Sigsworth (1987, 1992); Galton (1993); Galton and Patrick (1990); Patrick (1991); Potter and Williams (1994).
Roles and responsibilities within the school

Building a culture of collaboration

Hopkins et al. (1994:103) define organisational culture “...as an amalgam of the values, norms and beliefs that characterize the way in which a group of people behave within a specific organizational setting”. They conclude along with many other writers within the school improvement paradigm that transforming the culture of the school holds the key to creating the internal conditions that are needed for successful and sustained school improvement (Barth 1990; Fullan 1991, 1994; Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991; Holly and Southworth 1989; Hopkins et al. 1994).

Schools that have successfully created the conditions for continuous improvement are described in various ways. They are commonly referred to as learning schools, (Fullan 1994; Holly and Southworth 1989; Southworth 1994) or moving or learning-enriched schools, which are terms borrowed from Rosenholz’s study of Teachers’ Workplace (1989) (Fullan 1991; Hopkins et al. 1994). What these schools seem to have in common is that they have created a collaborative culture that views educational change as an opportunity for growth and learning for the students and teachers alike, there is a broad consensus and clarity about the direction in which the school is moving and a steady movement towards that vision is ensured by a balance of maintenance and development (Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991).

In a learning school

[t]eachers engage in frequent, continuous … and precise … talk about teaching practice … [and] build up a shared language adequate to the complexity of teaching …. 

Teachers and administrators frequently observe each other teaching, and provide each other with useful … evaluations of their teaching. …

Teachers and administrators plan, design, research, evaluate and prepare teaching materials together. … share the considerable burden of development required by long-term improvement, confirm their emerging understanding of their approach, and make rising standards for their work attainable by them and by their students.

Teachers and administrators teach each other the practice of teaching.

(Judith Little 1981, her emphasis, quoted in Fullan 1991:78)
Collaborative cultures, however, do not come along by themselves. They have to be deliberately created within the school. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991 Chapter 3) make the case for management arrangements that consist of frameworks which guide the actions of all who are involved in the school, clarify roles and responsibilities and identify ways in which people involved can work together (p.16). The management arrangements and the culture of the school are interdependent. While the management arrangements can be deliberately chosen to affect the culture directly, they are also a reflection of a certain culture. School improvers therefore need to direct equal attention to both the management arrangements or the organizational structure of the school and its culture.

Collaborative cultures call for a redefinition of the notion of leadership. Angus (1989) for example maintains that despite a flattering appearance the notion of the educational leader, not least as it appears in the school effectiveness literature, takes for granted the traditional bureaucratic structure of schools where leadership and followership are attached to hierarchical positions. He argues that if leadership is to contribute to educational reform the understanding of the concept must be reconstructed. Leaders are not necessarily those who are in the hierarchical positions of leadership but people who are willing and capable of taking on leadership roles on some occasions but not others according to the task at hand. Such leadership roles arise from participation in staff working groups where “…some have power … because they are empowered by others … [and] reform can be asserted from below by participants” (Angus 1989:86-87).

Similar arguments about leadership that empowers people and leadership and membership of groups as activities that can be taken on by the same individual on different occasions are put forward by Barth (1990); Beare et al. (1989); Day et al. (1990); Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991); Holly and Southworth (1989); Southworth (1988a, 1990, 1994) and Yeomans (1986).

**Vision, goals and objectives**

The educational changes of recent years in England and Wales have in many ways changed the role of the headteacher as a goal-setter. The National Curriculum has restricted the autonomy schools had in setting their own goals. However, the nurturing and articulation of an overall vision for the school, giving it a sense of direction, remains one of the most significant roles of the headteacher.
Having said that, it is important to remember what was said in the preceding section about collaborative leadership. If a vision is to guide the staff’s way forward it has to be shared by that staff and nurtured by the ownership and commitment of that same staff. This point is strongly made in the literature on school improvement and leadership already referred to.

Louis and Miles (1990: 217-237) also point out that vision is not a ‘packet’ that is created and shaped once and for all. They describe vision as “… a complex braid of … themes … ” (p.237) that evolve as the school moves on, and is generated, developed and shaped by constant interaction of people “…who talk about it, use the same language to describe it, and believe that they are engaged in a common task” (p. 237).

**Curriculum and classroom practice**

There are many definitions of curriculum. Whitaker (1983:65) offers the broad definition of the curriculum as “a school’s intentions for its learners” in terms of goals, methods and evaluation of results. Goals, according to Whitaker (ibid.) are “… general statements about what the school wishes to achieve“ and comprise the two more specific elements of aims and objectives. Day *et al.* (1990:136-137) provide a similar definition and use curriculum “…to refer to all planned activity involving teachers and pupils and to teaching methods and approaches”.

These deliberate plans constitute what in Coulson’s (1986:64) terms is the school’s ‘intended curriculum’, whereas there also exists “…the more subtle … influence, of the organizational arrangements and relationships … which connote attitudes and values – the hidden curriculum”. Together these two elements constitute what Coulson (ibid.) calls the school’s ‘operational curriculum’, the real “…experience each child has at school and what each takes away” (Day *et al.* 1990:137).

The main trend in educational reform efforts in the UK and most other western countries has restricted the schools’ discretion over the content and objectives of the curriculum, leaving the responsibilities for the implementation to individual schools, their headteachers and staff. Nevertheless Coulson’s (1986:68) comments remain true, that “…in practice it still falls to the head to take the major responsibility for shaping and implementing the curriculum”. In short the head and the staff have to organise the implementation and delivery of the National Curriculum and demonstrate to the public that it is done successfully.
The main aim of school improvement – to improve the quality of education for all pupils is directly linked to the curriculum development of the school. This has specific implications for small schools which are frequently criticised for being unable to “… provide the necessary range, balance and depth of curriculum …” (Galton 1993:7). Teacher isolation is also thought to add to this problem. However, findings from the PRISMS study (Galton and Patrick 1990; Patrick 1991), derived from classroom observation in 68 small schools in nine LEAs and a comparison with a sample of primary schools of all sizes in the same LEAs, seemed to confirm that there was no significant difference between curriculum provision in the small schools and the primary schools generally (Patrick 1991:61). Moreover, teacher isolation “…tended to be potential, or perceived, rather than actual” (ibid.:61). Galton (1993:17) maintains that the findings from the PRISMS study argue

… very strongly, against the kinds of generalisations which have, in the past, frequently been made about small schools concerning their ability to deliver appropriate curriculum for all pupils.

Bell and Sigsworth (1987) make similar points. They maintain (p.155) that “…implementing curriculum change through the use of subjects specialists offers no simple panacea …” and small schools have a strong potential to design and improve their curriculum through professional co-operation and whole-staff planning. They also conclude that “… rural teachers may be less isolated from their immediate colleagues than are many teachers in urban schools” (p.144) and “…that the general case against small rural schools is unproven” (p.150).

**Monitoring, evaluation and planning**

Many writers have described how effective heads keep a clear picture of what goes on in their schools (Leithwood and Montgomery 1986; Southworth 1988a,b; 1990; Mortimore *et al.* 1988) and try to be highly visible both to students and staff. A common practice for this purpose is for the head to walk around the school regularly, visit teachers in their classrooms formally or informally. This management style has been referred to as MBWA – Management by Walking About. Teaching, as will be underlined in the next section, is another important role that contributes to the head’s visibility.

• review, to collect evidence of the school’s current strengths and weaknesses;
• planning, where priorities for further development are chosen and action plans for their implementation constructed;
• implementation, where the plans are put into action;
• evaluation, where implementation is monitored and success evaluated.

There is also a trend of accountability in most development planning models. It is partly regarded as a tool by which schools can demonstrate their performance to the public, in their new position of self-managed institutions in the market-place of financial and staffing delegation, open enrolment and competition. (Coulson 1986; Dempster et al. 1994). The arguments whether the demands for public accountability contribute to school improvement will not be addressed in this paper. Suffice it to say that development planning in consultation with the school’s governors is seen by many as a way to respond to the demands of the market oriented environment schools find themselves in and a way to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible demands of improvement and accountability (Cuttance 1994; Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991, 1994; West and Ainscow 1991).

Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991), Hopkins et al. (1994) and West and Ainscow (1991) draw attention to the somewhat contradictory pressures of development and maintenance. The development pressure from the flow of change and reform initiatives is obvious. The need for maintenance is perhaps more subtle but no less important. As houses have to be built on rock, schools have to build their development on a stable foundation. All development planning has to take its starting point from where the school is at the outset and keep a balance between the need for maintenance and stability.

