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THE WORK OF THE TEACHER IN GRADES 2–4 AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The theory and practice of the work of small-staff schools – i.e. schools with one or two teachers and a small number of classes of limited size – have a long history: there have been – and still are – schools of this type in every country in the world. In some, they are the exception, and in others the general rule, their existence depending on the size of the population in a given area and the public education policy of the government concerned. In Tsarist Russia, for example, almost all primary schools – even those with 40–60 pupils – were one-teacher schools, while in many villages there were two primary schools side by side – a Zemstvo (Ministry of Education) school and a parochial (Church) school, run in competition with it. Under the Soviet régime, the school has become a prime concern of the Communist Party and the people, for continued progress and the construction of communism would be impossible without its help. Small-staff schools have accordingly ceased


3) A. Paplauskas-Ramunas (heute University of Ottawa), S. 87.
to exist except in a small number of population centres where the first four grades are taught by two or three teachers, or in rare cases by one.

The fact that small-staff schools exist extensively in all countries makes it imperative for educationalists to exchange their experiences concerning the special features of work in this type of school.

The present paper is intended to give information on three such points: 1. the provision of suitable conditions for successful teaching in small-staff schools; 2. teaching methods where two or three grades are taught by one teacher; and 3. forms of independent work by pupils.

Provision of suitable conditions for successful teaching in small-staff schools

Under the law on strengthening the links between school and life and further developing the public education system, an 8-year course of general compulsory education (in place of 7 years) was introduced for children and young people aged from 7 to 15 or 16, in the Ukrainian SSR, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, starting from the school year 1959/1960. The Ukrainian Law states that “primary schools covering Grades 1–4 will continue to be provided in small population centres, and on completing those grades the pupils will transfer to Grade 5 at the nearest school.”

It follows that the instruction given at all small-staff schools in the Ukraine is such as to enable the children to continue their education successfully in Grades 5–8 at secondary schools, the corollary being that exactly the same syllabuses and curricula apply in Grades 1–4 at small-staff schools as in all schools throughout the Republic.

Since the teachers at small-staff schools have to give, instead of the normal 4–5 lessons a day, as many as 8–10, 12–15 or even (where there are four grades) 16–20 lessons, during which the pupils have to work on their own, the education authorities try to staff them with the more experienced teachers and equip them adequately with teaching and audio-visual aids. The classroom is supplied with as many blackboards as there are grades working in it, and the blackboards are fitted with cloth curtains (or screens) so that written exercises can be covered over before the lessons begin. Two teacher’s desks are installed – one for the textbooks, exercise-books and teaching aids needed for the current lesson being given to two or three different grades, and the other for material that will be needed for subsequent lessons. The pupils’ desks are so arranged as to keep each grade separate from the others as far as possible.

The small-staff schools also have playgrounds for games and physical culture, plots for experimental farm work (a vegetable garden, an orchard and an experimental field) and a small rabbit-run, while many of them also have a geography area where meteorological instruments are installed. For handwork, special equipment is provided which is kept in the pupils’ desks, or, where space permits, there are specially fitted work-benches.

There has been no little debate concerning the principles to be observed in combining grades under one teacher in a two or three-teacher school. Where there are two teachers, the following three variants are possible: (1) Grades 1 + 2, 3 + 4; (2) Grades 1 + 3, 2 + 4; (3) Grades 1 + 4, 2 + 3.

Many people favour the second combination, which is traditional, and was customary even in the pre-Soviet period, when Grades 3 and 4 were small by reason of the fact that not many pupils continued their education beyond the first two years of the course. However, now that education is compulsory for everyone, all