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## **SMALL SCHOOLS AND RETHINKING INCLUSION**

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The predictions are that two thirds of the world population will live in cities by the middle of this century. The distribution of people across urban and rural spaces differs across the regions of the globe, but the trend is for living to become ever more metrocentric, with urban life as normalcy. Working against the grain, communities in peripheral places, those far from urban centres, educate and bring up the next generation through schooling that is very often provided in ways that reflect place-based realities. Topology and topography shape education in positive and negative ways in peripheral places. This abstract discusses small schools with multi/mixed grade provision in peripheral contexts and focuses on the opportunities for rethinking inclusion that these specific conditions allow.

Peripherality is associated with a range of locations. Geographical areas that are hard to access owing to the terrain can be termed peripheral. Similarly, the regions that are mountainous, comprise an archipelago or are coastal maybe seen as peripheral (Hirshberg et al., 2023). In contrast, in Australia for example, peripherality applies to the inaccessible centre of the landmass. In terms of education, peripherality relates to contexts that are outside of the usual conditions familiar to state or national ministries and departments of education (Gristy et al., 2020). Schools that meet nationally/federally determined classifications of peripherality, are referred to more generally as isolated or remote, thereby emphasising the ways in which they fall outside expected metrocentric norms.

A school in such remote or isolated circumstances is demarked by some typical features and practices but each has its own history and neighbourhood, so attempts to homogenise should be avoided. The school often is an asset in the local setting, being looked on with fondness and seen as forming the heart of the village. It provides a focus for local activities and building a sense of community as families relate to the space as somewhere where memories have been made by generations of residents. There are rich opportunities for drawing on the natural environment and local cultural heritages to enhance teaching (Gruenewald and Smith, 2008). Moreover, in such circumstances, the small number of children on roll encourages close relationships to form with the teachers getting to know families and their children as individuals, while the pupils get to play with all their peers in the school.

The school as the heart of the village is not without challenges. Notably, the settlements in which these schools operate have small populations, which might be decreasing through outmigration to cities or, alternatively, experiencing a rapidly

diversifying small population as migrants arrive for specific purposes such as employment in primary extractive industries (fish processing or forestry) or where connectivity permits, for remote online work as part of the knowledge economy (Villa, Andrews and Solstad, 2021). Another common denominator is the landscape, which is not only challenging for travellers, but which lacks many attributes and hinders lifestyle choices associated with urban or peri-urban living. While this might have impacts on the children and young people growing up in these communities, for the school, it raises the well-documented challenge of staff recruitment (Parfitt and Read, 2023), even if there is an extremely limited staff body comprising just one or two teachers. Having a handful of children on roll, despite potentially fostering a sense of community, is the Achilles heel of the small school, particularly for elementary or primary years. This leads central governmental departments to combine year groups or shut down a school entirely. Arguments citing the inefficiencies, unsustainable costs and administrative burdens of keeping a school with (very) few children open, as well as those highlighting the potentially limited curricula that an isolated, lone teacher can deliver, have, unfortunately, resulted in the consolidation of many small schools.

The phenomenon of the small school is not to be written off as an unwelcome expensive anomaly in the metrocentric economy of education systems. Where chosen as a way forward, the multi/mixed grade small school organisation is 'a space in which to experience learning pathways based on the unity and cross-sectoral content of knowledge' (INDIRE, n.d.). Indeed, mixed grade provision is recognised in many countries in the global north and south as commonplace for managing the circumstances of a school community. We contend that there are fresh perspectives and practical avenues to be explored when we draw on the experiences of small schools, as these are where multi/ mixed grade teaching is commonly pursued in Europe. The rationales behind mixed grade provision embrace pedagogical motivations as well as the drive to manage financial imperatives (Cornish, 2010). Regardless, the mixed grade offers an inherently inclusive setting, one where age is not used as the yardstick to segregate children on grounds that are considered unnatural for the rest of society (i.e. separating people by age cohort/date of birth).