Development planning is no simple task and has various implications for the head-teacher. The process will have to orchestrated by him or her, but if it is to be a successful tool for improvement it must unite the whole staff in an collaborative effort, build teams around specially defined tasks and empower individuals to take on leadership roles in such teams. In short, the staff’s ownership of and commitment to the process will determine whether the school development plan becomes yet another dusty document on a shelf in the head’s office or, to borrow Bruce Joyce’s (1991) analogy, the key to one of the doors to school improvement it has the potential to be.
Teaching

Coulson (1986) describes the school as divided into two zones: the school-at-large, as the head’s zone of influence and decision-making, and the classrooms where individual teachers ‘reign’ over their own territory. One of the challenges of school improvement is to build bridges of collaboration and team-work between these zones, where teachers are empowered to have a say in the head’s zone and can cross the boundaries of each others’ zones to learn together and where the head is able to participate in the prime task of the school, the teaching and learning. One of the most powerful blocks for that bridge-building is the head’s own teaching.

Teaching gives the head the opportunity to articulate her or his visions about the school, lead by example, be more visible both to teachers and the pupils, and to enhance her or his monitoring and evaluation role in the school. It contributes strongly to the creation of a culture of collaboration as it enables the head to exercise two functions that have been shown to be important, being a leader of the staff group and a member of the staff group (Holly and Southworth 1989; Southworth 1988a; Yeomans 1986). This is likely to be valued by the staff, and beneficial to staff morale and head-staff relations. It also helps the head to delegate responsibilities to other members of the staff group as the head’s teaching can release teachers to take on leadership roles in the school. In Coulson’s (1986:77) words: “It is probably as a teacher more than in any other way that the head affirms and renews his position as the school’s Leading Professional”.

Having said that, it must be acknowledged that the teaching role of heads in small schools in not without problems. Whilst these heads have nearly a full-time teaching commitment and in many cases a class responsibility as well, recent changes, and in particular Local Management of Schools, have added substantially to their other roles and responsibilities. As Dunning (1993) points out this additional load may not be any less in small schools than in others, and it is a simplistic assumption the small schools are necessarily easy to manage. As a result teaching heads are likely to be caught in a difficult conflict between their teaching commitment and these other roles (Dunning 1993; Keast 1991).

Staff development

There appears to be a consensus about the vital importance of staff development as a condition for school improvement. The interdependence of staff development and school development is also becoming increasingly clear or, as Hopkins and West put it (1994:1 their emphasis) “there is little teacher development without school
school leaders are increasingly searching for practical ways of bringing teacher and school development together”.

This view is enhanced in many ways by our general knowledge of educational change and school improvement. The main aim of school improvement to improve students’ educational outcomes makes teacher development an obvious priority. The view of the school as a collaborative workplace where practice is built on a shared vision and agreed goals requires a shift in the approach to staff development. This shift is from the traditional INSET approach which built mainly on voluntary attendance of individual teachers at occasional and mainly external courses and workshops to a more school-focused staff development seen as a lifelong process of professional development and organized to meet both the long-term and short-term needs of the school and its staff as they are identified by a vision, school review and school improvement priorities. Thus, staff development is strongly related to school development. It is considered as one of the most important strategies to achieve clarity and understanding about improvements, and is integrated into our activities to bring them about.

Schools in England are now required to produce a staff development policy as a part of their school development plan. It is therefore one of the head’s responsibilities to oversee that the plan is made, has the required development implications and takes into account the resource implications as well. As a leading professional and an exemplar of professional values (Coulson 1986) she or he is also likely to be the most prominent individual figure that orchestrates and co-ordinates staff development in the school.

Teacher appraisal is another means of identifying in-service needs for teachers and supporting their professional development, and is therefore inevitably a part of the school’s professional development system (Bollington et al. 1990). It will therefore be the headteacher’s responsibility to oversee that teacher appraisal schemes are actually implemented in the school, and the smaller the staff group the more prominent the role of the head is likely to be in the process.
Roles and responsibilities outside the school

Working with parents

An integral part of the school’s vision and philosophy is how its staff intends to set about developing and maintaining a good home-school relationship (Day et al. 1990). Developing good relations between the school and its parents serves two main purposes. First, there is some evidence that parental involvement in children’s learning in and out of school, and effective communication between the school and the home, has a positive impact on their learning experiences and outcomes. Second, it helps the school to gain the support of parents and the community at large (Day et al. 1990; Davies 1989)

In their study of school effectiveness Mortimore et al. (1988) include parental involvement in their widely quoted list of key factors that contribute to school effectiveness. Their findings (p.255)

… show parental involvement in the life of the school to be a positive influence upon pupils’ progress and development. … Parental involvement in pupils’ educational development within the home was also clearly beneficial.

Fullan (1991) also draws on a number of research evidence to conclude that “[t]he closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement” (p.227 his emphasis). He also maintains (p.250):

… educational reform requires the conjoint efforts of families and schools. Parents and teachers should recognize the critical complementary importance of each other in the life of the student.

In the competitive environment of today teachers have to set out some strategies to gain the support of parents and the community at large (Day et al. 1990) and ‘stay close to the client’ (Davies 1989:199) to use the terms of corporate management. In other words:

… generate a dialogue with families and … listen carefully to them … as they look together with parents, governors and others for the best way forward for the children in their school. (Davies 1989:199)

This has a number of implications regarding the role of the head. In maintaining these relationships the head will frequently find her or himself in most of the Chief Executive roles of Coulson’s (1986) framework. The head will be a figurehead and spokesman to the outside world, having to represent the school and transmit infor-
mation. She or he will have to take on the Liaison role of “… maintaining and developing the significant web of relationships … with individuals and groups outside the school” (Coulson 1986:16-17) and is also likely, from time to time, to find him or herself in the role of Disturbance Handler to solve conflicts between the school or individual teachers and parents. As Day et al. (1990) make clear, a home-school policy has a number of resource implications which will inevitably put the head in the role of the Resource Allocator. It is important, however, to bear in mind that successful home-school relationship is not the work of the headteacher alone but a part of the school’s culture and therefore a collective responsibility of the whole school staff.

**Local management of schools**

One of the most significant changes for the context of schools in England has been the introduction of local management of schools (LMS). According to Gilbert (1993:98) LMS is intended to

> … enable governing bodies and headteachers to deploy their resources in accordance to their own needs and priorities and to make schools more responsive to parents, pupils, the local community and employers.

West and Ainscow (1991) describe LMS as a transfer of the location of decision about policies, staffing and resources and the responsibility for the management of schools away from the local educational authorities to individual schools. They then go on to identify the following areas as some of the most important implications of LMS for the management of schools (pp.8-14):

- The need for establishing school objectives and developing an implementation plan for the National Curriculum where resources are managed “…efficiently towards the achievement of objectives which constitute effective educational outcomes for pupils”. (p.9 their emphasis)
- The need to develop skills of budgetary planning at the school level.
- The need to develop a “…series of staffing or personnel management functions” (p.11 their emphasis) as the school becomes an employer.
- Increased governor involvement in the life of the school.
- The school in the market-place where direct links are made between pupil numbers and school budget, which puts schools in a competitive position and requires marketing.
The introduction of LMS has been controversial. Some writers (Southworth 1988b) have expressed the concern that the additional workload and pressures of LMS may direct headteachers’ energies in other directions than pursuing their roles as professional leaders inside their schools, rendering them less visible to their staff. Others (Bolam 1993; Gilbert 1993) have questioned its positive impact on educational outcomes and even seen it as away to disguise education cuts. Gilbert (1993:104) also points to the danger that in the absence of influence and control from the LEAs, LMS

… will encourage schools to go down individual and isolationist paths. This will lead to the breakdown of a coherent local system of education which seeks to meet the needs of the whole learning community.

**Small schools and relationship with the community**

In their book *The Heart of the Community* (1992) Adrian Bell and Alan Sigsworth have examined the relationships small rural schools have with their communities. They set off by arguing that the social and demographic changes of the latter half of this century have fundamentally changed the nature of the village community. As the agricultural workforce has shrunk, middle-class people moving from the cities to the villages have become an increasingly prominent part of the rural population. As these middle-class families do not need the local social services of the villages these have disappeared: the local shop, the post office, the pub, the bus service, in many instances the village school as well.

