

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 228 169

SP 021 860

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 TITLE The St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands, Public School Primary Teacher: A Profile.
 PUB DATE [82]
 NOTE 10p.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Goal Orientation; Mainstreaming; Primary Education; Public Schools; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Background; Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Characteristics; Teacher Education
 IDENTIFIERS *Virgin Islands (Saint Croix)

ABSTRACT

Responses to a questionnaire seeking information on personal characteristics, opinions, and practices were received from 90 primary public school teachers in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. The instrument included questions on age, ethnic background, sex, educational background, and previous teaching experience. Opinions were also sought on professional attitudes. A profile of a St. Croix teacher, drawn from the findings, indicates that the typical St. Croix primary teacher is female, age 34, with a West Indian ethnic heritage. She has not taken courses in multicultural education but fully understands the St. Croix dialect. She has taken courses in language arts, child psychology, and the teaching of mathematics and reading, and she has taken a college course as recently as 1980 or 1981. She is undecided about her ultimate professional goals. The average primary teacher believes pupils should pass a competency test in basics before promotion and favors cross-grade grouping as an instructional approach. She prefers a class size of under 25 children. She is undecided about the value of a primary level bilingual-bicultural education, and is doubtful about having handicapped pupils mainstreamed into her class. (JD)

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The St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands,
Public School Primary Teacher: A Profile

Valerie A. Delemos
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Purpose of the Study

This study was undertaken to profile selected aspects of the characteristics, opinions, and practices of public school primary teachers on the island of St. Croix in the United States Virgin Islands.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to St. Croix public school teachers who were regular classroom teachers of primary grades one through three in February 1982. Excluded from this study were teacher specialists in areas such as art, music, and special education.

Study Instrument

The data used in this study were obtained from a thirty-four item questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed to obtain personal and professional data of St. Croix public school primary teachers as well as their professional opinions regarding certain educational issues.

The sections of the questionnaire used to obtain personal and professional data were adapted from the questionnaire used in the College of the Virgin Islands 1981 thesis study by Ruth S. Emery, "A Profile of the St. Croix Kindergarten Teacher." The section of the questionnaire used to obtain information concerning the professional opinions of St. Croix public school primary teachers was constructed from areas of interest raised through discussions between the researcher and other primary teachers of St. Croix.

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Subjects and Data Collection

The subjects of this study were the primary school teachers employed at the ten St. Croix public elementary schools in February of 1982. With the assistance of the St. Croix Primary Supervisor, 128 primary teachers were identified as the total non-special primary faculty.

Questionnaires were distributed to 120 primary teachers at the ten St. Croix public elementary schools. Eight teachers were absent during the period of distribution.

Ninety of the questionnaires were returned and identified as useable for the study. This was a returned response of 75.0 percent and a total population response of 70.3 percent.

Summary of Findings

Personal Data

Age. Almost three-fourths (67; 74.4%) of the St. Croix public school primary teachers in this study were between the ages of twenty through thirty-nine. The median age of the responding teachers was 34.2 years. No teacher was over fifty-nine years nor under twenty years.

Sex. Eighty-three (92.2%) of the teachers were female; only seven (7.8%) were male.

Place of Birth. Thirty-six (40.0%) of the teachers were born in the U. S. Virgin Islands, thirty-four (37.8%) were born on the U. S. mainland, eleven (12.2%) were born in Puerto Rico, and nine (10.0%) were born on Caribbean islands other than the U. S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Ethnic Heritage. Slightly more than one-half (46; 51.1%) of the teachers were of native West Indian heritage. Nineteen (21.1%) were Continental Caucasians, and eleven (12.2%) were Continental Blacks. Eleven (12.2%) were also of Puerto Rican heritage. Three (3.4%) marked "other" for the question of ethnic heritage. They wrote "Puerto Rican and Danish", "Puerto Rican and West Indian", and "Neorican."

Professional Data

Grade Level Assignment. Thirty-three (36.7%) of the responding teachers were teaching grade one. Twenty-seven (30.0%) were teaching grade two, and thirty (33.3%) were teaching grade three.

