

THE RETENTION OF RURAL SPEECH-LANGUAGE  
PATHOLOGISTS - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

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### ABSTRACT


In recent years, the retention of rural, Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) has been of concern in both the United States and Canada. American studies have indicated that dissatisfaction with work in rural areas (and school based service) has led many SLPs to leave both the profession and the location in which they work (Farmer, 1994; Hall, Larrigan & Madison, 1991; Neeley, Diebold & Dickinson, 1994; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992). Previous research (excluding Neeley et al., 1994) had tended to target issues in the light of prospective employment rather than the retention of present employment. The current study measured the views of SLPs retaining employment in rural, Canadian contexts.


The purposes of this study were to identify the reasons for continued employment for rural Speech-Language Pathologists in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, to conduct preliminary Canadian research and to replicate Neeley et al.'s (1994) study and thus provide the foundation for future research.

The results are comparable to the American data suggesting that employment practices, employment benefits and isolation are mitigating factors in the retention of the rural SLPs; it may be that the moving to collaborative models of practice will both enhance work satisfaction and increase retention.

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might win, By fearing to attempt"**

**(Shakespeare, 1593)**

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

The needs of the communicatively disordered appear to have been underserved in the rural setting (Farmer, 1994; Ferguson, 1991; Neeley, Diebold & Dickinson, 1994; Saskatchewan, 1983; Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988). Lack of funding to provide needed staff and the retention of staff are important factors in maintaining appropriate service (Farmer, 1994; Hall, Larrigan & Madison, 1991; Neeley et al., 1994; Prichard, 1991; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992). Speech-Pathology as a profession is a much needed one with the current trends in special education and its desirability has been recognized by federal immigration priority-selection procedures (Sawyer, McLaughlin & Winglee, 1994; Canadian Citizenship & Immigration, 1993).

A Speech-Language Pathologist holds a degree and/or certification in speech and language pathology. Speech-language pathology is the study of speech, language and voice disorders for diagnosis and treatment purposes (Nicolosi, Harryman & Krescheck, 1980). The most recent name for this profession is a Communication Disorders Specialist [a CDS usually holds a master's degree, a Clinical Fellowship Year (CFY) and a Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC)]. A communication disorder is "any interference with an individual's ability to comprehend and express ideas, experiences, knowledge, and feelings" (Nicolosi et al., 1980, p. 49). Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) work in treatment centres (pre-schoolers and adults), assessment centres (any age requiring a diagnosis and treatment plan), hospitals (any age but often older stroke victims, laryngectomies etc.), schools (K-12, public and private) and private practice (any age). School-based SLPs tend to be itinerant between a number of schools (in Canada it can range from 1 to 50 plus; in the U.S.A. SLPs are limited often 1 or 2). The service delivery model will vary depending on the number of schools and caseload served. Consultation rather than direct therapy becomes the norm when there are large numbers of schools or clients. Ministry guidelines from individual provinces may reflect the ideal role for that province; for example, direct therapy services would be the ideal but perhaps impossible in practice. Ministry guidelines for individual provinces also determine the number of specialists (including SLPs) for a designated school population. In British Columbia

(B.C.), there are 259 SLPs listed in the provincial association directory and in Saskatchewan (Sask.) there are 69 SLPs listed. Names and employers are included in the directory but the settings are not described (i.e. rural or urban).

Rural schools Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) services, in and of themselves, are a relatively new addition to the service delivery model for the communicatively disordered population. The role of the school SLP in rural Saskatchewan, for example, has only existed since the inception of the Shared Services programmes (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988). Prior to 1983, the communicatively disordered were served by single, centrally based SLPs. For example, in Swift Current, Sask. prior to 1983, a single Community Health therapist served the preschool to adult population of approximately 25,000 square kilometre area (9,000 square miles). The awareness of and understanding of the school SLP's role has been and continues to be a concern of rural SLPs (Hall et al., 1991; Magnotta, 1991; Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992). The Shared Services system involved a group of school boards purchasing and sharing specialists' services. The team included a school psychologist, a SLP, and possibly, a student and family counsellor. All specialists were itinerant and expected to provide on-site intervention (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988). Shared services teams still function in Manitoba, consisting of minimum specialist teams, including a school psychologist and a SLP (Rampaul & Freeze, 1990). In 1985, the majority of SLPs (47%) in Western Canada served the education system, while Community Health SLPs made up 17% of total practising SLPs. Other employment sites included Rehabilitation Centres (17%), acute care hospitals (5%), private practice (3%), geriatric (1%) and other settings (14%) (Campbell, 1985). The statistics may have changed somewhat since then; Alberta, for example, has moved to include all SLPs under the Community Health umbrella.

In British Columbia (B.C.) children are served through the education system by itinerant SLPs. Itinerant may mean that the SLP serves two or more schools. SLPs are not part of a Shared Services system, but they are defined as specialists. Specialists form groups that appear to serve the same function as Shared Services, but they have different titles. For example, in Chilliwack, B.C., SLPs are a component of the Human Resources Division (Human Resources Division, 1994) but in Port Alberni they are members of the Special Services Division (Grant, 1991).

Across both Canadian and American contexts Speech Pathology has been changing its approach to assessment from a pathology approach in the 1950's to the event focus approach of the 1980's (Lund & Duchan, 1988). The pathology approach was a medical one, and the event focus approach reflected the importance of context learning and pragmatics. The pathology approach, however, is still reflected in the consultation style of service delivery (Phillips & McCoullough, 1990).

