



NAZARBAYEV  
UNIVERSITY  
Graduate School  
of Education

The complexity of ungraded schools in rural  
Kazakhstan: Teachers' understandings about how  
the curriculum can be best delivered  
to mixed-age groups

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Marcelo J. López Lara

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# Research settings

## Kazakhstan Population

17,160,774

## Urban

9,433,482

## Rural

7,727,292

## General Schools 15/16

7,511

## Teachers (2012)

307,972

## Students 15/16

2,799,600

## Almola Population

735,566

## Urban

346,391

## Rural

389,175

## General Schools 15/16

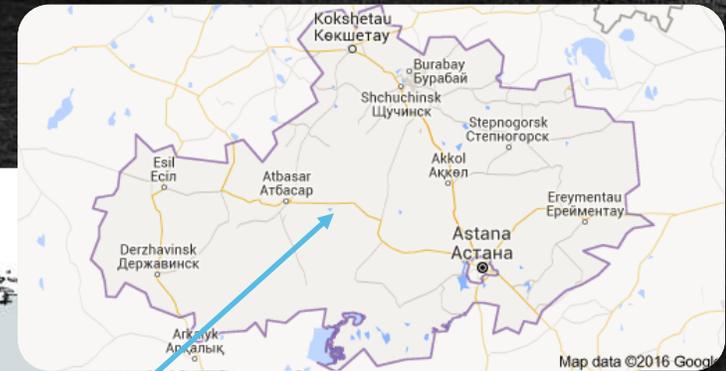
599

## Teachers (2012)

14,790

## Students 15/16

112,400



Map data ©2016 Google

# Research Problem

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# Research Background

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Escuela Nueva  
(Kline, 2002;  
Psacharopoulos  
et al. 1996)

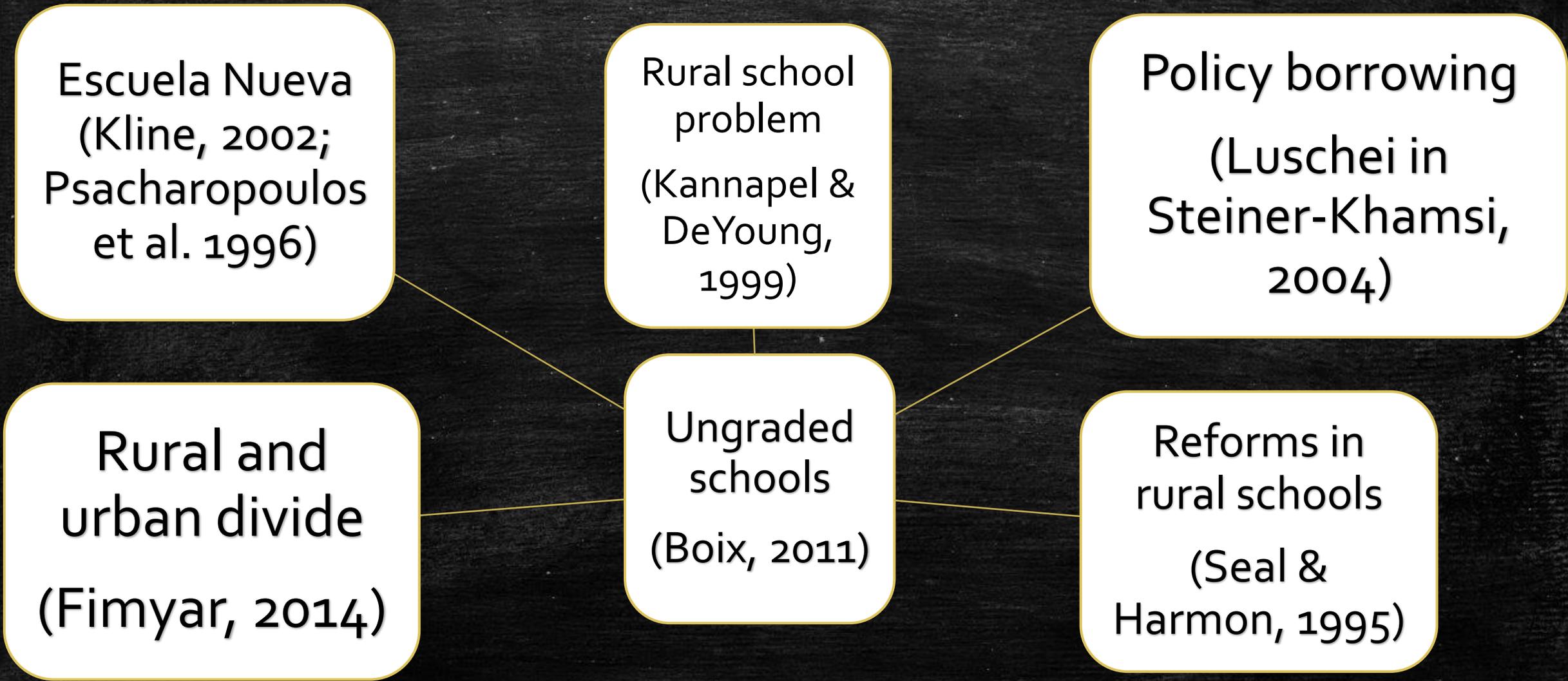
Rural school  
problem  
(Kannapel &  
DeYoung,  
1999)