Bell and Sigsworth (ibid.) argue that as a consequence of the social changes the notion of community has to be redefined. The traditional community where people where drawn together by focusing on things they had in common and “…were primarily absorbed in meeting the demands of agricultural and industrial enterprises” (p.13) no longer exists. What has come instead is the modern ‘voluntary community’ which has to be built by those who freely wish to participate and exists only as far as its members voluntarily take part in the areas of communality that exist in it and by doing so foster the relationships that build the community.

Bell and Sigsworth see the local primary school as one of the most important area of communality and having a “…potentially significant role to play as a focus of community action” (p.14). From their study they conclude:

There is substantial evidence everywhere that the rural primary schools are highly prized by their communities. Quite apart from the education they provide
… they are capable of conferring a sense of communal identity and are frequently a source of local pride. (p.14)

That leaves the village school … as the catalyst for community activity … for it is the village school, above all other rural institutions, nowadays which identifies with the children, without whom our rural communities can have no future. (Muffett 1991 quoted in Bell and Sigsworth 1992:15)

This favourable position of the rural primary schools does not come by itself by any means. It has to be initiated by the school, sensitively reaching out, making contact with the community, and it has to be sustained by the same steady but sensitive effort. It will have to be embedded in the school’s vision, philosophy, culture. This paper has made frequent references to a culture of collaboration inside the school. Bell and Sigsworth’s (ibid.) arguments make the case for a culture of collaboration between the school and the community that embeds the school into the complex web of the social network that makes and sustains the modern ‘voluntary’ community. They (ibid.) have neatly captured the importance and nature of these relationships in three sentences: The school in the community, the school of the community and the school for the community.

Co-operation between small schools

Small schools are frequently subject to three main kinds of objections against their viability (Bell and Sigsworth 1987; Galton 1993; Hopkins and Ellis 1991; Potter and Williams 1994): first, being unable to provide an adequate curriculum for their pupils; second, being socially disadvantageous for their children, limiting their opportunities for peer-grouping and social interactions; and third, being inefficient.

There is, however, some evidence that when these objections are subjected to research many of them are not justified. I have already quoted Bell and Sigsworth (1987), Galton (1993) and Patrick (1991), arguing against generalisations about small schools’ inadequacy in curriculum delivery. Bell and Sigsworth (1987, Chapter 4) have put forward some convincing arguments against the second objection. They have also (ibid. Chapters 7-8) examined thoroughly the economics of education in small rural schools, questioning the validity of arguments against their efficiency when both direct and indirect costs and benefits are taken into account.

This, however, should not be taken as a complacency, implying that small schools are not faced with any problems or that they cannot do better. Indeed, the growing emphasis on subject specialisation (Bell and Sigsworth 1987; Galton 1993) puts increasing pressures on their teachers. Devolved budgets tied to pupil numbers
with inadequate protection for small units have left small schools with increased financial problems. Each staff group may also be too small for its members to engage effectively in the negotiation, critical discussion and joint activities that are the hallmarks of healthy collaborative cultures (Southworth 1994).

In this situation small schools have much to gain from collaboration with other schools, and in Britain a number of co-operative clusters or federations\(^1\) have been formed for that purpose. (Galton 1993:21; Bell 1988; Bell and Sigsworth 1987 Chapter 9; Potter and Williams 1994). When The Educational Support Grant (ESG) scheme was launched in 1984 a major strategy of most of the projects was to form such clusters. (Bell 1988; Galton 1993). The scheme was funded by the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office and was specially designed to enhance the curriculum in small rural schools in three specific ways:

- by providing in-service training for teachers and opportunities for professional dialogue with colleagues in other schools;
- by exploring ways of improving the supply and availability of resources;
- by enabling children and teachers to meet and work together to overcome the possible effects of rural isolation.

Galton (1993) reports some of the findings of an evaluation of the scheme and concludes:

There appear to be great benefits for both pupils and teachers in small schools when collaborative groupings or clusters are formed. When these clusters move beyond the point at which they engage in a limited range of joint activities to a stage where management decisions relating to the organisation and delivery of the curriculum are shared across schools, greater benefits result. (pp. 25-26 my emphasis)

Potter and Williams (1994) present similar findings from a study of two school clusters in Wales.

School clusters need careful management and Galton (1993:33-34) identifies a number of management issues that need to be addressed. These issues include:

- decisions about staffing and funds;
- deciding whether decisions are to be taken collectively or delegated to a smaller committee;

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\(^1\) Clusters and federations are the most commonly adopted terms for co-operative groups of schools and are in most cases used more or less interchangeably (Bell 1988:180).
• procedures of the day-to-day running of the federation, e.g. the possibility of appointing one headteacher to co-ordinate the work of several schools or the possibility of the heads of the schools to take on such leadership roles in turn;

• governor involvement and collaboration of governing bodies of the cluster schools and the possibility of governing bodies delegating some of their responsibilities to a limited number of representatives on the federation management committee.

Bell (1988) and Bell and Sigsworth (1987) underline the importance of collaborative cultures within school clusters. They argue that the top-down or centre-periphery models where clusters are initiated and even mandated by LEAs and made dependent on outside support teachers who ‘work on’ rather than ‘with’ the schools (Hopkins et al. 1994) is unlikely to foster sustained curriculum improvement. Their arguments are in harmony with the school improvement approach already advocated in this paper. If a school cluster is to become a vehicle to sustained school improvement the notion of individual schools as a unit of change has to be extended to the cluster. Then the internal conditions of collaboration, ownership and continuous learning have to be created within the cluster, making it a learning-enriched community of committed professionals.

**Issues arising from the literature: questions to be addressed**

In the sections so far I have drawn on some of the existing literature about school effectiveness and school improvement to support my arguments about the importance of the headteacher for school improvement and to analyse the roles and responsibilities of headship in general. I have also referred to the shortcomings of the literature on headship in that it hardly mentions headteachers in small primary schools (Southworth 1990). There could be two reasons for this: either that headship in small primary schools is no different from headship in other schools, or that it has simply never been investigated as such. Then, even if we accept my framework as a suitable analysis of primary school headship in general, the question remains whether it describes the real world of headteachers in small primary schools.

As I have already described in the introduction to this paper and further explained in Appendix 1, there are fundamental differences between the English and the Icelandic school systems. The changes that have so dramatically changed the lives of English headteachers since 1988 have still not affected the Icelandic school system,
even if some of them are impending. As this paper draws entirely on literature from the UK and North America, and is written mainly from the British context, it raises the question of its applicability for a different school system like the Icelandic one.

To engage further with these issues I organised a small-scale enquiry into the real life of headteachers in small primary schools in Iceland and England. In the enquiry I wanted to address the following three main questions:

1. How do working headteachers perceive their roles and responsibilities as leaders of improvement in their schools? What correspondence is there between the theoretical world of the literature and the day-to-day realities, intentions and actions of headteachers in small primary schools in England and Iceland?

2. Are there notable differences between individual headteachers within each of the two school systems and between the school systems?

3. What direction do we seem to be going in within the two systems? Are there lessons to be learned from either of the systems or are there alarm bells ringing in the decentralised British system that we need to be aware of in the coming changes in Iceland?
Chapter 3

Headship in Small Primary Schools: A Comparative Study

So far I have drawn on some of the literature on school effectiveness and school improvement to underpin my prevailing argument about the importance of the headteacher for school improvement. Second, I have attempted to analyse the main aspects of headship in primary schools and develop a synthesis of some of the main roles and responsibilities that comprise effective headship. Third, I have posed the main questions I addressed in my study. In this chapter I shall first describe the planning of my enquiry and then report and discuss the main findings of it, following mainly the synthesis of roles and responsibilities laid out in Chapter 2.

An account of the enquiry

To address the three main questions raised in Chapter 2 I decided to interview headteachers working in small primary schools both in England and Iceland. As a definition of a small school I used the criteria that there were fewer classes than year groups, in other words too few students on roll to be able to have at least one class for each year group.

In England five village schools in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk were visited from the 5th of April to the 18th of May 1995. All the schools catered for pupils from 4 to 11 and the number on roll ranged from 55 to 140. Similarly five primary schools in four LEAs in Iceland were visited in the period from the 21st to the 27th of May 1995. The age range of pupils in these schools varied. Two of them had pupils from 6-12, one had pupils from 6-14 and one was an all-through primary school catering for pupils from 6-16. The number of pupils on roll ranged from 15 to 65.