The centrally located SLP and the itinerant SLP are changing styles from medical models of dispensing expert knowledge to context relevant partners in serving the communicatively disordered. The consultant role, for example, was evolving into that of a collaborative partner, but the pull-out techniques model was gradually being replaced with classroom based activities (Achilles, Yates, & Freese, 1991; Coufal, 1993; Ferguson, 1991; Magnotta, 1991; Russell & Kadervak, 1993). The desegregation of SLP services has seemed to parallel the integration movement of special education (Elksnin & Capilouto, 1994; Sawyer et al., 1994). The changing approaches form the context from which the rural SLP issues may be examined.

### **Statement of the problem**

The rural SLP shares with the urban SLP practical issues of school based service that have been the focus of current research such as understaffing, support and advocacy for SLPs. Programmes have been developed that focussed on maximizing the limited number of SLPs available by suggesting strategies for more effective delivery of service within a specific locale served such as the ones by Teas (1991) or Freeze, Bravi & Rampaul (1991). The need for specialized services in rural settings has been stressed by many (Farmer, 1994; Hall et al., 1991; Neeley et al., 1994; Prichard, 1991; Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988). In 1991, Helge pointed out the higher estimated percentages of at-risk students in rural districts as compared to other districts across the United States.

The need for SLP services and their effective deployment form only part of the equation in meeting the needs of the communicatively disordered in the rural settings. In 1992, Schetz & Billingsley looked at SLPs' perceptions of administrative support and non-support (N = 20) in rural (4) and urban Virginia (16). Of particular interest it was noted that, "...research, found that speech-language pathologists are one of the special educator groups at higher risk for leaving school employment." (Schetz

& Billingsley, 1992, p. 156). A supported staff "experience less stress, higher levels of job satisfaction, and commitment, and they are more likely to stay.." (Schetz & Billingsley, 1992, p. 156). Support for adequate working conditions and resources, advocacy for SLPs and speech-language programmes, help with programme activities and staff development facilitation were important types of support identified in the study. It did not target the reasons why rural SLPs retain employment but rather SLPs' perceptions of support/non-support by administration within primarily urban settings.

The retention and recruitment of rural SLPs have been pressing issues for the under-served rural populations (Farmer, 1994; Prichard, 1991), but interestingly, the shortage of rural SLPs in Canada has not been studied extensively. According to Prichard's (1991) study, Special Education Directors in West Virginia tend to recruit directly from university programmes (93%). Incentives offered by Directors to prospective rural SLPs include leave for professional meetings (89%), insurance benefits (87%) and supplies (83%). The continuing education reimbursement (45%) is by far the least of the incentives offered to the rural SLP. Neeley et al. (1994) reported that existing studies have largely addressed recruitment issues and that there is, in fact, a dearth of literature aimed at identifying the reasons why SLPs who have worked in rural schools for extended periods continue to do so.

Rural and urban SLPs in Washington were studied by Hall et al. (1991) using a questionnaire format with a 97% response rate. It was found that most SLPs grew up in urban areas; this may account for some of the retention problem. The Collaborative Career Adjustment Project was proposed to address this problem of retention and recruitment by helping rural teachers retrain as rural SLPs (Farmer, 1994). According to Hall et al.'s (1991) study, rural SLPs served significantly larger numbers of schools and although caseload size was high it was not significantly different. The 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services study supports the Hall et al. (1991) findings with large caseloads served. Therapy time was equal for both groups. Weekly professional contact with other SLPs was significantly higher for urban SLPs than for rural SLPs. Of concern were the data that many rural SLPs surveyed planned a change to an urban location within the next two years; surprisingly, urban SLPs also planned an occupation change within the next two years (Hall et al., 1991)!

The most recent research by Neeley et al. (1994) indicates the top three reasons for continued employment in a rural setting in Arkansas are liking the clientele, liking summers off and being paid fairly. Other highly rated reasons

included autonomy and support. Autonomy and team efforts were listed third and fourth as strengths in the Saskatchewan Shared Services survey in 1988. In the study by Prichard (1991), SLPs were asked to rate, in order of importance, criteria used to select a work locale. The top four in order of importance were the quality of the school system, salary, other SLP contact and continuing education opportunities. The differences in how a rural SLP rates a prospective position as opposed to a present position seems to indicate the need for further research. What are the antecedents to loss and retention in both urban and rural SLPs becomes an important question.

For example, salary and status were issues in the 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services Study. Of the Shared Services SLPs who responded, the majority were "out of scope" which means both that they are not protected by union status and that they had to trust employers to negotiate fair contracts. Contracts are either negotiated with Directors on an individual basis or are simply assumed to be drawn in mutual good faith. Career advancement, better pay, the need for increased professional contact and support were cited as reasons for leaving in the studies of Hall et al. (1991), Farmer (1994), Neeley et al. (1994) and Schetz & Billingsley (1992). But the 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services survey listed isolation as the number one personnel related issue.

More research is needed to determine the rural Canadian SLPs' ongoing issues and how those issues will be impacted by the ongoing development of the field of speech pathology. The chronic shortage of rural SLPs must be addressed to meet its under-served communicatively disordered population (Farmer, 1994; Hall et al., 1991; Neeley et al., 1994).