Years of Teaching. As to years of teaching experience in the St. Croix public school system, only two (2.2%) teachers had twenty years or more of experience. Nine (10.0%) teachers had fifteen to nineteen years, seventeen (18.9%) had ten to fourteen years, thirty-three (36.7%) had five to nine years, eleven (12.2%) had three or four years, nine (10.0%) had one or two years, and nine (10.0%) had less than one year.

Previous Position. Twenty-nine (33.7%) of the responding teachers had been full-time college students immediately prior to becoming public school teachers on St. Croix. Thirteen (15.1%) had been teachers in a non-public school, twelve (14.0%) had been homemakers, and four (4.7%) had been unemployed. The sixteen (18.6%) "other" answers were as follows: "secretary" (3), "bank clerk" (2), "guidance speech aide" (1), "social worker" (2), "beautician" (2), "sales clerk" (2), "school lunch dietitian" (1), "assistant librarian" (1), "teacher's aide" (1), and "Vista volunteer" (1).

Previous Location. Forty-two (46.6%) of the responding teachers were living in the U. S. Virgin Islands immediately prior to becoming a public school teacher on St. Croix. Forty-one (45.6%) were living on the U. S. mainland and six (6.7%) were living in Puerto Rico. Only one (1.1%) teacher reported living on any Caribbean island other than the U. S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico prior to becoming a public school teacher on St. Croix.

Degree Level. Less than four-fifths (71; 78.8%) of the responding teachers had at least a bachelor's degree. Fourteen (15.5%) had a master's degree. No teacher reported a degree, or diploma beyond the master's degree.

Undergraduate Major. The most common undergraduate major was elementary education, the major of fifty-eight (81.7%) teachers. There were seven (9.8%) majors in early childhood education and two (2.9%) majors in secondary education. The four (5.6%) "other" undergraduate majors were psychology, sociology, health and physical education, and English language arts.

Undergraduate College. Sixty-six of the seventy-one teachers with a bachelor's degree reported from what institution the bachelor's degree had been received. Twenty-eight (42.4%) of these sixty-six teachers had received their bachelor's degree from the College of the Virgin Islands. There were fourteen (21.2%) teachers with bachelor's degrees from seven institutions (two from each institution). These seven institutions were Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Hampton Institute

(Virginia), Hunter College (New York), Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, Kean College of New Jersey, New York University, and the University of Puerto Rico. The remaining twenty-four (36.4%) had received their bachelor's degree from twenty-four different institutions. Seventeen (77.8%) of these twenty-four institutions were in Atlanta Coast states from New Hampshire to North Carolina.

Graduate College. Eleven of the fourteen teachers who held a master's degree specified the name of the institution where they had received the degree. Seven (63.6%) had a master's degree from New York University, two (18.2%) had a master's degree from the College of the Virgin Islands, one (9.1%) had a master's degree from the University of Hartford, and one (9.1%) had a master's degree from Hampton Institute.

Courses Not Taken. Seventy-eight (86.7%) of the responding teachers did not have a course in multicultural education. Fifty-eight (64.5%) did not have a course in the teaching of social studies, fifty-two (57.8%) did not have a course in the teaching of science, fifty-one (56.7%) did not have a course in human relations, twelve (13.4%) did not have a course in the teaching of language arts, seven (7.8%) did not have a course in child psychology or child development, seven (7.8%) did not have a course in the teaching of mathematics, and five (5.6%) did not have a course in the teaching of reading.

Latest Course. More than half (48; 53.3%) of the responding teachers had taken a college course as recently as 1980 or 1981. Twenty-six (28.9%) had taken a college course in 1975-1979; five (5.5%) of the teachers had taken a college course in 1965-1969. Four (4.5%) teachers had not taken a college course since 1964.

Language Competencies. Sixty-five (72.2%) of the respondents reported that they fully understood the St. Croix dialect. Seven (7.8%) reported they fully understood another West Indian dialect. Twenty-seven (30.0%) said that they fully understood Spanish. Five (5.5%) of the teachers marked "other" and specified that they fully understood the following languages: French (three), Dutch (one), and Norwegian (one).

Team Teaching Training. Twenty-one (23.3%) of the ninety teachers were trained in team teaching. Sixty-nine (76.7%) were not trained in team teaching.