The English schools were chosen somewhat randomly. I felt that this would be relatively safe in the light of recent reforms of the English school system which makes various school development activities, such as development planning and
teacher appraisal, mandatory. This is not the case in Iceland and therefore I had to choose the Icelandic schools more selectively. From my own work in Iceland I know most heads in small schools and have a rough idea of what kind of schools they run. This enabled me to select schools where I knew that some kind of planned school development has been going on in recent years. My choice was therefore partly based on my personal knowledge of these schools and partly on the fact that all, but one have recently received grants for development projects.²

I spent between 2 and 2½ hours in each school. I had about an hour’s interview with each of the headteachers and spent the rest of the time chatting informally with the headteachers and looking around the schools, visiting classrooms and in some cases meeting some of the staff. My intention was to get the headteachers to talk as freely as possible about their job, what they perceived as their main roles and responsibilities and what they actually did to discharge them. I also felt it important to have the opportunity to probe issues coming out of their answers with further questioning. For that purpose semi-structured interviews seemed the most appropriate method (Bell 1993:91-101). I used the framework of roles and responsibilities that emerged the literature review as an interview structure around which I arranged some further questions. The extent to which I needed to use these questions varied from one interview to another. It depended on how willing the headteacher were to talk; in some cases the interviews became more like a narrative. All the interviews were recorded and a transcript made of them afterwards. The interview schedule with the questions is set out in Appendix 3.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this sort of enquiry. First of all it is very small-scale and the selected schools are by no means a representative sample of small schools in either country. My personal knowledge of Icelandic small schools tells me that I could have chosen a completely different sample of schools, e.g. with high staff turnover or no planned development activities. Heads of such schools might have told me different things and a comparison of that would indeed make an interesting study. This may also be true of England.

In the study no triangulation (Bell 1993:64) was attempted. Such triangulation could have been accomplished by interviewing selected teachers in the schools, the chair of governors, LEA officials and by examining policy documents from the schools. This would indeed have enhanced the validity (Bell 1993:65) of the study,

² Grants to schools, individual teachers or groups of teachers are available mainly from two sources: The Ministry of Education’s Fund for Primary School Development and The Teachers’ Union of Iceland’s Fund for School Development and Research.
but within the time limits and the scope of the study this was simply not possible. It would be an interesting field of further study to examine the correlation between how the headteachers describe their intentions and actions, and how these same intentions and actions are perceived by the people who work closest to them both inside and outside the schools.

These warning notes are struck not to undermine the significance of my study. They are only to emphasise that it should not be taken for anything other than it is: an account of headteachers’ perceptions of their roles and responsibilities, inside and outside their schools, and how they go about developing and improving their schools.

A discussion of the findings

Building a culture of collaboration

We do it very much as a team - everything is shared – everything is discussed. … I don’t want to be seen as the one on the top giving all the information and orders. … Delegation is extremely important. (English head)

All the heads interviewed express their commitment to collaboration, team work and staff participation. They all try to give their staff opportunities to participate in decision-making, delegate responsibilities to them and empower them to make their own decisions about their professional practice.

I delegate by trusting my staff to handle professional problems … I try to empower them to make their own decisions about their professional affairs … and I have tried to promote the philosophy that we are all on the same boat and success depends on our collaborative effort. (Icelandic head)

There are however limits. One of the English heads reported that as his school has grown considerably over the last 10 years it has tended to become less collegial with more and more decisions taken by himself and his deputy head, and less participation by staff. Some of the heads also tend to be selective about teachers’ participation and make certain decisions on their own.

… certain decisions I take independently especially if they are ones that are not straightforward e.g. the ones I am facing now to make staff redundant … I don’t think it’s appropriate to worry them with that. (English head)
Some heads also report a tension between delegation and their own responsibilities (Southworth 1995:13). An Icelandic head summarises this well:

> When I first came here I believed that we could do everything as a team, and the title headteacher did not make much difference. I know better now. There are certain things you can’t avoid if you are the headteacher … a certain amount of responsibility and decision-making … . I’m very well aware of the tension between delegation and responsibility for the whole organization.

**Vision, goals and objectives**

The school’s policy is … as it should be, a vision of what we aim for … . If we want to initiate something new we can match it with that vision … in that sense it is a signpost that guides us in a certain direction. (Icelandic head)

Nearly all the heads in both countries express a strong sense of vision for their schools and in all the schools I visited there is a fairly clear policy for the school set out in an annual prospectus. Such prospectuses are required of English schools, but in Iceland it is more an expectation than a requirement and their general quality is very varied. However, all the Icelandic schools visited issued high quality prospectuses that clearly indicated that the staff had worked hard to produce them.

As can be concluded from the preceding section all the heads highly value staff involvement in building vision and goals for their schools. In the English schools there is close consultation with the governing bodies as well as staff but in Iceland no such consultation with governing bodies is required and hardly exists at all, even though some heads mentioned that it would be desirable. Despite their commitment to collaboration many of them describe themselves as ‘mobilisers’ and ‘change agents’ in their schools; they are very influential in the creation of the school’s vision and policy and exercise strong leadership in the process.

… naturally I exercise a certain leadership and nothing is decided unless I endorse it … . (Icelandic head)

It’s clear that you are the one that’s got to be the strong one … The staff are always looking to you as a leader, and you’ve got to lead and how you lead is extremely important. (English head)

**Curriculum and classroom practice**

In this area there are a number of differences between the two countries. English schools are required to make sure that individual teachers are designated the re-
sponsibility for all areas of the National Curriculum and all the English heads report that practice. All of them feel that this is very demanding in a small school where there are fewer teachers than subjects and where the same teacher, usually including the head, has to have responsibility for up to four areas. All the English heads also report that they are using school development planning as their main tool for their curriculum planning and identification of priorities as one of them commented:

… it has been a major part for the last few months building up a school development profile of areas of curriculum …. We identify a key area of curriculum each year which gets a substantial amount of money that year, whereas other areas get virtually nothing.

This is not the case in the Icelandic schools. Teachers are only responsible for their class and subjects within that class. There are no examples of teachers holding responsibility for subjects throughout the school. Icelandic schools have a small quota which they can use, according to their own decision, to pay allowances either for subject co-ordination or year co-ordination. The quota is tied to the number of pupils on roll and is therefore virtually useless for individual schools with fewer than 50-70 pupils. It has however in some cases become useful in school clusters where the schools pool together their quotas. Headteachers never take on subject or year co-ordination, and are not entitled to be paid allowances for this.

Most of the heads in both countries report that their schools have a stated policy on classroom practice and teaching methods and that such a policy is a feature of the general policy of the school.

**Monitoring, evaluation and planning**

My greatest help in monitoring classroom practice is the fact that I am one of the teachers and the openness of our classroom organisation makes sure that all of the time I am fully aware of what is happening. I would not be as comfortable about that … if the teachers were teaching behind closed doors. (Icelandic head)

Whilst acknowledging the importance of monitoring and evaluation the heads from both countries express their uncertainty in dealing with them. All of them seem to use informal rather than formal ways of monitoring, making use of the smallness of their organization and being in close connection with the teachers, and in fact one of them.
Assuring that teachers follow the policy of the school and the possibility of intervening if they do not, seems a very daunting task even for the most experienced among the heads. This may be due to the intimacy of the small work group in a small school which then is both an advantage in the sense that it facilitates monitoring and a disadvantage in the sense that it makes intervening difficult.

I find it difficult to intervene … and I don’t always do that, usually that is the last thing. And the reason is because it’s too close … I find that quite threatening. (English head)

Some of the heads report that they would like to adopt more formal ways of monitoring and evaluation but seem uncertain of how to set about that. This may be understandable in the light of the fact that most headteachers have their background as class teachers which gives them experience in working with and dealing with children but less experience in organising and assessing the work of adults.

School development planning (SDP) is now required of English schools. Interestingly, two of the English heads admitted that they are not very good at it. One of them, however, had just been to an in-service course on planning and had made a plan of how to tackle this task in the future. The other two were more confident:

I use the SDP as my tool to create a vision and identify goals and we do that as a staff …. It is a useful tool, we tie in resources implications … that’s where we decide where priorities are. … gives me an opportunity to get my vision across to the staff and also to get their support. (English head)

Another interesting point is that none of the English heads actually mentioned teacher appraisal as a tool for monitoring and evaluating classroom practice. They do not seem to make links between these two activities even though some of them mention teacher appraisal as helpful in determining staff development needs. Nothing in my data suggests any good reason for this but it inevitably raises questions about the implementation of teacher appraisal in these schools.