### **Purposes of the study**

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that impact the retention and employment of rural SLPs in Canada. As an initial step, the provinces of B.C. and Sask. were surveyed; a replication of the Neeley et al. (1994) survey research was conducted. The pilot research may provide the catalyst for further study Canada-wide, and it may, indeed, generate suggestions regarding ways to meet the needs of the field-based professionals.

The purposes of this study are the following:

1. What are the reasons for continued employment for rural Speech-Language Pathologists in British Columbia and Saskatchewan?

2. Can Neeley et al.'s (1994) survey research on identifying the factors impacting the employment and retention of Speech-Language Pathologists be replicated in Canadian rural contexts?
3. Will the results be comparable to the previous studies? To provide the foundation for future research and act as a catalyst for change to support Speech-Language Pathologists and the communicatively disordered population?

\* In British Columbia and Saskatchewan SLPs are employed directly by the school districts and in Alberta, all SLPs are under the Community Health umbrella. As salaries and other factors differ quite widely between the school districts and Community Health, the two similar served provinces of B.C. and Sask. were selected for the initial research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Overview**

A review of the literature will examine the relevant research regarding the retention issues of rural Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs). The following areas will be examined: SLPs' perceptions of administrative support and non-support in primarily urban settings, a comparison of SLPs in rural and urban employment settings, retention and recruitment of rural SLPs and the identification of issues impacting the employment and retention of rural SLPs.

#### **Support and non-support**

Researchers in the field of education have provided many studies regarding the perceptions of administrative support and non-support by regular and special education teachers in literature about teacher stress, attrition, burn-out and leadership effectiveness (Schetz & Billingsley, 1992). Existing research does not seem to address the specialists', specifically SLPs', perceptions of administrative support and non-support. In work reported by Sapriati (1984) it was noted that job satisfaction has been defined as the feelings that workers have about their jobs and that these feelings are associated with a perceived difference between expectation and experience. In 1992, Schetz & Billingsley reported that SLPs are at higher risk for leaving school employment. Identifying SLPs' perceptions of administrative support and non-support becomes a salient focal point for research.

Schetz & Billingsley in 1992, conducted an exploratory study to investigate SLP perceptions. Twenty female SLPs (rural: 4; nonrural: 16), with masters degrees and ASHA certificates of clinical competence were interviewed. Their names were randomly chosen from the Virginia State Speech-Language-Hearing Association directory. The lack of representation of male SLPs in the sample should be noted as it could have an affect on the results. Respondents had on average 10 years experience (7 in present position) in school settings (primarily preschool and elementary school). An average of 1.5 schools were served and the average caseload size was 52 clients. The respondents seem to reflect an urban setting as the years of experience, length of present employment, number of schools served and caseload size concur with Hall et al.'s (1991) earlier findings about rural and urban service. Five telephone

interview questions were asked that covered support, non-support, and frustrations/solutions. A follow-up to the fourth question that dealt with support improvement was given. Three initial questions were given to define support better which included solicitation of personal understanding of administrative support, role playing and examples of support received by administrators. This initial clarification may have inadvertently set a positive tone for the responses. Sapriati (1984) reported the finding that by simply asking people if they will be satisfied with a job predicts subsequent job satisfaction. On the other hand, this preliminary study did not identify the impact of the SLPs' administration on the SLPs' responses. If administrators required copies of transcribed interviews then the responses may not reflect the true picture. Respondents may be theoretically free to address concerns but not in practicality.

Interview responses were typed into the computer directly by one author. Individual interview transcripts were analyzed, and the comments were coded into categories of support and non-support. The transcripts were analyzed for recurring themes and independently checked by an individual not involved in the study for inter-rater agreement (support: 85% agreement; non-support: 79%). The results were charted by theme, frequency and type of support or non-support. The five interview questions were not given but appear to be somewhat like the support clarification questions given initially. Significance testing was not reported.

The most frequently identified area of support and non-support was in the provision of adequate working conditions. Half of the respondents reported help with time related issues and caseload size while half identified it as an area of non-support. Just under half reported administrators providing materials and resources while a fourth reported not receiving this support. Other issues within the category of working conditions were the provision of materials, equitable distribution of funds, and hiring of additional personnel.

The second most frequently identified area of support and non-support was in the advocacy for speech-language programmes and SLPs. A little over a fourth of the respondents reported support from their administrators by demonstrating awareness/knowledge of SLP's programme/job. Half of the SLPs reported a failure by administrators to be aware/knowledgeable/interested in programme/job. Other issues within the category of advocacy were promotion/communication of knowledge of SLP's programmes/role to others, open communication with the SLP, communication

of confidence/respect for the SLP, consideration of SLP/programme as part of total school programme, demonstration of personal interest in students, consideration of therapist's ideas and actions and providing appropriate salary.

The third most frequently identified area of support and non-support was in the facilitation of staff development. A little less than half provided support for in-service workshops for SLPs. Approximately a quarter of respondents reported support by administrators in each of the following areas: in facilitating conference attendance, knowledgeable assistance and evaluation, and facilitation of departmental sharing/collaboration between SLPs. Non-support in this area was minimally reported.