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Mainstreaming. Teachers were asked to indicate if they had pupils with handicaps mainstreamed in their class. Of the eighty-eight teachers who answered this question, twenty-one (23.9%) reported that they had a mainstreamed handicapped pupil; sixty-seven (76.1%) reported that they did not have a mainstreamed handicapped pupil in their class.

Three questions were directed to the twenty-one teachers who indicated that they had a mainstreamed handicapped pupil in their class. Teachers were asked to indicate how many handicapped pupils were mainstreamed in their class. Eleven of the twenty-one teachers responded to this question. One teacher (9.1%) reported two handicapped pupils and ten (90.9%) teachers reported they each had one handicapped pupil.

Teachers were also asked if they were previously advised concerning the needs and abilities of the handicapped pupil prior to enrollment in their class. Eighteen of the twenty-one responded to this question. Six (33.3%) reported that they were previously advised and twelve (66.7%) reported that they were not previously advised.

Another question concerning mainstreaming asked teachers to indicate if they had participated or expected to participate with the special education specialists regarding the following: initial parent's conference, mainstreamed pupil's individual program, periodic meetings with parents and special education specialists, and year-end conference with parents and special education specialists. Of the eighteen teachers who answered in reference to the initial parent's conference, eight (44.4%) stated yes and ten (55.6%) stated no. Fifteen teachers responded in reference to the mainstreamed pupil's individual program. Five (33.3%) of the teachers indicated yes and ten (66.7%) indicated no. In reference to periodic meetings with parents and special education specialists, there were seventeen respondents. Eight (47.1%) stated yes and nine (52.9%) stated no. Seventeen teachers also responded with reference to a year-end conference with parents and special education specialists. Seven (41.2%) reported yes and ten (58.8%) reported no.

Professional Opinions

Ultimate Professional Goal. Only twenty-one (23.3%) responding teachers considered primary teaching as their ultimate professional goal. Thirty-four (37.8%) did not consider primary teaching their ultimate professional goal; thirty-five (38.8%) were undecided about primary teaching as their ultimate professional goal.

Remedial Classes. Eighty (88.9%) of the teachers believed that intensive remedial classes should be provided for failing third grade pupils before they were promoted to fourth grade. Three (3.3%) of the teachers did not favor such classes; seven (7.8%) of the teachers were undecided about the matter.

Gifted Services. Eighty-four (93.9%) of the teachers believed that special services should be provided for gifted pupils in the primary grades at their school. Three (3.3%) indicated no and three (3.3%) were undecided.

Team Teaching. Only nine (10.0%) of the ninety teachers were involved in team teaching. Of the eighty-one (90.0%) not involved in team teaching, twenty-six (32.1%) would like to become involved, twenty-five (30.9%) would not like to become involved, and thirty (37.0%) were undecided about becoming involved in team teaching.

Cross-Grade Grouping. Sixty (66.7%) of the teachers would look with favor on a cross-grade grouping instructional approach, eighteen (20.0%) would not, and three (13.3%) were undecided.

Departmentalized Grouping. Thirty-six (41.4%) of the teachers would look with favor on a departmentalized instructional approach for their grade level. Thirty-seven (42.6%) would not, and fourteen (16.0%) were undecided.

Competency Test. The teachers were asked if they believe that pupils in the primary grades should pass a competency test in mathematics, reading, and language arts before they are promoted to the next grade. Seventy-one (78.9%) answered yes, nine (10.0%) answered no, and nine (10.0%) were undecided. One (1.1%) teacher checked "other" and specified that pupils in the primary grades should be required to pass such a test only at the completion of grade three.

Supervisory Help. Sixty-nine (76.6%) of the teachers indicated a need for more supervisory help. Ten (11.1%) said no more help was needed, and nine (10.0%) were undecided. Two (2.3%) of the teachers marked "other." One stated that "help is needed only if it is going to be constructive." The other teacher specified that "occasional consultation with supervision is needed."