To date, inclusion in schools has largely developed around respecting and making reasonable adjustments centred on individuals' protected characteristics. Slee (2014) has challenged education systems for still being based on the systematic othering of those who do not fit in to some predetermined criteria around which neo-liberal education is focussed. This, it is contended, is clearly seen in the teaching and isolating practices applied to children and young people labelled as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). While the provision of 'Special Schools' is deemed inappropriate, equally, inclusion in neighbourhood schools is still shown to be geared toward othering, separation and exclusion of children who pose a risk. This is in spite of the widespread dissemination of education policies dressed up as inclusive: apparently espousing the promotion of equality and diversity. As Slee goes on to explain, it is the entrenched 'ethic of competitive individualism that drives the formation of [such] education policies and practices' (2014:7) that serve to disenfranchise. The rich possibilities associated with mixed grade provision do not directly address inclusion in

terms of the experiences of specific groups of diverse and/or disadvantaged pupils. Instead, its potentials concern wider, fundamental questions about the nature of inclusion relating to all children, as well as adults, seeking to belong to their school through participating in an energised purposeful community.

Regrettably, even when circumstances in small schools could encourage fully fledged mixed grade experiences, the legacy of delivering lessons segregated by age, is often apparent. These emerge in practices of differentiation, accommodations or adaptive teaching that are introduced when staff are unsuccessfully trying to mimic lessons devised for age-homogenous settings. In these lessons, the few children in the classroom are segregated and some instructed individually while the others have to make do, studying alone on their pre-set tasks. The full possibilities of mixed grade teaching are only realised when the teachers and their education leadership are prepared to think differently, let children assemble as one body and put their voices and talents forward in collaboration. That is, sometimes the oldest are guiding classmates and at other times, these classmates take the initiative, while the adult/teacher works hard to facilitate the creation of collective knowledge (Bjørø, 2023).

The ethic at work in the mixed grade small school scenario is that of inclusion: inclusion that treats and respects individuals as whole people. Herein, differences and similarities are employed to foster an education built on a shared purpose, rather than on competitive individualism (Simon, 1977). This democratic form of learning is the key lesson to be learnt. The small school is an asset in establishing an inclusive comprehensive future for education.

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## **ВИКОРИСТАННЯ МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНИХ ПРИНЦИПІВ В ІСТОРИКО-ПЕДАГОГІЧНОМУ ДОСЛІДЖЕННІ**

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В історико-педагогічному дослідженні важливим є використання комплексу взаємопов'язаних методологічних принципів, спрямованих на вивчення та аналіз теоретичної й теоретико-методичної спадщини видатних учених, учителів-словесників, наукових праць дослідників з історії педагогіки, методики, нормативних документів тощо. Методологічні принципи виконують роль нормативів, приписів, які регламентують процедуру обґрунтування історико-педагогічної проблеми.

Існують різні наукові погляди на сукупність методологічних принципів історико-педагогічного дослідження. Так, О. Адаменко, В. Курило, Є. Хриков до них зараховують такі: – принцип об'єктивності, який вимагає наукового обґрунтування вихідних положень, виключення суб'єктивізму в оцінці історичних фактів; – принцип можливості відтворення результатів дослідження; – принцип поєднання цілісного та аспектного підходів до аналізу процесів розвитку педагогічної науки; – принцип руху від опису до пояснення, а від нього – до прогнозування; – етичний принцип, що передбачає відповідальність дослідника за адекватність і глибину аналізу, коректність критики [5, с. 148-150].

На думку Л. Голубничої, основними та невід'ємними принципами історіографічного вивчення історії педагогіки є такі: історизм, системність, об'єктивність, усебічність, спадкоємність [3].

В історико-педагогічному дослідженні, на наш погляд, варто використати такі методологічні принципи: історизму, єдності логічного та історичного, діалектичний, системності, об'єктивності, хронологічний, усебічності, суттєвого аналізу, наступності (спадкоємності) [1; 2].

Ураховуючи спрямованість історико-педагогічного дослідження на аналіз освітніх феноменів минулого, першочерговим стає принцип *історизму*, дотримання якого дозволяє простежити перспективність у дослідженні історії педагогіки. Сутність означеного принципу полягає в тому, що будь-яке історичне явище має розглядатися в розвитку на тлі факторів, що його зумовлюють. Принцип історизму передбачає вивчення сучасного стану предмета дослідження, здійснення реконструкції минулого та окреслення майбутнього, прогнозування тенденцій розвитку.