The fourth most frequently identified area of support and non-support was for programme activities assistance. A little less than half reported provision of guidance/assistance with problems and conflicts and approximately a quarter reported non-support in the assistance of student scheduling/student therapy attendance. Other issues within the category of programme activities assistance were the provision of assistance and involvement in IEP/eligibility, and facilitation of collaboration with the classroom.

The dimensions of support identified in this study were similar to those identified by previous researchers studying regular or special education personnel which would appear to affirm, albeit informally, the truth of the results. The basic tenets of effective administration are found in the areas of support identified; advocacy for staff (through knowledge, respect and assistance) and programming (from professional development to IEPs), and practical considerations (such as materials and space). Schetz & Billingsley, in their 1992 exploratory study, appear to have identified the administrative support framework needed to foster the retention of rural and urban SLPs.

### **A comparison of rural and urban employment settings**

The unique features of rural SLP service delivery models are best illustrated when compared to their urban counterparts. While a number of researchers have reported on the development of speech-language programmes and training models for the rural settings; it has not been with an eye to comparison or retention but rather effective programming. The comparison studies of SLPs in rural and urban settings seem to be in short supply (Hall et al., 1991).

In 1991, Hall et al. conducted a comparison study of SLPs in rural and urban school districts in terms of demographics, role emphasis and diversity, continuing education, pre-service training, job satisfaction and perceived differences. The surveys were sent to 154 SLPs working in 137 school districts. Urban and rural designations were identified by contacting Education Service Districts to determine the number of SLPs working within each district and the United States Bureau of the Census. Administrators were contacted by phone and permission was granted for SLPs to participate. Ninety-three (urban: 41; rural: 52) returned the 19-item questionnaire. Chi-square analyses was used to analyze responses and the significance level was set at .05.

Interestingly, the demographic section revealed that the majority of both groups grew up in urban (U: 74%) areas rather than rural (R: 83%). Over 50% of both groups presently live in an urban setting. A significant difference [ $\chi^2 (2) = 20.74, p < .0001$ ] was found in the number of schools each group served (U: 71% ; R: 24% of sample worked in 1-3 schools; while U: 16% ; R: 50% of sample worked in 5 or more schools). This is also illustrated in Schetz & Billingsley's 1992 sample. Caseload size was not found to be statistically significant but 26% of rural respondents reported caseloads over 70 compared to 14% of the urban respondents. There was no difference found in the total hours of therapy delivered but the method of delivery was different. A significant difference [ $\chi^2 (1) = 33.96, p < .05$ ] was found in the years of experience between the two groups (U: 43% ; R: 21% had 11+ years of experience). The comparison of years spent in present positions (U: 59% ; R: 31% had 6+ years of experience) also revealed a significant difference [ $\chi^2 (2) = 9.78, p < .01$ ]. The urban group's years of experience and years spent in present position are comparable to the findings of Schetz & Billingsley's (1992) research. Of those respondents planning to change jobs within the next two years (N = 30); 47% were urban and 53% were rural respondents. Sixty-nine percent of the urban respondents planned to leave the field (be it speech pathology or school-based service, it isn't clear). Seventy-one percent of the rural respondents indicated a change to an urban location. Even though a statistical significance was not reported, these results support the previous findings on the difficulty in retaining SLPs in school-based service (and surprisingly the profession).

A significant difference was found in role diversity between the two groups with respect to hours spent travelling per month [ $\chi^2 (3) = 11.10, p < .01$ ]. Six percent

of the urban group spent 16 or more travel hours per month compared to 31% of the rural group.

Varied results were found in the area of continuing education. No significant difference was found between the urban and rural groups in their attendance at in-services or conventions. However significantly more urban SLPs (U: 43% ; R: 27%) attended workshops [ $\chi^2 (2) = 14.63, p < .001$ ]. A significant difference [ $\chi^2 (1) = 10.52, p < .001$ ] was shown in the number of hours spent in continuing education functions such as workshops, in-services or conventions (U: 35% ; R: 7% of the sample attended 41-60 hours continuing education per year). Schetz & Billingsley's (1992) study also reported administrative support for in-service workshops for primarily urban SLPs.

The results in the area of professional contact and job satisfaction are both curious and noteworthy. A significant difference [ $\chi^2 (1) = 28.65, p < .001$ ] was found in the amount the two groups were able to contact other colleagues per week (U: 84% ; R: 27% talked to another SLP once per week or more). The rural group's contact with colleagues was better represented by monthly opportunities. The lack of contact, however, was not cited as the most important reason for changing jobs. The 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services survey identified isolation as the number one issue and the need for collegial contact was also noted by Schetz & Billingsley (1992). Perhaps the urban and rural groups, from the Hall et al. (1991) study, find opportunities for collegial contact through adequate professional development activities. The Hall et al. (1991) finding is quite different from the other findings on job satisfaction as well. Although no statistical significance was noted, Hall et al. (1991) reports that the majority of both groups were satisfied/extremely satisfied with their jobs. This finding would seem to highlight the uniqueness of Washington state or reflect the differences in research methods. The findings of both Schetz & Billingsley's (1992) research and the literature upon which it was based were quite different. SLPs are leaving urban and rural, school-based service and Hall et al.'s (1991) study also points this out in the review of research and questionnaire responses. The responses may reflect the nature of the questionnaire with 18 forced-choice response questions and one open-ended question. The pre-involvement of the administrative personnel (special education director or SLP coordinator) through telephone contact for permission and the distribution of questionnaires may have set the tone for the responses. Job satisfaction may mean satisfaction with occupation

choice and has been defined in a number of ways (Harijati, 1986; Sapriati, 1984). It is not clear what is meant by job satisfaction in this present study.

