

BERA workshop Wednesday 7th September 2022

Small Schools in contemporary contexts: Developing research agenda

Research and publication priorities (in no particular order)

Developed by the workshop and research activity of workshop contributors

NB Acknowledging the diversity of definitions, this research agenda includes all schools and education institutions (including nurseries and preschools) defined as or who define themselves as 'small'

- ◇ A systematic review of published research and other literature (policy, reports etc) on small schools in England and the four nations
- ◇ A thorough and detailed examination of OFSTED and DFE data on small schools currently and over time.
- ◇ A 'state of the nation' survey of the challenges faced by small schools from the perspective of school leaders, education managers and policy makers, teachers, communities, pupils and families. (See recent literature review from Europe by Fargas and Bagley, 2021).
 - Geographical and psychological isolation
 - Curriculum delivery
 - Threat of closure
 - Maintaining and sustaining staff
- ◇ Understandings of the 'rural' designation by different stake holders in education in England. Comparison of rural designations in education in the four UK nations.
- ◇ An exploration of the use of the terms small/rural/peripheral/isolated/coastal. How are the conditions of these contexts similar/different? Often conflated, how are these terms similar/different. How are they used in key policies and discourses around education?
- ◇ A quick guide to the working definitions of 'small' and 'rural' in education contexts in England and in the four UK nations
 - Ethnicity is defined as 'if you feel '...' You are. Perhaps this way of thinking about definition could be useful in the defining of 'small' in the context and work of this small school network/alliance
 - Small and rural are often conflated. How and why? And how to challenge.
- ◇ Calculation of the number of 'small schools' and 'rural schools' in England and the four UK nations
- ◇ Teaching/pedagogies in mixed age classes
- ◇ The use of digital provision for curriculum (and other elements of schooling eg specialist SEN provision) for pupils, teachers, leaders, governors etc
- ◇ Exploration of understandings of teaching in smalls schools as a career trajectory/opportunity
- ◇ Case studies to explore the importance of context for schools/children/families/communities
- ◇ Pupil Attainment in small schools.
 - Are there any patterns in attainment data linked to school size, geographical locality, place etc
 - Are there urban/rural or size effects?

- ◇ Survey of headship arrangements for schools/clusters of school.
 - What are the different ways in which small schools are being led and how are these arrangements organised and managed
 - Heads taking on extra duties for the money
- ◇ Leadership roles in small schools and expectations of teaching headteachers
- ◇ How are schools organising/aggregating for self-preservation: federations, joining MATS, paying to join networks, amalgamating phases/special
 - Schools taking on extra activity to draw in funding eg after school provision, serial entrepreneurship
 - How are budgets being stretched/creatively used/managed
- ◇ Examining the OFSTED framework and its fit with small schools. (Ref Hay McBer report of 2000)
- ◇ An exploration of the key issues for Church schools (particularly Church of England)
- ◇ Review of the staff recruitment and retention issues faced by small school leaders (include a consideration of turnover issues).
 - Links to ITE placement opportunities
 - SCITT activity
- ◇ SENCOs in small schools in England. Research from 2017/17 suggests high levels of turnover
- ◇ Preparation for teaching in small schools
- ◇ Support and professional learning opportunities for early career teachers (and other teachers) in small schools – looking at professional isolation

Notes

See briefing notes accompanying the small schools manifesto for a useful reading list

The Manifesto and briefing notes can be found here:

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/education/university-practice-partnerships/publications>

Fargas, M. & Bagley, C. (2021), Is small beautiful? A scoping review of 21st-century research on small rural schools in Europe. *European Educational Research Journal*. 21, 5, p. 822-844

Attendees

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| Cath Gristy | Montserrat Fargas-Malet |
| Charlotte Vidal-Hall | Morag Redford |
| Erin Early | Neil Short |
| Jan Georgeson | Rowena Passy |
| Jean Lang | Tanya Ovenden Hope |
| Katie Morigi-Eades | |