



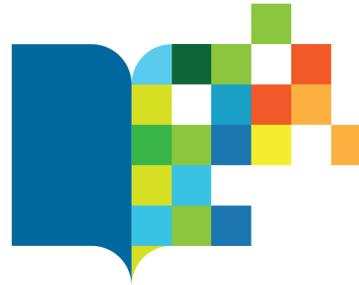
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# PICCOLE SCUOLE

TRAME SOCIALI IN RETE



## INTRODUCTION TO THE SMALL SCHOOLS MANIFESTO

One of the objectives of a modern-day country is to guarantee quality education in every part of its territory, and consequently, also small schools can and must be schools of quality.

For many years, Indire has supported the survival of small schools to maintain their function as strongholds of education and culture and to tackle the phenomenon of dwindling populations. Indire's research has allowed some schools on the smaller islands and mountain areas of Italy to try out joint working thanks to the Internet and videoconference systems.

The national small schools network that has been created has helped to overcome isolation, to link classes with few students and to develop educational paths based on the use of technologies and distance collaboration.

## THE SMALL SCHOOLS MANIFESTO

When we talk about small schools we do not mean only those school complexes with a reduced number of students, but also schools characterized by isolation, by difficulties in accessing essential services, and by the progressive depopulation of the areas where they are located. In the outlying regions, for example in the mountains and on the small islands, schools are organized following the same educational model as schools in large towns and cities. This situation is to be found across vast areas, given that, thanks to Italy's orthographic and morphological features, 76.8% of the country consists of mountains and hills. It therefore becomes important to think of a different paradigm for these widespread educational situations, focusing on the possibility of realizing learning environments that are qualitatively suitable for the development of inclusive pedagogical and educational objectives. Removing schools from an isolated area often means dooming the latter to abandonment and marginalization, irreparably jeopardizing its capacity for development, obliging young families to find other accommodation, which radically alters their life projects. The fact is that these areas actually provide a high quality of life and an environmental wellbeing much greater than in the major cities. These are communities of memory, custodians of a heritage of history, art, traditions and cultures that is often unique and deep rooted, alongside environmental treasures of inestimable value. The outlying areas, and with them the schools located there, must be regarded as an absolute priority for the country, to be protected, valorized and expanded, through a joint effort by all the institutions concerned. No longer marginal areas, but territories of strategic importance, to be protected with specific targeted interventions by the lawmakers. If supported and given value by specific legislation that emphasizes the forms of flexibility needed to ensure educational effectiveness and efficiency, schools in these locations can promote quality education, together with the construction of a strong educational alliance between school and territory.

Indeed, the timeframes and spaces of a small school and its relationship with the territory can offer unique opportunities to move towards the school of the future. Large classes, inadequate buildings without surrounding spaces often hinder the creation of innovative learning environments. Schools in inland areas and on the islands that manage small numbers, instead enjoy conditions of potential advantage that can transform educational environments into places of inclusion and experimentation. In their daily routine, small schools can easily adopt vertical and horizontal processes, thanks to strong ties with families, the territory, and its socio-cultural expressions. In particular, in these areas, the municipality and the school are the institutions closest to the citizens and can promote the latter's growth in political and cultural terms. For this reason, their relationships are intimate, and the resulting collaboration represents a point of strength that makes them socio-cultural strongholds of the entire territory's heritage and of the whole community that lives there. The presence of the one without the other can profoundly weaken a territory. In small schools, it is easier to work on unity of knowledge and cross-sectoral methods, to promote peaceable democratic coexistence and teach active, aware and responsible citizenship. Collaboration, tolerance, inclusion, and cooperative learning can constitute the strengths of these schools. The real Achilles heel of these places is their isolation, which modern information and communication technologies (ICT) can now help to overcome, thereby broadening the socio-cultural environment that the children frequent. Lastly, a national small schools network can represent an incentive to plan activities jointly and verify the results among groups of teachers working on the same project. The Small Schools Manifesto is linked to seven points of the Avanguardie Educative Manifesto and develops certain dimensions of it that aim to develop its original characteristics and transform these elements into opportunities to increase educational quality.

## THE THREE KEY POINTS OF THE MANIFESTO

### COMMUNITIES OF MEMORY AND THE QUALITY OF LEARNING

The original characteristics of small schools are particularly useful for an acceleration of the innovation processes that are underway in all the schools of the Avanguardie Educative network. Traditionally, small schools maintain and strengthen their distinctive cultural and historical traits to become large communities of memory. Their relationship with the natural and socio-cultural environment can represent a resource with a strong innovative potential since it links learning to the circumstances giving it value in terms of territorial vocations. Even the reduced number of students unquestionably represents an "advantageous" element to launch curricular innovations that allow a more flexible organization of learning pathways.

### THE MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE - A RESOURCE, NOT A LIMIT

The exploitation of differences, learning with respect for individual rhythms and characteristics, the promotion of flexible organizational procedures through shared forms of learning that encourage collaboration and inclusion, mean the multi-age classroom - normally a limited situation but widespread in outlying areas - can in fact imply new curriculum settings that cherish an open educational environment, enriched by the valorization of pathways linked to the territory and enhanced by learning environments that embrace virtual networks. A space in which to experience learning pathways based on the unity and cross-sectoral content of knowledge. Multi-age classrooms are a situation to be valorized, given that they develop educational approaches and organizational procedures which are equally of use in wider contexts.

### TECHNOLOGIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Implementing appropriate technological solutions for the different situations makes it possible to overcome the restrictiveness of a social environment that limits the occasions to exchange opinions and tends to curtail incentives and opportunities. Experiments involving the carrying out of educational activities in collaboration with other schools in different territories can represent a real opportunity to overcome the limitations arising from isolation and the limited extent of the territories and social environments.