Both rural and urban respondents were asked to identify the ways in which the practice of speech-language pathology in rural settings differed from urban ones. The perception of caseload size was the most accurately identified in terms of data support, 11% felt that rural SLPs have larger/smaller caseloads but the majority did not register a difference. Only small percentages (approximately half and less) registered perceptions similar to the data regarding increased travel hours and schools served and decreased opportunities for peer contact. This would suggest that even within the profession, the issues of rural SLPs are not recognized.

Hall et al.'s 1991 study of rural and urban SLPs in Washington contrasted some key features of rural and urban employment. The results complement the findings of Schetz & Billingsley (1992) while adding new twists in the tale of rural SLP retention issues. The number of schools served, years of experience, opportunities for continuing education and collegial contact are recurring themes of support and satisfaction.

### **Retention and recruitment of rural SLPs**

The Hall et al. (1991) study identified an important feature of rural SLPs that could well effect their recruitment and retention in rural settings. The majority of rural and urban SLPs grew up in urban settings and over 50% of both groups still lived in urban areas. This finding has been supported by Farmer's 1994 study in New Mexico which looks at the retraining of rural teachers and special educators as SLPs in an effort to retain staff in the rural settings. The recruitment of indigenous rural students who want to work in rural settings also formed part of a project by the United States Department of Education and West Virginia Department of Education (Prichard, 1991).

Rural upbringing is one piece of the retention puzzle. Perceptions of administration and their advocacy for SLPs and their programming is another. The perceptions of administrators may be mirrored in the incentives offered to SLPs in the recruitment process.

Prichard in 1991, conducted a two-part study in West Virginia to identify the recruitment and retention strategies in place. A 13-item survey instrument was sent to all 55 Special Education Directors (SED). A 36-item instrument was sent to 356 SLPs

in West Virginia public schools. Fifty-three SEDs responded and the top three recruitment strategies were: recruitment from university training programmes, advertising in newspapers and advertising in ASHA (national association for SLPs in the United States) journal. The members of recruitment teams seemed to differ depending upon the county and sometimes would not include SEDs (30.2%). Prichard (1991) notes that in many cases recruitment from universities meant sending a position vacancy to a training programme with little or no follow-up. The onus would seem to be on the rural systems to pursue newly trained staff.

Recruitment incentives listed by SEDs were seemingly standard benefit package items. The top three incentives listed were: leave for professional meetings, medical insurance benefits and funds to purchase materials. One quarter of the respondents in Schetz & Billingsley's 1992 study reported the lack of material provision. Continuing education reimbursement was listed fifth with less than half reporting it as an incentive. This finding alone is enlightening considering the repeated identification of this need by SLPs (Neeley et al., 1994). Two SED respondents reported using incentive strategies not listed such as providing contract work.

The second survey instrument sent to the SLPs, targeted professional responsibilities, selection criteria for locale, retention and recruitment strategies. The return rate was 67% (241/356) and the analysis was calculated using percentages. Demographic variables revealed that 68.5% held masters degrees (and of those: 48% had certificates of clinical competence) and 54% were between 31 and 40 years of age. The majority of respondents had worked as SLPs for 6-15 years. Funnily enough this finding regarding years of experience for rural SLPs ties in with the urban findings of Schetz & Billingsley (1992) and the urban findings of Hall et al. (1991) rather than the rural ones. Thirty-three percent of respondents stated that they did not consider their county to be rural even though it was so classified by the United States Census.

SLPs were given four specific choices and one open-ended choice in identifying the reasons for working in West Virginia public schools. Of the choices given, spousal employment was the highest rated. A return to work in one's hometown/state and other rounded out the top three reasons. The most common other responses dealt with features of school employment such as summer vacations.

Spousal employment was not a notable consideration in retaining employment in the Neeley et al. (1994) study.

In prioritizing local and job selection variables, SLPs were given 14 and 17 items, respectively, to rate on a five-point scale. A score of 5 would indicate its importance and a score of 0 would indicate its lack of importance. Variables with ratings greater than 4.0 were compared with the percentages of SEDs reporting incentive use of that variable. The top three variables used to select a locale and job were medical insurance, quality of school system and salary. The percentages of SEDs reporting incentive use in these areas were 87% for medical insurance, 2% for quality of school system and 19% for salary. The comparison becomes even more striking in the area of cooperation among professionals (ranked 5th by SLP; 0% incentive use reported from SEDs!), opportunity to interact with SLP (ranked 13th; 0% incentive from SEDs) and continuing education opportunities available (ranked 15th; 0% incentive from SEDs). The areas of administrative support identified by Schetz & Billingsley (1992) are never more clearly illustrated. Significance testing was not performed but the results are quite interesting. Perhaps future research could involve comparing rural and urban administrative support for SLPs. The low percentages in support areas reported by SEDs in Prichard's (1991) study would seem to be important variables that factor into the retention equation in West Virginia.

It would appear that SLPs received these questionnaires directly and returned them directly without the involvement of administrative staff which may, on the surface, enhance the validity of the results.

