ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Gender Equity in the Rural Secondary Classroom: the Experience of Beginning Teachers

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The secondary classroom is a place where girls and boys have very different experiences (Sadker, 2002; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008). This feminist, phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of beginning teachers in rural secondary schools, specifically regarding gender and gender equity in their classrooms. Ten first-year teachers in schools located in towns with populations smaller than 5,000 people were interviewed about their perceptions about gender equity, their role in maintaining an equitable classroom, and the impact of their preparation and the rural community on their teaching.

Participants indicated the importance of community in their rural schools. In most cases, they found the community to be positive and supportive. When that was not the case, participants reported a more negative experience. Participants noted multiple challenges to teaching in rural schools, especially a high workload, but were overall happy with their positions. All participants expressed a disposition towards valuing and helping all students, regardless of gender or gender identity. Most participants did not exhibit a critical awareness of gender bias. This, combined with their high workload, prevented them from implementing gender equity practices.