No formal school development planning is required of Icelandic schools and they have no schemes of teacher appraisal either.

**Teaching**

I don’t feel that I am as effective a leader of curriculum because I am not a class teacher … I find that a disadvantage. It’s often easier to be an effective leader by doing the job and showing by example. On the other hand being a full teaching
head I would not be able to give quality teaching so it’s a kind of a dilemma. 
(English head)

This year I teach 50%, [a school of 125] … to release every teacher to have an 
afternoon of non-contact time. This means that I teach every child. That’s by 
choice … (English head)

In general the English heads do more teaching than their Icelandic colleagues. 
Heads in schools of 50-60 pupils commonly teach up to four full days a week while 
an Icelandic head in a similar size school would only teach about 15-16 forty min-
utes periods and could finish his teaching in two or three days. English heads also 
seem to value their teaching more. Even though they may find it difficult to have a 
commitment as a class teacher many of them say that teaching enhances their cur-
riculum leadership role and helps them to lead by example. Some of them resent 
having had to cut their teaching commitments in order to find time to cope with the 
requirements of local management of schools (LMS).

Although the Icelandic heads say they think teaching is valuable all of them would 
like to teach less than they do. The reason is that they find their administrative 
tasks and duties too demanding, not least those they carry out on behalf of the local 
communities that run their schools. They also say they need more time for educa-
tional leadership in their schools.

It is very valuable to have a teaching commitment … but the introduction of 
community management of schools in Iceland must lead to a reconsideration of 
our job description. One must hope that this will be done realistically and 
teaching duties reduced. (Icelandic head)

They do not seem to make explicit links between their teaching and their leadership 
roles. Facing the changes of community management of their schools, they claim 
that they will have to reduce their teaching loads but seldom mention the possibili-
ties of delegating these duties to other members of staff. It should be noted here 
that none of the Icelandic headteachers has any secretarial assistance, nor do any of 
them have a deputy head. These facilities come only when the number of students 
rises to well over a hundred.

**Staff development**

None of the Icelandic schools has a stated policy on staff development. Most 
INSET courses are given by the University College of Education in Reykjavík, 
which issues an annual prospectus of the courses on offer. In most of the schools 
the teachers seem to have a look at the prospectus and pick and choose according
to their interests rather than the identified priorities of the school. Most of the heads recognise that it would be more effective to select courses according to the needs and priorities of the school but this does not seem to have come into practice. An exception from that, however, is that in nearly all of the schools the whole staff have gone together on a course addressing teaching in mixed age classes.

The English schools seem to have moved further in establishing a staff development policy and selecting INSET training according to their needs. Most of the heads seem to tie staff development with development planning and the requirements of the National Curriculum. Some of the heads also mention teacher appraisal as one of the tools for establishing INSET needs.

Limited funding for staff development seems to be a major problem for the English schools. In particular this seems to limit the opportunities to attend longer courses or study leaves, not least for the headteachers.

    There is no funding to encourage staff to go on long courses or extended study leaves. I have to avoid encouraging that … and as a headteacher it is difficult to take a large sum for yourself leaving nothing for the teachers. (English head)

**Home - school relationship**

As a small school we are deeply involved with parents - I don’t think we realize how deeply until we compare it with big schools and realize how much we’ve got that they haven’t. (English head)

Certain aspects of home-school relationships are similar in the two countries. All the schools have an open school policy where parents are welcomed and encouraged to come into the school whenever they want to. All the heads also report formal meetings with parents to exchange information about the school and discuss assessment. Regular newsletters to parents are used in both countries but seem more common in the English schools.

All the heads report efforts to promote effective communication between parents and the school, not only exchange of information when something goes wrong. They also report a lot of informal communication with parents. Most of them live in the small communities the schools serve and are in many cases involved in various social activities alongside parents.

But there are also substantial differences. All the English schools have active PTAs which was the case in only two of the Icelandic schools. The clearest difference is
the amount of parental involvement in the day-to-day life of the school. In all the English schools the PTAs play a substantial role in fund-raising for the schools, while only one of the Icelandic head reported any such fund-raising activity. In some Icelandic schools, however, parents do certain jobs on a voluntary basis, especially building and maintaining the playgrounds. Parental involvement in classrooms is virtually unknown in Iceland, whereas this is well established in English schools and parents come regularly into classrooms and work as assistants alongside teachers.

All of the Icelandic heads report that they would like to enhance this relationship and some of them have various ideas about what kind of relationships would be desirable. Two of them had taken action on more parental visits and involvement in classrooms, but on the whole the Icelandic heads had not made any action plans for change in the directions they wanted.

**Local Management of Schools (LMS)**

I have the comparison … and I know what I would prefer - LMS. It’s because I am making the decisions - the school is making the decisions … not someone from the LEA telling me and my staff how to run my school with their money. Now they are giving me the money to make these decisions because I know best what I need in my school. It makes sense and it works. (English head)

LMS is not what I came into headship for because I don’t like keeping accounts, I don’t like ordering equipment … and if it were not for my wonderful secretary I honestly don’t think I would be doing this job any more. (English head)

The two above quotations seem to grasp at least some of the controversy about local management of schools in England. All the English heads report that the introduction of LMS has changed their lives and some of them feel that it has directed their energy away from teaching and curriculum leadership towards financial management and administration.

LMS has driven us very much down the line of the efficient school, as opposed to the effective school and I think many of us are trying to pull back now to get involved in the curriculum. (English head)

However, few of them would like to go back to what there was before LMS but would want more assistance and support in school to cope with the administration LMS requires. All of them have part-time secretaries to whom they delegate a lot of administrative tasks, but all of them feel they need more assistance.
The compromise is what you give up … I would like more support in school …

The situation is different in the Icelandic schools. In none of them is there any secretarial assistance, none of them has a deputy head, none of them has a bursar and only one of them employs a half-time caretaker. Even though the heads do not have the responsibilities of LMS this situation leaves them with significant duties to perform on behalf of the communities who own and run the schools. They have to plan for the community’s part of the budget in consultation with the local councils and the body of governors. They oversee community use of their school, which in many cases is substantial as many of them serve as community halls as well as schools. They usually oversee, and in some cases take part in, the maintenance of school premises. They have to oversee staff who are employed by the communities, organize bussing of the children and so on. In many places music schools are run as independent institutions inside the primary school buildings, with children going out of their normal lessons to have their music lessons. Even though these music schools usually have their own headteachers this situation requires a lot co-ordination and is an additional workload for the headteachers.

When the new Education Act takes effect these administrative duties are likely to increase and consequently add to the tension between the administration and teaching and professional leadership. As was reported earlier most of the heads mention reducing their teaching duties as the obvious response to this and it seems clear that either that or new staff to whom administration can be delegated will be required in Icelandic small schools.

The introduction of LMS in England has given the governing bodies a very significant role to play in the running of the schools. The same will be the case in Iceland under community management of schools. A common trend in all the answers from both counties is that the governing bodies, whether their role is more or less, are reluctant to take on their responsibilities and are poorly prepared for their tasks. The governors are lay people with limited general knowledge of education, they lack time to visit the schools, time to read documents and often insight into the needs of the schools for which they are given responsibility.

The English heads seem to have taken on a certain leadership role in their relation with governors for, as one of them points out,
I feel I have to make the governing body work … so I’m doing a training act with them all of the time. … If the school comes to an inspection the governors will need to know … where the school is going. If they don’t they will be severely criticised and I feel that it is a part of my job to make sure that they are kept informed. (English head)

Icelandic heads spend far less time working with the governing bodies. They are generally passive and there is in fact a considerable ambiguity over what their roles and responsibilities actually are. This seems to result in what is perhaps the most sensible stance to take: the schools and their governing bodies leave each other very much alone.

**The school as a part of the community**

… if there is no school you don’t have these young families moving in. Instead you get a population of middle class people who, because they’ve got a car, use the out of town supermarket so the village shop folds up, perhaps the pub will go as well. … They don’t use the bus either so the bus service folds up. … and you end up with a dormitory of middle class people and the old indigenous people in the village, who no longer have a shop, a pub, a post office or a bus service. (English head)

All the heads report strong links with the community and the importance of their schools for the communities they serve. As the above quotation indicates there are a number of social factors involved in the presence of the school and a number of possible social consequences of a school closure.

