



SYNERGY AND ENVIRONMENT TO
EMPOWER DECENTRALISED SCHOOLS

TOOLKIT GREEN S.E.E.D.S.

MODULE I Seeds for Boosting

UNIT I Education, rural schools and communities: a common project



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RESPONSIBLE FOR IO1 “TOOLKIT GREEN S.E.E.D.S.”

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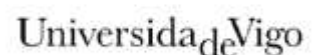
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1. Training of the national responsible (5-6.03.2020)
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UNIT 1.1

EDUCATION, RURAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES: A COMMON PROJECT

Today, Daniel is a renowned doctor who, 11 years ago, studied in a one-room school in a hamlet no bigger than 100 inhabitants. When he remembers that part of his life, he describes it thus, "The school was in my own home. There were 30 of us children, all of different ages, from 5 until 11. My three brothers were also in the class; one was older than me and the other two were younger. There was only one teacher for all of us. She rented a room to stay in at a local home from Monday to Friday. She was very disciplined. The normal thing in the classroom was for us to be seated according to the different grades, which the teacher did so she could dedicate time to each group. I remember that we used to do a lot of independent work, but we also worked in groups. Many times, the groups were with children of different ages or levels. We liked that; it made the older kids feel good because they were able to teach and work with others, and the younger ones liked it because they thought it was fun and exciting when we worked like that. I remember that time in that environment with my classmates who were, in reality, my neighbors and, as I said before, my brothers fondly; I am also nostalgic for that sense of family and union that existed between us, and the fact we could safely move around the hamlet. That teacher recommended that I continue studying, so at the age of 11 I went off to a city school as a boarder, and everything changed. Above all, I remember the feelings of loneliness, of being rootless, upon finding myself in an unknown human and social space, which was much bigger and had much stricter rules than where I had come from. It took a long time for me to identify with and adapt to my new school life. Now, after so many years, somebody created a WhatsApp group for that first class and it has been exciting to reconnect with a lot of my old classmates who, as with me, abandoned our places of birth to move to the city. Today, that hamlet is practically empty; it's almost a weekend-getaway place. This is why reliving all of this is so emotional. My years in that one-room school was the warmest and happiest part of my school years, without a doubt".

As was Daniel's case, in many European countries, rural education was previously done in one-room schools with one teacher who educated and took care of students of different ages and grades.

The prior testimony, while bringing us back to a prior educational reality, with social, academic, material, and personal conditions which have been outdated for a while, does still hold true in some



places. It also helps us to consider the unique situation that is rural schooling, the role teachers play, and the students' situation. Although it has changed, the small, rural isolated school has not disappeared with globalization and the digital revolution. Eurostat (2015) states that 28% of the population in Europe are rural inhabitants, which is why rural schools are still a reality for the education systems of numerous European countries.

In this introductory teaching unit, we will attempt to profile the characteristics and situation of education and schools in the rural world today. We will examine the different positions regarding the roles and relations of the rural school and the community, and establish the need to adopt a critical attitude which leads one to view the school and its role in the context of developing sustainable, comprehensive, and integral educational and social project. In short, this unit emphasizes the important role schools play in rural environments, with an emphasis on its educational and social functions.

1. What characterizes what today we understand to be a rural school?

Rural society has undergone a significant transformation, starting from the second half of the 20th century. Related

statistical definitions have been based on demographical, geographical, and social-economic factors, such as population density, distance, or economic development. There are, however, notable differences between rural areas in terms of their social, cultural, economic, and topographical characteristics. Rural environments can be found on islands, in the mountains, in deserts, or on the plains. There are rural areas which are economically healthy, others which could be classified as suffering through a depression, and ones which are growing. There are also isolated rural areas, well-connected ones, and others which are marginalized or remote.

In any case, and recognizing the differences between countries and areas, today what we understand as a rural school is not merely limited to the farm, the field. Today's rural society has changed, with the service and business sectors now forming part of its fabric; this has resulted in new ways of how rural environments are used, with quality of life, residential use, rural tourism, or recreation, among others, becoming relevant.

As such, one cannot speak of a one-size-fits-all approach to determining what represents rural society, or rural environment. Rather, one may talk of certain characteristics (which vary from

one location to another), but which more or less often share the characteristics which make up what we understand as rural. Echazarra and Radinger (2019) lay out the following characteristics for rural education in OECD countries:

- ◆ Geographical distance: rural communities tend to be far from other population centers.
- ◆ Small and disperse rural areas often have a very low population, which usually limits the services made available to them.
- ◆ A shrinking population: the population of rural areas went down in the past century in a majority of countries, due to issues such as migration to urban areas, lowering birthrates, or changes in agricultural production and so-called economies of scale.
- ◆ Low socio-economic status: in general, rural areas are normally poorer than urban ones; there is a socio-economic gap between rural and urban families. As a consequence, in rural communities the ability to provide or pay for quality services is often limited, and students tend to join the workforce prior to those from urban areas.
- ◆ Ethnically homogeneous and socially cohesive communities: in rural areas, local residents often

maintain close and stable relations and are largely ethnically homogeneous. Nonetheless, although immigrants normally establish themselves in urban environments, some rural areas have experienced a growing amount of ethnic and cultural diversity as a result of immigration from abroad.