Policy borrowing  
(Luschei in  
Steiner-Khamsi,  
2004)

Rural and  
urban divide  
(Fimyar, 2014)

Ungraded  
schools  
(Boix, 2011)

Reforms in  
rural schools  
(Seal &  
Harmon, 1995)



# Research Questions

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1. What are the characteristics of ungraded schools in rural Kazakhstan?
2. What are the teaching features of mixed-aged groups within the “ungraded” schools in the country?
3. What are teachers’ understandings about how the curriculum for mixed-age groups can be best delivered?

# Research Approach

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Qualitative (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011)

Case study (Martinez Bonafé, 1988; Eisenhardt, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 2006)

Limitations (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001)

# Data collection tools

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Documentary analysis (Cohen et al., 2011)

In depth interviews (Burgess, 1994) 20 in total, 4 encounters with each teacher.

Observations (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) 2 per teacher for a total of ten.

# Case Study: Profiles

\* names have been changed

Case	School	Teachers	Principal	Grades offered	Language of instruction	Students	Shifts
Isis (1) Female	Water	34	Female	1st to 11th	Russian and Kazakh	188	2
Hector (2) Male	Fire	15	Male	1st to 9th	Kazakh	62	2
Camilla (3) Female	Earth	6	Female	1st to 4th	Russian	12	1
Artemis (4) Female	Air	19	Male	1st to 11th	Kazakh	69	2
Pax (5) Female	Wind	16	Female	1st to 9th	Russian and Kazakh	75	2

# Findings

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- Ungraded schools show the lack of resources either human or material. Some ungraded schools would not even have the basic rooms like built-in toilets.
- Some teachers and principals at ungraded schools are trying to find ways to compensate for the lack of resources by asking the community to help the schools out.