SLPs were asked to suggest recruitment techniques and the top three suggestions were monetary incentives, release time and reimbursement for professional meetings and recruitment on-campus. In Neeley et al.'s 1994 study, issues of professional practice rather than professional benefit topped the list for reasons for continued employment.

In Prichard's study (1991), the perceptions of SLPs in suggesting strategies for retention were in the provision of monetary incentives, the provision of a better work environment and the provision of in-services. These top three suggestions are consistent with previous research findings regarding administrative support and non-support and urban-rural differences.

The strategies for recruitment and retention for rural SEDs and those of rural SLPs seem worlds apart in terms of priorities. SEDs have much to learn about their

staff if retention is a goal and SLPs are valued. It would appear that if SEDs send vacancy notices to training programmes with no follow-up that SLP services are not valued. Education about the field, awareness activities and public relations exercises may ameliorate some of the reasons that underlie the SEDs apparent lack of support. The studies, thus far, have seemed to limit the meaning of the term context to rural or urban settings. Perhaps other factors such as penury and accessibility (fly-in, boat-in, road conditions that are weather dependent etc.) have as much to do with the lack of follow-up as the interest in the field of speech pathology.

The number of schools was not reported in Prichard's (1991) study either in the survey questions or in the open-ended responses. The years of experience of rural SLPs in West Virginia may be significantly less than urban West Virginia and so reflect the same relative proportions reported by previous researchers. The years of experience in rural settings cited in this study's findings could also reflect a satisfied community of rural SLPs. Opportunities for continuing education and collegial contact were of lower priority for rural SLPs in West Virginia than in other research. Regardless of the type, the need for support continues to be identified as an integral part of the retention issues of rural SLPs. Prichard's (1991) questionnaire research seems to address SLPs' perceptions of their jobs in the abstract rather than the concrete. What keeps rural SLPs in their positions is not always clear.

### **Identification of issues impacting the employment and retention of rural SLP**

Rural public school administrators have difficulty recruiting and retaining SLPs due to a variety of reasons within (working conditions, advocacy etc.) and outside (spousal employment, upbringing etc.) their control (Hall et al., 1991; Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988; Saskatchewan, 1983). In an effort to address the shortage of rural SLPs, retraining of indigenous rural special educators in collaborative efforts with university programmes have taken place (Farmer, 1994; Prichard, 1991). Despite the shortage of rural SLPs there have been few studies to address this problem. The studies that have been done focussed on identifying support, on selecting locale and job criteria, suggested retention techniques and comparisons of rural and urban settings. Recruitment has been the focus rather than identifying the reasons why SLPs continue to work for extended periods of time in rural settings.

Neeley et al. in 1994, conducted survey questionnaire research to address this gap in the existing research of the retention issues of rural SLPs. The final draft of the questionnaire was mailed to 254 SLPs practising in rural systems in Arkansas. The United States Bureau of the Census provided the definition of rural as those school districts with an enrollment of less than 2,500 students. Ninety-three respondents (55%) who were employed in the same rural system for four or more years were selected from the 169 total respondents. The 32-item questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section detailed biographic, demographic and basic employment data. The second section detailed reasons for continued employment with a final item inviting free comment. Data were analyzed using percentages.

The average age of the subjects was 38.32 and were predominantly female (96.3%). The presence of male subjects was a refreshing change in the data from previous studies. Approximately 40% were natives of the district or county (which is higher than the Hall et al. 1991 results) and the majority were married. This feature of the questionnaire went one step further than Hall et al. (1991) by specifying the present employment setting as the indigenous one. The majority reported extended family members living within one to three hours driving time of their employment situation. Earlier research had only identified spousal employment but not the presence of extended family.

The reports on professional qualifications were similar to previous findings with the majority receiving masters degrees and half receiving ASHA certification. Respondents were also asked if they were licensed to practice by the state and most respondents indicated that they were licensed.

The basic employment data were coloured by the language choices made as some of the terms could be interpreted in different ways. For example, respondents were asked if they received extra compensation or a salary supplement above their regular salary. Extra compensation could mean mileage or consultant's fees and either may or may not be included in the regular salary. Arkansas state may also have standardized terminology for all school districts' salary and compensation packages. Approximately 50% were employed on a full-time basis with a mean nine-month salary of \$25,000 (U.S. funds). The impact of contracted SLPs and year round schools are not represented by the data. About 11% of the respondents reported receiving extra compensation but this value could be higher if the term was clarified. A little over a quarter of the respondents reported supplemental income through additional

employment. The average duration of school district employment was approximately 10 years which supports the Prichard (1991) data. Interestingly the majority of respondents reported that they were, in general, satisfied with their employment and anticipated long-term employment there. While this finding does support Prichard (1991) and Hall et al.'s (1991) studies; neither study explains what is meant by job satisfaction.

The results of the second section which identifies the reasons for continued employment reveal the top rated issue to that of employment practice and not employment benefit as in the Prichard (1991) study. The respondents were asked to rate 16 reasons for continued employment. The 16th-item was a free choice item. A final area for comments was given. Neeley et al. 1994 did not report any responses to either the free choice item or comments section. Participants were asked to rate the reasons using a 4-point scale arranged sequentially from *Very Important* to *Not a Factor*.