2. What characterizes education in rural environments? What are rural schools like?

In this unit we are concerned with not so much establishing a lone definition of what rural schools or rural education are, but with reflecting on some of their characteristics. As has stated before, the differences in rural environments are not only country to country, but within them as well. Likewise, education policies and systems mark significant differences when speaking about rural education; it is necessary to consider these differences when establishing common features for rural education in Europe. The following are some of those characteristics (Boix, Champollion & Duarte, 2015, Bustos):

1. An education in movement, which has been reconfigured and redefined in light of more recent changes.

2. An inclusive approach to accepting and incorporating differences into education.
3. A heterogeneous and diverse student population, with different grades often in the same class.
4. Generally a lower number of students than in urban schools, which is consistent with lower population rates in rural environments.
5. Initial training for teachers who are little adapted to or adjusted to the necessities of rural schooling.
6. A complex personal situation for teachers, whose likelihood to feel isolated and alone varies depending on the environment and type of school.
7. A social environment often unknown by teachers, who must adapt to a different method, often with a culture, way of talking, and relating different those which dominate urban settings.
8. A pedagogical-didactic structure based on heterogeneity, multi-level groups, on the recognition of different capacities, curricular competences, and the different levels of schooling.
9. A singular organizational and administrative structure, which is adapted to the circumstances and needs a school's location. There are different types of classroom, schools, and student groupings depending on country and area.
10. A lower number of services and resources available to students, above all when these are assigned to a school or classroom based on the number of enrolled students.
11. Rural education being deemed as marginal, with little presence in education policies.

There are many options in terms of organizing rural education in different countries. In fact, one can differentiate different types of rural schooling if one is often speaking of schools in villages, hamlets, or rural areas with populations between 200 and 3000 inhabitants, depending on the country

The following table includes some of the most common options.

TYPE OF RURAL SCHOOL	DESCRIPTION
ONE-ROOM SCHOOL	<p>An educational unit, where children of different ages and levels are taught together by one teacher.</p> <p>Example: "Piccole scuole" (Italy)</p>
TIERED SCHOOLS	<p>A grouping of several classrooms which are shared by children of two or more grades. In each class there is a teacher who attends to students from two or more grades. The task of managing the school is shared among the teachers.</p>
COUNTY SCHOOLS	<p>When, in neighboring villages, there are enough children to form a class, county schools are set up; these are attended by students from the different localities. There is normally a teacher per classroom and grade, and all the typical services found in education centers. Students in these schools spend the entire day there, returning home when school is let out.</p>
GROUPED SCHOOLS	<p>An administrative, although not physical, grouping of small one-room schools or incomplete and disperse schools in different locations in the same rural area. These often share itinerant teachers, material, and center management, with teachers, students, and others participating in joint meetings.</p> <p>Example: Group Rural Schools (Spain)</p>
DISPERSED INTERMUNICIPAL PEDAGOGICAL GROUPS	<p>Grouping of students based on their grade at several neighboring schools. For example, pre-school in one hamlet, the first years of primary education at another, and the last years of primary education at a third one.</p> <p>Example: Regroupements pédagogiques intercommunaux dispersés (France)</p>

3. What social and educational function do rural schools fulfill?

Communications, social advances, and greater educational expectations have resulted, in many cases, to significant changes in the role played by rural schools. Nonetheless, some of the challenges and opportunities unique to rural education still exist, with new ones arising as well. In any event, there is agreement in terms of recognizing that rural schools serve an educational function requiring great responsibility because (Boix, Champollion & Duarte, 2015; Sepúlveda & Gallardo, 2011):

- They give voice to often-ignored rural cultures, reaffirming their value and potential in a globalized world.
- They defend and ensure a collective identity and rural culture, rescuing, recognizing, and reconstructing the feeling of natural and historical heritage.
- They bring life to their surroundings. Rural schools and their agents perform a function which goes beyond the classroom, being a nucleus for educational, social, and cultural activity.
- They offer an alternative model to education organization which adapts to and creates a rural identity, answering the immediate reality. It

counters the organizational model imposed and defended by urban centers, stopping attempts to impose uniformity.

- They are a mechanism for guaranteeing the principle of equality of opportunity for all persons, regardless of place of origin, conditions, etc.
- They reconstruct the concept of rural, providing sense to local development projects, as well as autonomous and integral life.
- They promote and awaken the sense of belonging to the environment, creating citizens who value, are dedicated to, and who enrich their surroundings, culture, customs, language, and more. They thus have the potential to undo rural exodus and contribute to the sustainability of the community.

In short, the part which rural schools play in their environment should form part of a local strategy. This way, schools can be seen, especially in rural areas, as the most valuable resources in the community. This vision which imagines schools and communities being in a relationship as equal partners, is diametrically opposed to those other approaches which view communities as mere resources or as an objective for schools.



The projects and experiences which support joint projects between schools and communities involve viewing schools as institutional members in the providing of services created jointly for and by the community (Schafft, 2016). It thus strengthens a sense of localness in a globalized society. In this relationship, families and local agents are called to

participate in defining the role of rural schools, and even the construction of new social movements. Thus, Anyon (2005) argues that schools can and should be in the center of constructing new social movements so necessary for reconstructing and revitalizing rural environments and rural education

DO IT IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Examine Daniel's case:

a) identify the barriers, obstacles, or difficulties in it;

b) point out the aides, levers, or opportunities attributed in the text to the school and rural environment;

c) compare this with your own school/classroom;

d) propose 2 actions for addressing the barriers you face.

	DANIEL'S CASE	MY SCHOOL/CLASSROOM
BARRIERS		
AIDES		

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TO LEARN MORE

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