

# Territorial Specificities of Teaching and Learning

*Introduction by Roser Boix, Pierre Champollion, & António M. Duarte (Editors)*

It's our pleasure to present this special issue of *Sisyphus* «Territorial Specificities of Teaching and Learning».

The links between education and territory are multiple and complex. No part of schooling can entirely free itself from the territorial context in which the school action plan is included: formal schooling, academic achievement, vocational orientation, didactics, pedagogy, etc. are all more or less according to the territories, more or less according to the educational systems concerned. Thus, the territory can have an external effect on school education as an impact factor, but can also be and/or intend to have a full educational role. It may also impact on education as a whole, even a systemic impact as it is the case in some rural and mountain areas.

In a previous special number of this same journal, titled «One Planet Residency: Perspectives on Globalisation and Education» (Laura Colucci-Gray & Donald Gray, 2014), we were alerted to the need for education to contribute to build a safe operating space for humanity, considering that humans evolved by developing a risky predatory relationship with their environment, tending to standardization. To re-establish respect for and an adapted relationship with the local territory without losing a global perspective, might be the key to a healthy humanity's development. In this view, the thematic of education and territory is therefore critical.

Particularly, the multigrade school in rural territories has been a target of multiple investigations and analysis on the part of pedagogy and related disciplines, like sociology, anthropology and psychology, which have contributed with scientific relevant knowledge which allowed the improvement of education's quality in those territories. Nevertheless, multigrade classroom's didactics has received little attention of scientific research, despite the fact that diffusion of curricular experiences and good pedagogic practices have allowed to rethink the process of education and learning in this type of classrooms, and therefore to improve their practices.

The eight articles contained in this special issue bring together perspectives from Portugal, Spain, France, Chile and Uruguay that question several dimensions of the relationship that education develops with the territory in which it occurs and to which it contributes as a constructor. Besides, the papers add relevant educational implications in the view of a conceptualization of teaching and learning as dynamics that both can adapt to territorial specificities and can contribute to territorial sustainability and change.

All the authors of these nine papers have been collaborating in this area for some years, in the context of different international and national projects<sup>1</sup>.

Three of the articles that appear in this issue («Teaching Strategies and Space Organisation in Multigrade Classrooms»; «The Issue of Autonomy within Multigrade Classrooms»; «Teaching Practices for Passive and Active Learning in Rural and Urban Elementary Teachers») are the result of researches developed in the frame of the «Research and Development Action Plan's», «Fundamental Program of Oriented Research» of the Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain. Namely, an international project involving three European countries (Spain, France and Portugal) and two Latin American (Chile and Uruguay), with a three-year duration (2009-2012). This project is titled «The Efficiency and the Quality in the Acquisition of Competencies which Characterize the Rural School: Is It a Transferable Model to Other School Typology?».

In order of appearance, this special issue opens with a paper by Pierre Champollion, «Education and Territory: Conceptual Framework», who speaks about territorial impact. Nevertheless, is it really the territory, all «sides»

1 Examples: I+D+I international project «The efficiency and the quality in the acquisition of competencies which characterize the rural school: is it a transferable model to other school typology?» (2009-2012); Gargallo Foundation project «Rural School's Achievement factor: Contextual Characteristics» (2013-2014); all the researches of the Observatory of Education and Territories (OET/2009—<http://observatoire-education-territoires.com>). See details and bibliography further.

considered, that has an impact on school, or is it rather its «symbolic» part—the territoriality—which «shapes» the education pathways? If the actions of the different contexts which have an influence on education—spatial, political, institutional contexts for instance—have been analysed for a long time, it is completely different from the action of the territory, which has only really been tackled for the last fifteen years. The study of the relationships between territory and territoriality on the one hand, and education on the other, has become important to understand schooling in a fine, detailed and comprehensive way.

Roser Boix, Pierre Champollion and António M. Duarte's «Teaching and Learning in Rural Contexts» present us a literature review on rural and mountain education, focusing on the importance of the rural territory to the specificity of learning and teaching in rural schools globally. Focusing on the rural education particularities, the authors illuminate its present conditions besides its limitations and potential advantages for the processes of teaching and learning in elementary education.