There are as yet few examples of small school closures in Iceland even if they would seem possible in some areas and many people fear that they may be considered for efficiency reasons under the impending community management of primary schools. The schools involved in my study all serve rural areas and their closure would have different social consequences from those in English village schools, but nevertheless all the Icelandic heads express strongly the importance of their schools for their communities.

I look at the school as the heart of that community in a sense. … Pupils, parents and teachers get together here … they have a sense of ownership of this place … I regard the school in many ways as a cultural centre of the community … . (Icelandic head)
Co-operation between small schools

In both England and Iceland there were similar examples of co-operation between small schools. In England however this seems to be somewhat better established and there is definitely a longer tradition of working together. Two of the English schools were members of the same cluster, with a history reaching back twenty years. In this cluster the collaboration includes both social and professional activities. There are visits between the schools and social events where the children are given the opportunity to get together. The heads meet regularly and there is to some extent professional collaboration between teachers. Recently the PTAs and the governing bodies have started to meet and collaborate as well.

This is not unlike Iceland, where for instance one of the schools was involved in a cluster where the schools have written a district curriculum which is supposed to form the basis for curriculum planning in individual schools. There was however no example of co-operation between PTAs or governing bodies.

All the heads who have been involved in co-operation of that kind reported it as very beneficial and supportive for the school, and wanted to hold on to it and enhance it. Most of the other heads who were not involved in co-operation expressed their desire to be so.
Chapter 4

Some Conclusions and Implications

In the previous chapter I reported, and to some extent compared, the main findings from my interviews with the eight headteachers in Iceland and England. In this chapter I shall turn back to the three main questions posed in Chapter 2 and address these questions in the light of my findings and the theoretical framework in Chapters 1 and 2.

The first question relates to the consistency between the picture of roles and responsibilities of primary headteachers drawn up in the literature and the picture that emerges from my study of the day-to-day realities of headteachers in small primary schools.

The general picture emerging from my interviews seems fairly consistent with the literature. The heads all have a strong sense of ownership of their schools and frequently refer to them as their schools (Southworth 1988a); they are fascinated by their schools and what they are doing there, and are happy to talk about it (ibid.). For at least some of them it seems that their job, and what they are doing in their schools, is their mission in life.

All the heads involved in the study seem to exercise strong leadership in their schools. They describe themselves as the leading agents of change (Southworth 1988a) and I think it is fair to conclude that some of the Icelandic heads are playing a pioneering role in raising standards of small schools in the country. All the heads have a clear vision of how they would like their schools to develop (Coulson 1987; Southworth 1988a,b; 1990) and are therefore quite influential in determining the school’s stated vision and policy. They are, however, not authoritarian leaders and do not see the power relationships in the school in terms of leaders and followers. They all seem to value and promote teamwork and collaborative work patterns in their schools and try to find a balance between their leadership and ‘change agent’ roles and the autonomy and empowerment of teachers.
The smallness of the organisations puts the heads in close relationships with their staff and makes them automatically visible in their schools. Therefore they do not seem to need to take any deliberate actions like MBWA (Southworth 1988a,b; 1990) to be visible in their schools; they are there most of the time in more or less the same way as the teachers.

Southworth (1994) provides an excellent example of how a deputy head, supported by his head, uses his teaching to enhance his curriculum leadership role, set an example for other teachers and disseminate a new teaching practice through the school. Waugh (1991) also sees the opportunities for heads to influence curriculum change through their class-teaching role as one of the advantages of small schools. From my data there is evidence of similar practice by headteachers, and certainly teaching is a substantial part of their leadership role and further enhances their visibility in the schools. It gives them increased opportunities to get involved in curriculum leadership and put their educational philosophy and vision into practice, by setting an example through their own teaching and acting as models for teacher learning and development.

All the headteachers play very significant roles outside their schools, and relationships with parents and governors are significant features of their jobs. The picture of these relationships emerging from the interviews is fairly consistent with the picture drawn up by writers such as Coulson (1986) and Day et al. (1990). In particular the Interpersonal and Informational roles described by Coulson (ibid.) seem to be present. Recent legislation in England has further increased the significance of some of these external roles and in some ways changed them dramatically. As West and Ainscow (1991) point out, the relationships between schools and the local education authorities have changed fundamentally, leaving heads and governors with the responsibility to manage educational provision at the school level. This again has changed the relationship between the heads and the schools’ governing bodies, which have become more powerful than before.

As Southworth (1990:12) points out, very little is known about headship and leadership in small primary schools. Having compared the picture of heads in small primary schools emerging from my interview data with some of the existing literature on leadership and headship it is therefore tempting to speculate whether the nature of headship in small and larger schools is different. In my interviews I asked each of the respondents to comment on this and there seems to be a fairly consistent view among them that the nature of the role of heads is very much the same
whatever the size of the school. They agree, however, that they are different in scope and shaped in many ways by the school size.

To take one example, the principles of collaboration and staff participation may be the same but the work pattern in a staff group of 3-5 must be different from the work pattern of a staff group of 20-30. Communication must also be easier in a small staff group where the head is visible all the time and teaching alongside the rest of the teachers. Curriculum leadership and involvement is equally important, but will in a small school, as already indicated, inevitably be shaped by the teaching commitment of the headteacher. The same can be said about monitoring and quality assurance: the role is the same in nature but differently pursued according to the school size. It has already been mentioned and should be reiterated here that small schools are in many ways more dependent on their headteachers’ leadership than bigger schools. There is no team of senior management, perhaps not even a deputy head, to which the head can delegate tasks and responsibilities. It is only him or herself and the class teachers who may of course be empowered to take on leadership roles alongside the head.

From this I will tentatively conclude that headteachers’ roles and responsibilities within small and large schools are different in scope and to an extent shaped by the school’s size, rather than being different in nature. This conclusion is further supported by evidence from the PRISMS study (Patrick 1990) where it appeared that even if small school heads seemed to apply a more informal management style with more consultation with staff on a greater range of management issues “…the heads themselves saw their responsibilities as basically the same as they would be in a larger school” (Patrick 1990:45). The same would probably be true of some of the head’s external roles, especially those relating to LMS and, partly, relationships with parents. It seems, however, likely that the remaining external roles discussed in this paper – the school’s involvement in the community and the co-operation between schools – may be different in nature.

From Bell and Sigsworth’s (1992) descriptions of small schools’ involvement in the community and their potential contribution to the enhancement of the community I would assume that heads in small schools are likely to have roles and responsibilities that are fundamentally different from those in larger schools in larger communities. Collaboration between small schools in the form of school clusters or federations (Bell 1988; Bell and Sigsworth 1987; Galton 1993; Potter and Williams 1994) is also likely to put the heads of those schools in a position not found in other schools.
In my second question I raised the issue of differences between individual headteachers within each of the school systems and between the two school systems.

While the general picture within each country is fairly consistent there are also some individual differences. Most of these are reported in Chapter 3 and need not be repeated here. The most notable difference between English headteachers is their views on LMS, but despite different views they all seem to have responded to it in more or less similar ways.

As could be expected there are some notable differences between the two school systems. There are indications that Icelandic headteachers are less involved in curriculum leadership and planning than their English colleagues. This tentative conclusion is justified by three sets of findings from my data and to some extent by my general knowledge and experience of Icelandic primary schools.

The first indication is that the Icelandic heads in general teach less than their English colleagues and, what is perhaps more important, seem to see their teaching to a less extent as an opportunity to get involved into curriculum planning and leadership. The second indication is that Icelandic headteachers are not expected to take on subject- or year co-ordination. This seems likely to detach them from curriculum leadership and involvement, and is a particularly unfavourable practice for small schools. The third indication is that there is less ongoing development planning in Icelandic schools, and they are not required to produce formal development plans. Schools are, however, expected to draw up a document which is usually referred to as ‘The school curriculum’. It is supposed to be a description, written by the staff, of how they intend to make use of the school’s autonomy within the framework of the National Curriculum. This document has two main shortcomings. First, its publication is more an expectation than a requirement. Second, and more importantly, it is only partly a planning tool, however well it is done. It is a statement of the school’s policy, objectives and practice and may or may not be built on a process of evaluation of the school’s performance, but it does not identify priorities for development or make action plans for the future.

Though this is only a tentative conclusion, requiring further enquiry, the importance of active involvement by headteachers in school improvement has already been established in this paper, and if these differences are more generally true they may have important implications for school improvement, not only in small schools but in Icelandic schools in general.
The most significant difference between the two countries is the different degree of
devolution in the two school systems. I have already described some of the changes
to which English heads have had to respond over the last years and reported some
of their views on them. These changes should be of particular interest to Icelandic
headteachers and educators in the light of the new legislation which introduces
‘community management of schools’. This difference leads directly to the third
question raised in Chapter 2, about the direction in which the two systems seem to
be heading and the lessons we might learn from this.