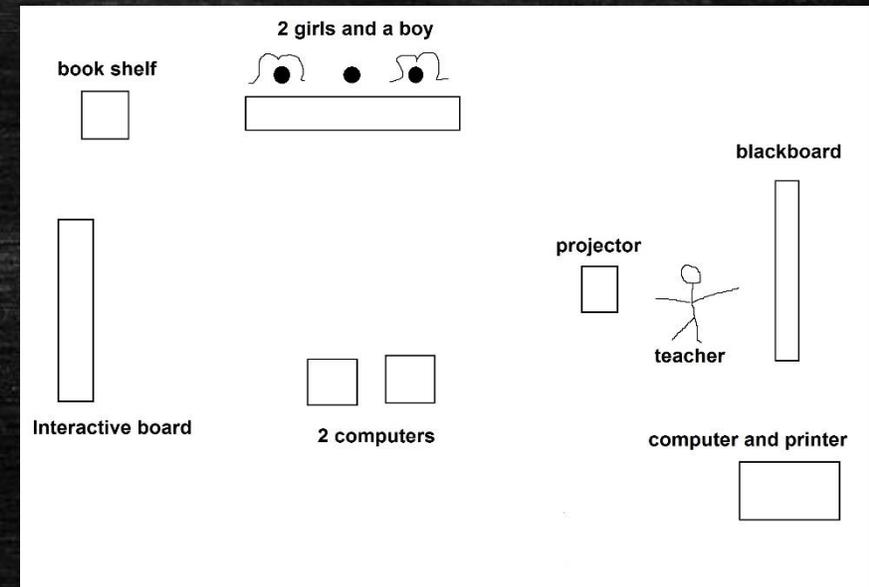
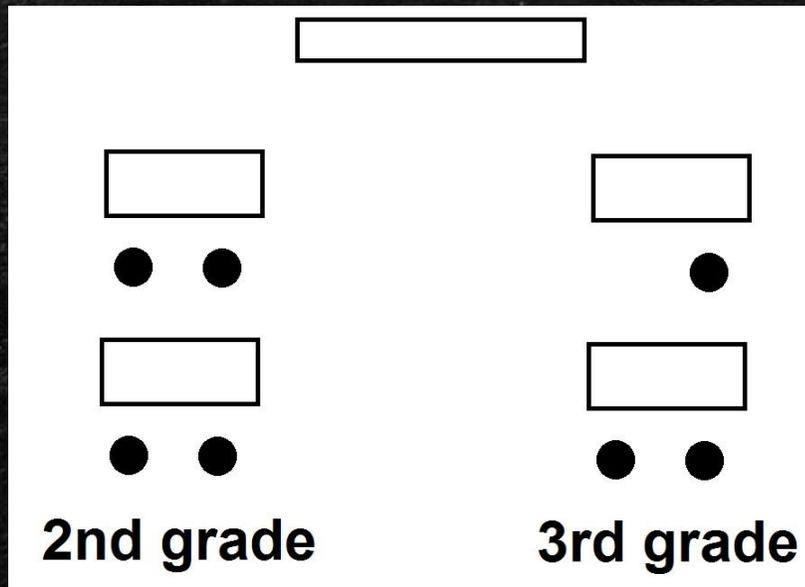
# Findings

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- Some ungraded schools offer pre-schooling when they are not supposed to do that however, and since there is a lack of a pre-schools in the villages, this becomes an alternative to serve the younger students in an ungraded environment.
- There are similarities among ungraded schools like their sizes but many differences among them as well like the resources each one counts on. Both, similarities and differences are found at schools in the same region and under the supervision of the same education department.

# Findings

- Teachers who deal with mixed-age groups are handling up to two grades at a time only.



# Findings

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- The curriculum used for mixed-age groups is designed for the single-age ones. Teachers have to adapt the curriculum to deliver the lessons to ungraded classes.
- Mentoring the novice teachers is a way to compensate for the lack of training at ungraded schools. It is a way the ungraded schools uses to immerse new teachers into what teaching mixed-age groups is by having the experienced teachers share their expertise.

# Findings

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- Teachers tell that little or no changes have happened to the curriculum in relation to ungraded schools in at least the last two decades.
- Unless there is an effort to give the three languages a similar status at schools, it will be very difficult to see teachers and students using them indistinctively.
- Teachers and students at ungraded schools experience, throughout the school years, the learning process under two different and opposite environments, the single-age group environment and the mixed-age group one.

# Findings

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- Some teachers see the teaching of English in ungraded schools as a long-term plan. This finding is derived from the discussion about implementation of trilingual education policy in the country.
- The learning gap between urban and rural school is shown because some students learn using one language (Kazakh or Russian), others do so in two languages (Kazakh and Russian) and only few students get instruction in three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English).

# Findings

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- Students at ungraded schools engage in activities where there is no supervision from the teacher because the teacher has to work with one grade first and teacher before moving into the other grade. (not the whole group at the same time).
- Homework plays an important role in the teaching process at ungraded schools because this compensates for the time teacher cannot dedicate to the students during the class of a mixed-age group.



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Thank you!