The respondents reported that liking the type of clients was very important (95.7%). Satisfaction with clientele may be what Prichard (1991) and Hall et al. (1991) respondents were referring to in the job satisfaction questions. Liking the clientele is also somewhat ambiguous in meaning as it could mean type or range of disorders, age range (elementary etc.), cultural background (mid-south, Hutterian, German etc.) or refer to socio-economic status (affluent, indigent etc.).

The second and third highest rated reasons were having summers off (90.3%) and being paid fairly (86.1%). Issues of professional benefit figured prominently in the Prichard (1991) study on recruitment and retention issues. Summer vacations were not a highly listed issue in Prichard's (1991) study. Salary on the other hand, received the same ranking (third) in the Neeley et al. study (1994) as the Prichard (1991) study. In both states, SLPs received more money outside the school system (e.g. health care settings) than in it, which may provide the reason for retention and recruitment problems within those areas. The reverse is true in Western Canada, where the school based SLPs earn more than their Community Health counterparts. It was interesting to note that regardless of the phrasing of the responses (one asked for comparison: being paid fairly; one did not: salary) the issue of salary received the same ranking in both studies. Salary was rated second in terms of priorities (personnel related issues) in the 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services survey. Curiously, the issue of professional benefits did not receive as high a priority rating for Neeley et al.'s

(1994) respondents as salary which may mean that there are standards for basic benefit packages in Arkansas or be indicative of other factors at work.

Autonomy in caseload selection (80.6%), collegial relationship (78%), school reputation (77.9%) and support for professional development (76.3%) rounded out the reasons for continued employment with rankings of 75% or higher. Autonomy in caseload selection rather than caseload as a single term provided a different angle on support in the provision of adequate working conditions. The narrower focussed question elicits perhaps a more finely honed response as caseload size was not a significant factor in the Hall et al. (1991) study, or highly ranked by the Prichard (1991) study or of definitive consequence in the Schetz & Billingsley (1992) research.

The needs for collegial support and professional development by rural SLPs continue to be voiced amongst the various studies. The quality of the school system emerged in the Prichard (1991) study as the second ranked retention and recruitment issue and is now reasserted in the Neeley et al. (1994) study (ranked sixth).

While spousal employment was an important issue in the Prichard (1991) study, it wasn't mentioned in the Schetz & Billingsley (1992) or Hall et al. (1991) studies as a priority. Results from the Neeley et al. (1994) study regarding spousal employment opportunities (61.3%), children enrolled in the school system (45.2%) and being employed here is a family tradition (1.1%) would seem to indicate that family related reasons are not high priority reasons for extending employment in rural settings. However the results on the initial section of the survey would seem to favour the presence of family and indicate its importance. The findings in the first section of the study indicated that 86% of the respondents had extended family within three hours driving distance of employment and 65.6% reported family within one hour driving distance. The seeming incompatibility of these responses on the different sections (demographic: reasons for continued employment) of the survey would seem to illustrate the importance of the language selected for these survey questionnaires. From this one example of inconsistency, one may ask if the differences are a result of answering the demographic question in terms of current employment and the reasons for continued employment were identified in terms of a potential position.

The 19th question regarding opportunities for advancement suggests a different delivery model for school-based service in Arkansas than other areas.

Service is usually itinerant and the SLPs, regardless of number, represent their department (the workers and the department heads are sometimes the same person) and so there is little room for advancement. The term advancement may mean increments in pay for years of experience but it is unclear if this was the intended meaning.

The factors impacting the employment and retention of rural SLPs identified in this study underline the importance of a supported work force. The respondents in this research were chosen specifically for their length of employment which sets them apart from the previous studies in this regard. Once again, however, the needs for collegial support and continuing education opportunities are strongly made. Job satisfaction continues to surface in the areas of working conditions, advocacy for SLPs and their programmes, assistance with programme activities and facilitation of staff development. What is clear is that rural SLPs enjoy the field of speech-language pathology and it does not appear to be the profession that drives SLPs from their rural employment settings.

### **Summary**

The review began with research aimed at identifying general issues of support for SLPs by their administration. Such preliminary research on SLPs' perceptions of administrative support and non-support is well overdue. Studies on the perceptions of regular and special education teachers are building blocks in the education literature regarding leadership effectiveness, teacher stress, attrition and burn-out. SLPs could be leaving their rural and urban school settings from burn-out and stress caused from inadequate working conditions or advocacy for their roles. Facilitation of staff development and assistance with programming are buoys for the SLPs' drive to remain in school settings. The commitment by administrators to the SLPs would be best demonstrated through knowledge, respect and valuing of the profession.

Difficulty with the retention of school based SLPs becomes even more salient in rural settings. The communicatively disordered are under-served and have been the focus of various studies to maximize existing staff. The rural setting offers some unique challenges that involve geography, funding and isolation from colleagues. A comparison of rural and urban SLPs revealed a significant difference in the number of schools served, years of experience, years in present position, hours spent travelling, hours spent in continuing education activities and the amount of professional contact.

Two surprising, though not statistically significant, findings were in job satisfaction and planned job changes. Both groups reported being satisfied/extremely satisfied with their jobs even with the reported difference in other areas. Respondents from both groups planned a change (rural to urban; urban to different clinical settings or to different professions). Rural and urban SLPs face somewhat different challenges in their service delivery models.

