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RURAL PRESCHOOL TEACHERS: FACTS, PROBLEMS AND
PERCEPTIONS

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RURAL AND CITY PRESCHOOL
TEACHERS TO IDENTIFY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THESE
GROUPS, AS WELL AS TO IDENTIFY PROBLEMS WHICH
ARE SIMILAR FOR RURAL PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AND
RURAL PRIMARY AND SECONDARY TEACHERS.

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ABSTRACT

The central problem investigated in this field study was whether the working conditions of rural preschool teachers were different from those encountered by urban preschool teachers. And, if so, whether the problems encountered by rural preschool teachers were similar to those experienced by rural primary and secondary teachers.

For the purposes of this study, small rural towns were those towns with populations of less than eight thousand and were geographically remote from large rural and urban centres of populations of more than twenty thousand.

The data were collected by means of a mail questionnaire. The questions were devised around the issues raised in the literature about rural primary and secondary teachers. The material reviewed was converted into question format and placed in the context of preschool education.

Eighteen teachers from rural schools and seventeen teachers from city schools participated in the survey.

The statistical package for the Social Sciences was used to analyse the survey data. In all, nineteen hypotheses were tested. Further data, more directly pertinent to preschool education, were derived from four open ended questions.

The results of the tested hypotheses revealed the following outcomes which were similar to those reported in the research on rural primary and secondary education:

Rural Teachers

were younger and less experienced than city teachers

lacked resources and back up staff

lacked adequate inservice opportunities

were isolated from colleagues and advisers

had some difficulty coping with the values portrayed by some

members of the aboriginal community.

Unlike rural primary and secondary teachers, the rural preschool teachers did not appear to have the same problems of adjusting to the rural community and did not lack parental support.

The open ended questions suggested that rural and city preschool teachers did not differ greatly in their perceptions of school readiness, the role of parents, and the functions of preschool. However, rural preschool teachers did nominate isolation and lack of resources as their greatest problem. Both groups identified the complex and time consuming administrative tasks as a major problem.

Since this is only a pilot study, this particular piece of research should be developed much further. This study has implications for further research in that it has identified a large number of areas to be explored, especially in regard to the working environments of rural preschool teachers, their relationship with their communities and the problems they face.

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