The first point I want to make are the warning notes struck by Southworth as early
as 1988, that heads may

… have to spend increased amounts of time ‘outside’ the school rather than
inside it … [which] will channel the energies of headteachers in new directions
rendering them less visible to their staff … . (Southworth 1988b:214)

The responses from the English headteachers seem to confirm that at least as far as
small schools are concerned this was not mere pessimism but a wise warning. They
all seem to be caught in the conflict, described by, Dunning (1993) and Keast
(1991), between their roles as teachers and professional leaders within their schools
on the one hand and their administration and management duties on the other.
Under LMS these headteachers have either timetabled themselves with less
teaching or feel that they are not doing justice to their role as teachers. They also
seem to be struggling with their monitoring role and are on the whole giving less
leadership and support in curriculum planning than they feel they ought to. The
following analogy from one of the English heads neatly epitomises this:

I see my head these days as a computer disk that … just can’t take in more infor-
information and sometimes when I have to go in there and teach I simply feel I can’t
do it, … or I can hear myself, and I’m a terrible teacher and I shouldn’t be in
there …

It is worth mentioning here that as far as financial management goes these head-
teachers are dealing with quite small sums of money. 85- 90% of their budget is
already fixed for staffing and premises costs and the 10-15% which is left for them
to ‘play with is no big deal’ as one of the English head commented. The wisdom of
keeping professional educators busy with that ‘playing’, while perhaps distracting
them from their important duties within the schools, is questionable.

A second point I want to make is the demand for efficiency in staff development.
The INSET budget is not a large sum in small primary schools, which creates a de-
mand for maximum efficiency in terms of giving maximum number of staff training opportunities at minimum cost. However, efficient staff development is not necessarily effective and this seems to have encouraged schools to aim for short courses for as many teachers as possible, limiting the opportunities of teachers to attend longer courses and take on study leaves. It seems also to have virtually eroded the headteachers’ possibilities to go on longer courses such as Master’s or Diploma courses because it simply takes a bigger chunk out of the school’s INSET budget than the heads can for moral reasons take for themselves, leaving little or nothing left for the training needs of teachers.

The third point I want to make relates to the schools’ relationships with the LEAs and the availability of external support. Along with the diminishing of the LEAs’ administrative roles, their roles as sources of support and consultation for schools have decreased as well. Again, this has special implications for small schools. Their budgets follow the number of pupils on roll and the so called ‘lump sum’ to protect them as small units is generally considered inadequate (Dunning 1993). This will make it particularly difficult for them to buy in outside consultants and sustain the service of advisory or peripatetic teachers to provide curriculum support in subjects like Music and PE (Galton 1993:9-10). Potter and Williams (1994:151) also point out that the weakening of LEAs is likely to have serious implications for clusters of small schools “… since they will lack the infrastructural links provided by advisers and advisory teachers”.

I set off my analysis of headship by establishing the importance of the headteacher’s role in school improvement, outlining a picture of the effective transformational leader who is able to create the internal conditions for sustained school improvement. What emerges from my data is that many features of LMS are counter-productive of this as far as small schools are concerned. Even though in England there is a system of school improvement, with various national strategies, such as school development planning, teacher appraisal, staff development policies and school inspection, and although the headteachers conceptualise themselves as having a role in school improvement, the pressure on them, particularly because of LMS and other reform efforts, is so enormous that they are likely to lose sight of their long-term planning and improvement role and become passive respondents to official mandates and more occupied with maintenance than development.

Many studies of headship (Coulson 1986; Holly and Southworth 1989) describe the head’s day as fragmented and full of short activities that need to be handled immediately. There is every reason to believe that this applies even more to teaching
heads. Findings from the PRISMS study indicated that frequent interruptions were a normal part of the school day in the heads’ classrooms and resulted in higher levels of distraction from work on part of their pupils (Aldridge et al. 1990). Dunning (1993:83) also draws attention to the

… conflict between the professional concerns of teaching, management and leadership … and the relatively unimportant distracting demands … that regularly arise in day-to-day school life.

These ‘distracting demands’ even if they are urgent in the short term may not be what is most important for the long term improvement of the school. Therefore this conflict has to be solved and in my view that makes the case for appointing new staff to small schools to handle some of the urgent maintenance requirements and release heads from some of the day-to-day pressures that keep them away from the classrooms, and leave them free to concentrate on what is their crucial role in school improvement.

If my finding is right that headteachers’ opportunities for taking longer courses, such as Diploma and Master’s courses, have more or less disappeared, it is another unhealthy sign of the current system. To turn once again to the important role of the head in school improvement, it is also evident that effectiveness in these roles does not come by itself. Most headteachers are appointed to headship directly from teaching which is probably not a sufficient preparation for the job in the long term. This should make the case for the importance of effective, well-organised in-service development opportunities for headteachers. According to Dunning (1993:79-80) official statistics from 1991 (DES 1991) indicate that over 19% of English primary schools and 33% of Welsh primary schools have fewer that 100 pupils. Excluding heads of these schools from this is not an indicator of a healthy system-wide improvement.

What, then, are the implications and lessons to learn from this situation for Icelandic educators in the impending changes towards community management of Icelandic small primary schools?

The first and most obvious thing is that the new educational context Iceland is establishing will lead to fundamental changes in headteachers’ lives. Even though they already have considerable management and administrative duties these will inevitably increase substantially under community management of schools, in much the same way as has happened in England. The problem is that while the British LMS system can be described as a model for the maintenance of schools no such
maintenance model yet exists in Iceland. This inevitably causes considerable uncertainty and concern among Icelandic headteachers about their future role.

This uncertainty is further enhanced by the fact that there is no improvement model for Icelandic schools either. There is no model for school self-evaluation and formal school development planning, no teacher appraisal, no requirements of a formal staff development policy and no official means of assessing the performance either of individual schools or the system nation-wide. Therefore, even though the heads I interviewed conceptualise themselves as having an active role to play in school improvement, they have no models of improvement to go to and are uncertain how to set about their improvement task. My impression is that many of their development efforts suffer from this: they are somewhat fragmented efforts to work on particular programs of their schools, lacking the whole school context and strategies for sustenance. One of the heads expressed her concern about this:

… but somehow it seems that these projects are isolated. I’ve got a thick file here with reports of development projects which have received grants. This is a huge amount of information about all kinds of excellent research and experiments. But few of them are alive … in the schools and not used in the pre-service teacher training.

A lot of the head’s concerns for the future seem to be concerned with maintenance systems and how they can respond to the changes that will be imposed on them, rather than taking the proactive school improvement stance. And to bear in mind my criteria for selecting the Icelandic heads and the fact that three of them have taken a fifteen-week post-graduate course in education management, it does not seem unfair to conclude that these are among the more effective headteachers.

Their concern is perfectly legitimate, however. There is no reason to doubt that their personal ‘hard disk’ is full already, to borrow an analogy form one of their English colleagues, and the tension between the additional workload and their duties as educational leaders will have to be resolved. The important question is how. Oddly enough, their spontaneous response is a claim for less teaching commitment. That however, as I have already argued in this paper, would be the least sensible reaction. It would detach them from curriculum leadership and involvement, make them less visible in the schools, lessen their opportunities for relationship with children and reduce their opportunities for informal monitoring. It would,

3 From The Ministry of Education’s Fund for Primary School Development or The Teachers’ Union of Iceland’s Fund for School Development and Research.
in short, substantially limit the advantages of being a head of a small school. A more sensible reaction would in my opinion be to appoint new staff, such as deputy head, a secretary, and a caretaker who could release the headteachers from the new administrative tasks and enable them to hold on to their teaching commitments and other teaching and learning centred duties.

Outside support is a crucial issue in Iceland, not least for small schools. Many of them are fairly isolated, which makes co-operation between them difficult. They are required to cater for all children regardless of their abilities even though many of them have no special needs teachers. Under community management of schools the state-run LEAs, which have been the main providers of external support and consultation and to some extent staff development, are abolished. Under the new Act individual community councils are responsible for the service the LEAs have so far provided, even though no guidance on the implementation of this has yet been provided.

