



Educational Considerations

Volume 13 | Number 2

Article 2

4-1-1986

Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Spears, Jacqueline D.; Maes, Sue C.; and Bailey, Gwen (1986) "Introduction," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 13: No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1676>

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Introduction

Contrasted with other fields in American education, rural adult education is still an emerging discipline. Tracing its roots back nearly a century to the development of land-grant universities and the introduction of the Cooperative Extension Service, the field of rural adult education has become increasingly diverse. Rural schools, community development corporations, colleges and universities, grassroots organizations, rural libraries – these and many other organizations provide educational service to rural areas. While they differ in mission, in style, and perhaps in approach, they share an immense concern and respect for rural areas.

With the support of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), the Action Agenda Project has spent the past three years exploring this field – asking what, within the discipline of adult education, is special about rural and what, within the discipline of rural education, is special about adults. In many respects we've come away with more questions than we've answered. Examined from the perspective of rural empowerment, education takes on meaning that expands far beyond classrooms and degrees. Distinctions between education and information, secondary and postsecondary, formal and informal, credit and non-credit fade when we confront the issue of how the educational resources of a nation can be extended in support of rural people.

It is in this spirit of concern for the development of human resources in rural areas that the articles in this issue have been collected. Our hope is that they enable you to see rural education from a broader perspective and that you come away with a better understanding of the issues and concerns that face those who wish to serve rural areas. If you would like more information on the project or would like to join us in our efforts, please write.

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