The article of Roser Boix and Laura Domingo, «Rural School in Spain: Between Compensatory Education and Inclusive Education», places the rural Spanish school between a perspective of compensatory education, fruit of the history of the education in that country, and a propaedeutics vision of inclusive education. It is argued that to advance towards a pedagogic option based on an active participative methodology implies, among other aspects, advancing in the perspective of an inclusive education and leaving that of a compensatory education, which does not correspond with the real needs of the multigrade classroom. Nevertheless, this is not seen as possible without the support of a suitable and especially stable legislation. The authors point out that, in present-day Spain, it is very difficult to be able to seat the bases in order that the rural school could be considered and rethought from an inclusive perspective, given that in thirty-five years of democracy seven educational organic laws have been legislated. The article argues then that legislative stability is necessary in order that the rural school could advance in the improvement of its educational quality.

Pilar Abós and Antonio Bustos show us, in «Teaching Strategies and Space Organisation in Multigrade Classrooms», the results of two of the dimensions studied in the multigrade classroom: the didactic strategies and the organization of space. Departing from a pedagogic exposition based on active participative methodology, the study centres on the analysis of multigrade



classroom's didactic strategies that allow a significant attention to diversity. The focal point is also on the given possibilities, concerning the management of classrooms' and educational centres' spaces, that give a response adapted to those strategies. The study focuses on multigrade classrooms and educational centres that present active-participative methodologies, having involved a qualitative analysis on the basis of interviews to teachers.

Catherine Rothenburger presents, in «Towards a Territorialised Professional Identity: The Case of Teaching Staff in Rural Schools in France, Spain, Chile and Uruguay», the posting of teachers to small rural schools consisting of one or two classes. How do today's French, Spanish, Chilean and Uruguayan primary-school teachers experience their encounter with rural schools? Whether this area of practice occurs at the beginning of their professional careers or later, it disrupts their representations of their own profession and their professional practices in several ways. What processes of identity-formation do these disruptions set off for teachers in rural areas of these four countries? What convergences, and what divergences, can be brought to light in the way in which teachers in French, Spanish, Chilean and Uruguayan rural areas construct their professional identity?

Roser Boix and Limber Santos, in «The Issue of Autonomy within Multigrade Classrooms», interrogate the degree of pupils' learning autonomy in Uruguayan's multigrade classrooms. Following from the notion that the rural pupil is more autonomous than the urban pupil, the study suggests a diverse typology of autonomy of learning (false autonomy; apparent autonomy; autonomous learning control), disputing a concept of learning autonomy considered as erroneous, that is presented as anchored in the concept of individual work. The article so concludes that being a pupil of a rural multigrade classroom does not necessarily imply the acquirement of a higher level of autonomy than the one of a pupil of a graduated classroom.

Cécile dos Santos, Thierry May-Carle and Pierre Champollion, in «Rural Vs. Urban Crossed Approaches: School and Territory Representations of Pupils at the End of Primary Education. Case Study of Drôme France», approach learning, school trajectories and social representations of rural and urban pupils at the end of primary school, which have often been analysed, but seldom comparatively. After characterising the rural schooling in 2000 and 2012, the researchers of the French Observatory of Education and Territories have tried, in 2014 and 2015, to probe the urban schooling in three primary schools of the department of Drôme. They present their first comparative

«exploratory» results—as beginning of full scientific analyses—in this article which stress to a pedagogic experimentation of a «didactic of territory».

Finally, António M. Duarte, Belmiro Cabrito, Ana Figueira and José Monge let us know, in «Teaching Practices for Passive and Active Learning in Rural and Urban Elementary Teachers», about the teaching practices of different samples of urban and rural teachers, related with passive and active learning. The authors reflect on the possible causes for the use of those practices and on the reasons for their differentiation between territories, arguing on how schools from different territorial contexts might learn with each other, in order to improve the success and the quality of students' learning.

The articles here assembled intend to contribute to the knowledge regarding how teaching and learning articulate with the territory where education takes place. Considering this problem in different educational systems, the papers focus on elementary education and encourage us to consider how education entangles and might constructively relate with its territorial context.

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## REFERENCES

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