All the Icelandic heads complain about inadequate support from the present LEAs and express concern about how this need of the schools will be addressed in the future, fearing that the little there is now may become even less. The smallness of the nation makes it highly unlikely that private consultancies will to any extent be able to take over this role, even if the schools were given the money to buy them in. Official agencies to provide this service seem therefore to be the only answer. But even so, there are clear implications for small schools. While the larger communities, the towns in particular, already have some social service systems that may well be able to embrace these new responsibilities, the smaller and poorer communities running the small schools are clearly unable to handle this task on their own. How they will meet their new demands still remains to be seen, but obviously this is of crucial importance for the future of their schools.

Despite the inadequacy of the current LEA support and service for schools their existence has been extremely important to schools, not least the small isolated schools struggling to cope with their variety of demands. The existence of the LEAs has probably been one of the most important contributions to keeping relatively uniform standards of quality in Icelandic primary schools and thence educational equality in the country. Under the community management of schools, and in the absence of the LEA control and support system, it seems to me almost inevitable that the quality of schooling will be more unevenly spread across the country than ever before. I can see no signs of the demographic changes mentioned in the introduction to this paper coming to an end. The decline in population in
rural Iceland and the numerous fishing villages along the coast will result in increasingly diverse financial capacity of the local communities. There will be well-resourced schools in the wealthier areas which will attract effective teachers and heads and quickly leave behind, in terms of quality, their counterparts in the more impoverished areas, the small rural communities or fishing villages. Much will depend on the headteachers in this situation which of course makes the case for effective training for them. But if my gloomy picture of the future prospects of education in rural Iceland is justified, it seems rather obvious to me where the better educated and more effective heads will and will not be going.
References


Appendices
Appendix 1

Some Background Information about Primary Schools in Iceland

The Icelandic school system is a two-tier system of primary and secondary schools. The primary school is a ten-year compulsory school from the age of 6 - 16. Subsequently students can go to secondary schools which are basically four-year schools.

There are currently 207 primary schools in Iceland. Virtually all of them are public (as opposed to private) schools and are currently financed collectively by the state and the local communities. The country is divided into eight Local Educational Authorities, run by the state. Their main responsibilities are to

- administer the government’s part of the budgeting;
- ensure that schools are run according to Education Acts and regulations;
- assist schools in catering for special needs;
- provide psychological service for pupils when needed;
- advise on the organisation of teaching and learning, promote school development and play a role in INSET.

There is a strong emphasis on inclusiveness and equal educational opportunities in the primary school. In theory every child is entitled to schooling in his or her home community but in practice many schools in rural and remote areas have difficulties in catering for children with severe handicaps or learning disabilities. Educational equality has partly been ensured by the government’s responsibility for the whole system, a considerable centralisation of administration and a national curriculum. Apart from national testing in four core subjects at the end of the primary school there is no official evaluation or inspection, neither of individual schools nor of the

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4 This account of the school system in Iceland is mainly based on a section in my second assignment of the M.Phil. course: School-Based Review, Development Planning and Inspection as Strategies for School Improvement: Some Implications for Educational Policy in Iceland.
national system, there are no requirements of formal school self-evaluation and the LEA’s monitoring function is relatively vague.

Now this context is changing. A new Education Act for the primary school devolves all responsibilities both for finance and implementation of the Act directly to the local community councils and individual schools. The LEAs are virtually abolished and the local community councils are required to establish their own institutions to take over their responsibilities.

It is worth mentioning that most of these communities are very small. Nearly 60% of the 250,000 population of the country lives in and around the capital. The remaining 40% live, with the exception of a few bigger towns, in rural communities or fishing villages with a population of 200-400 people, each running their own school. Of the 147 primary schools outside the capital area, 94 or 64%, have 100 or fewer pupils. Taking over the primary school is a formidable task for many of these communities even though the government has promised to create a fund to compensate for their diverse financial capability. The changes are therefore highly controversial and many see their fragmentation of the responsibility for the educational system as bringing a potential threat to the long tradition of educational equality.
Appendix 2

A Synthesis of Roles and Responsibilities

1. Roles and responsibilities within the school
   • Building a culture of collaboration
   • Vision, goals and objectives
   • Curriculum and classroom practice
   • Monitoring, evaluation and planning
   • Teaching
   • Staff development

2. Roles and responsibilities outside the school
   • Working with parents
   • Local management of schools (include working with governors)
   • The school as a part of the community
   • Co-operation between small schools
Appendix 3

Interview Schedule

Factual profile of the school:

Staffing and organization
- Number of teachers.
- Other staff.
- Head’s teaching duties.
- Number and age of pupils.
- Number and arrangements of classes, which age groups are together.

Resources:
- Buildings and school premises.
- Maintenance of buildings.
- Budget.
- Budget for staff development.
- Resources and the development of the school – is any lack of resources inhibiting development?

Roles and responsibilities within the school

The leadership roles within the school
- What are your key leadership roles within the school?

Vision, goals and objectives
- How clearly is the school’s vision and its objectives stated and where?
- What is your role as a headteacher in creating them?
- What is the staff’s role in creating them?

School development/improvement
- What actions are taken in the school for school development?
- What is your role as a headteacher in them?
- What is the staff’s role in them?
- How do you perceive your role in general as a change agent or initiator of school development in the school?

**Curriculum and classroom practice**
- What is your involvement in the curriculum design of the school?
- What kind of curriculum responsibilities do teachers have?
- Is there a school policy about classroom practice and teaching methods (e.g. co-operative learning, individualised learning, differentiation, inclusiveness etc.) or is it left to individual teachers?
- What do you do as a headteacher to ensure that these policies are followed?
- Do you intervene in teachers’ practice – under what circumstances?
- What actions are taken in the school to match curriculum and classroom practice to the context of small schools, e.g. in mixed-age classes?

**Monitoring and evaluation**
- What kind of monitoring and evaluation do you see as most important in the school?
- What are your main strategies for monitoring what goes on in the school?
- What do you do as a headteacher to ensure that the school’s policies in general are followed?
- How is pupils’ progress and achievement assessed in the school?

**Teaching duties**
- Is it important for a headteacher to have a teaching commitment?
- Do your teaching duties affects your role as a leader within the school?

**Staff development**
- Does the school have a stated policy on staff development?
- Who decides how staff development budget is spent and what courses teachers attend?
- Do you play a role in the staff development of the school?
- How?
- Have any staff development actions been taken to meet the challenge of teaching in mixed-age classes?
- What staff development opportunities are there for headteacher
Pattern of leadership in the school

- Do you have strategies for involving staff in decision making in the school?
- In what way do staff participate in decision making in the school?
- What kind of delegation of leadership roles and responsibilities is there in the school?
- Are staff taking on leadership roles in the school – in what instances – on what grounds?

Effects of school size

- What are the effects of the school size on the roles and responsibilities within the school? Are they different in nature in a small school?

Roles and responsibilities outside the school: relationships with the community:

Parents

- Could you describe the schools relationship with parents?
- Is parental involvement important for school improvement – does it contribute to it?
- Are you happy with the school’s relationship with parents as it is or would you like it to change?
- Do you have any strategies to accomplish this?

Governors

- Could you describe the way you work with the school’s governing body?
- What kind of direct involvement of governors is there in decision making in the school?
- Is the situation as it is desirable – is it likely to contribute to the development of the school?
- Have you any plans to change the way you work with the governing body?
- (Iceland only) How do you think the increased power the governing bodies are given in the 1995 Education Act will affect your role as a headteacher – is it in your opinion likely to contribute to school development?

LEAs

- (England only) How has the changing role of the LEAs changed or affected your roles as a headteacher?
- (Iceland only) What kind of support and service do you get from your LEA at present?
– (Iceland only) What kind of support and service does the school need from the bodies that will replace the present LEAs?

The school as a part of the community
– How important is the school for the community it serves?
– What kind of community involvement is there?
– In what way is it beneficial for the school?
– Do you do anything as a headteacher to enhance this community involvement?

Local management of schools (LMS)
– In what way has the introduction of LMS affected the role of the head teacher in general (if you have the comparison)?
– In what way is it likely to affect your role as an educational leader in the school?
– Does LMS have any specific implications for small schools?
– What kind of preparation did you have for LMS – was it sufficient?

Co-operation between small schools
– Do you have any experience of co-operation between small schools or federations of small schools?
– What is the importance of such a collaboration for school improvement?
– What implications does co-operation of this kind have for the role of the head?

Advice for new heads
– Would you have any advice for a newly-appointed headteacher in a small school?