THE REMOTE NETWORKED SCHOOL MODEL: AN ICT INITIATIVE TO KEEP ALIVE SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS AND THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY

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The Province of Québec (Canada) has a vast territory and a small population, in comparison with many European countries. Population is concentrated in urban regions and, for some years, Québec has been struggling with demographic movements and rural exodus. This has important consequences for schools of villages and their communities. For instance, some schools are threatened of closing with population decrease. When such a situation happens, the whole community suffers, considering the interdependence between a school and its community’s vitalization (Prévost, Lussier, Boyer & Authier, 2007; Prévost, 2004). Whose parents would want to buy a house in a rural community where there is no school for their children? When a small school remains open its small size may become a challenge for insuring a quality learning environment, knowing the importance of social interactions (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999; Sawyer, 2005).

For almost a decade (Laferrière & Breuleux, 2002), an action research partnership has been established using a systemic approach (Banathy, 1991; Engeström, 1999; Seidel & Perez, 1994). It is tackling this geographic, social and educational challenge. The main objective was to design and study (see design experiment methodology: Brown, 1992; Collins, 1992; 1999), from an ecological perspective (Nardi & O’Day, 1999), a model that was to enrich the rural school learning environment. To this end, we used collaborative ICTs (desktop videoconferencing system and electronic forum) to network 120 rural schools or so. Teachers that feel professional isolation can go beyond school’s borders to interact and share ideas with colleagues from other regions (Allaire, Laferrière, Gaudreault-Perron & Hamel, 2009). Students can learn with teammates from other schools, thus enriching their social interactions for learning and knowledge building purposes (Laferrière, Allaire, Breuleux, Hamel, Turcotte, Gaudreault-Perron, Beaudoin & Inchauspé, 2009).

Our communication will focus on two poles of results that has given legitimacy to the Remote Networked School (RNS) model. The first pole will concentrate on the networked schools dynamic in terms of pupils’ academic achievements (diversity of interactions, vocabulary progression, reading comprehension, etc). Discourse analysis
from the electronic forum and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) measures are used to this end. Moreover, parental involvement is being recognized as an important outside-school factor in children's education (Deslandes, 2006), the second pole of results will present parents’ representations of the RNS model and its value regarding community vitalization. Semi-directed interviews are used for this portion of data collection.

**Keywords:**
Collaboration with ICT; rural schools; school-community partnership.

**References:**