Class Size: Teachers were asked what they believed the maximum class size for pupils in the primary grades should be. There were eighty-eight respondents. Forty-two (47.7%)

of the teachers specified that the maximum class size for pupils in the primary grades should be twenty-five pupils, thirty-six (40.9%) indicated twenty pupils, seven (8.0%) indicated fifteen to twenty pupils, and two (2.3%) indicated that the maximum class size for pupils should be thirty pupils. One (1.1%) teacher indicated that the maximum class size should be fifteen to twenty pupils in grade one and thirty pupils in grades two and three.

Teachers were also asked to answer this question relating to class size: "If pupils are grouped homogeneously by achievement, do you believe that the class size of groups of underachievers should be less than maximum class size?" There were ninety respondents. Seventy-two (80.0%) of the teachers said yes, eight (8.9%) said no, and ten (11.1%) were undecided.

Bilingual Education. Three questions relating to primary level bilingual - bicultural education were asked. The first question asked teachers to indicate whether or not a primary level bilingual - bicultural education program existed at their school. There were eighty-five responses to this item. Forty-three (50.6%) of the teachers reported yes and forty-two (49.4%) reported no.

The second question was directed to the forty-three teachers who reported that there was a bilingual-bicultural program at their school. This question asked if they believed that the program was adequately meeting the needs of the pupils enrolled in the program. More than two-thirds (30; 69.8%) reported that they believed the bilingual-bicultural education program at their school was not adequately meeting the needs of the pupils enrolled in the program. Approximately one-fifth (9; 20.9%) of the teachers reported yes and four (9.3%) were undecided.

The third question was directed to the forty-two teachers who had indicated that there was no primary level bilingual-bicultural education program in their school. They were asked if they believed there should be a primary level bilingual-bicultural education program at their school. Seventeen (40.5%) indicated that they believed there should be such a program, twelve (28.6%) indicated no, and thirteen (30.9%) were undecided.

Mainstreaming. Eighty-eight teachers responded to the question: "Do you believe that handicapped pupils should be mainstreamed in your class?" Thirty-three (37.5%) of the responding teachers said yes, thirty-four (38.6%) said no, and

twenty-one (23.9%) reported they were undecided.

Profile from Findings

Personal Data

The typical St. Croix public school primary teacher is about thirty-four, female, was born either in the U. S. Virgin Islands or on the U. S. mainland, and has a West Indian ethnic heritage.

Professional Data

The typical St. Croix public school primary teacher has been in the St. Croix public school system less than nine years. She was either a full-time college student or employed other than as a regular classroom teacher immediately prior to becoming a public school teacher on St. Croix. She was about equally likely to have been living in the U. S. Virgin Islands or on the U. S. mainland immediately prior to becoming a public school teacher on St. Croix. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education, but she does not have a master's degree. Her bachelor's degree is either from the College of the Virgin Islands or from a university in Puerto Rico. She has not taken any courses in multicultural education, the teaching of the social studies, the teaching of science, and human relations, but she has taken courses in the teaching of language arts, child psychology or child development, the teaching of mathematics, and the teaching of reading. She has taken a college course as recently as only a year or two ago. She fully understands the St. Croix dialect. She has no training in team teaching, and she has no mainstreamed handicapped pupils in her class.

Professional Opinions

The typical St. Croix public school teacher either does not consider primary teaching as her ultimate professional goal or is undecided about it. She believes that remedial classes should be provided for failing third grade pupils before they are promoted to the fourth grade, and she believes that special services should be provided for gifted pupils in the primary grades at her school. She is not involved in team teaching, and she either would not like to become involved in team teaching or is undecided about it. She would favor a cross-grade grouping instructional approach. As to a

departmentalized instructional approach for her grade, she either would not favor such or is undecided about it. She believes that pupils in the primary grades should pass a competency test in mathematics, reading, and language arts before they are promoted to the next grade. She feels a need for more supervisory help. She believes that the maximum class size for pupils in the primary grades should be between twenty and twenty-five pupils. She believes that class size of groups of underachievers should be less than the maximum class size if pupils are grouped homogeneously by achievement. If there is a primary level bilingual-bicultural education program at her school, she believes that it is not meeting the needs of the pupils enrolled in the program. If there is not a primary level bilingual-bicultural education program at her school, she either believes that there should be such a program or she is undecided about it. As to handicapped pupils being mainstreamed in her class, she either believes that they should not or she is undecided about it.