The issues of retention and recruitment were identified by Special Education Directors (SEDs) and rural SLPs with a view to prospective employment. The recruitment incentives of administrators were quite different from those of SLPs in terms of locale and job criteria. SEDs reported no incentive use in the area of continuing education opportunities compared to high priority ratings identified by SLPs. The SEDs reported no incentive use in two other areas of importance to SLPs (cooperation among professionals and opportunities to interact with other SLPs). The gap between what is offered by administrators and what SLPs have identified as preferable is quite wide. Despite the findings from this particular study, the sample group of rural SLPs had more than six years experience which could indicate satisfaction with the position or other variables entirely.

The steps towards identifying the retention issues of rural SLPs began with the general support needs of SLPs, a comparison of rural and urban SLPs and then the rating of recruitment and retention issues of prospective positions. The next step was to examine the research regarding rural SLPs' identification of reasons for continued employment in current employment settings. The top seven ranked reasons identified were related to employment practice (such as satisfaction with clientele or collegial contact) and employment benefit (such as salary and professional development). Liking the clientele, having summers off and being paid fairly were the three most important reasons for continued employment. The need for collegial contact and professional development are themes that surfaced in this research and resonate throughout the research literature on retention and recruitment of rural SLPs.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH OVERVIEW**

#### **Overview**

The overview of the study, definitions used in this study, and research questions will be presented in this next section.

#### **Rationale for the study**

In recent years, the retention of rural Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) has been of concern in both United States and Canada. The communication disorders have under-served and SLP services understaffed (Farmer, 1994; Prichard, 1991; Neeley et al., 1994; Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988; Saskatchewan, 1983; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992). American studies have indicated that dissatisfaction with work in rural areas has led many SLPs to leave both the profession and the location in which they work. While research into the identification of SLPs' issues has been sparse (Schetz & Billingsley, 1992; Neeley et al., 1994), there has also been a paucity of research done in terms of reasons SLPs extend their employment in rural settings (Neeley et al., 1994).

The current study measured the views of the SLPs working in rural, Canadian contexts. SLPs in rural British Columbia and Saskatchewan were surveyed for their reasons for continued employment. Some of the retention issues identified, either by this study or previous ones, may be addressed as the field of speech pathology changes from pull-out, medical models of practice to collaborative, classroom-based models.

#### **Research questions**

- 1) What are the reasons for continued employment for rural Speech-Language Pathologists in British Columbia and Saskatchewan?
- 2) Can Neeley et al.'s (1994) survey research on identifying the factors impacting the employment and retention of Speech-Language Pathologists be replicated in Canadian rural contexts?
- 3) Will the results be comparable to the previous studies? To provide the foundation for future research and act as a catalyst for change to support Speech-Language Pathologists and the communicatively disordered

population?

**Definition of terms**

**Rural.** Rural was defined lexically as the countryside; rural SLPs, therefore, worked predominantly in the countryside, away from the major populated centres.

**School District.** School district refers to an area served by a single school board or multiple school boards sharing services.

**ASHA/CSLPA.** ASHA/CSLPA refers to the American and Canadian national organisation of speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

## CHAPTER IV METHOD

### Overview

The sample, instrument, the data collection, assumptions, limitations and data analysis will be discussed in this section.

The research was conducted during the months of June and July, 1995. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches were employed. Questionnaires were sent out directly to the Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) working within the school districts identified as rural.

### Sample

The sample consisted of 128 SLPs working in rural British Columbia (B.C.) and Saskatchewan (Sask.) of the 328 SLPs registered/licensed to work in these two provinces. The 128 SLPs sent surveys represent 39% of all registered/licensed SLPs in B.C. and Sask. (in B.C. 35% or 91/259 were sent surveys; in Sask. 53% or 37/69 were sent surveys). The 128 SLPs were selected because they lived in rural areas. Rural was defined lexically as the countryside; rural SLPs, therefore, worked predominantly in the countryside, away from the major populated centres. The 87 SLPs that returned the surveys represented 67% of the 128 SLPs living in rural areas as defined by this study (the survey response in B.C. was 58% or 53/91; the survey response in Sask. was 92% or 34/37).

In the original research, surveys were deleted if they did not meet the following two criteria: 1) rural employment setting and 2) length of employment of at least four years duration. The replication study retained the rural criteria in the survey respondent selection process. It did not however retain the four plus year length of employment feature as a criteria for selection due to the small number of total SLPs in rural B.C. and Sask. The original length of employment criteria was highlighted using a "check-box" at the top of the survey questionnaire.

Surveys that were not included in the sample were as follows: 1) Six surveys were not included as their province of origin could not be determined (no post-mark or province indication on survey question); 2) One survey response was eliminated for statistical purposes as it was blank except for a single comment; 3) One survey was not included because it was received after the analysis had been completed.

Surveys were sent directly to SLPs through their school district offices. School district refers to an area served by a single school board or multiple school boards sharing service. SLPs were sent covering letters with the surveys. Each respondent received a cover letter explaining the nature of the study and a stamped, return envelope was provided.

### **Instrument**

The reasons for continued employment for rural SLPs in B.C. and Sask. were identified through the distribution of survey questionnaires. The 32-item questionnaire from the Neeley et al. (1994) study was used with three modifications. A box was added for SLPs to identify their length of employment. The provinces of BC/Sask. were substituted for the State of Arkansas in item six regarding licensing. The words "county" or "trade district" were deleted from item 12 as these designations are not appropriate for B.C. and Sask. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (see Appendix A). The first section identified the subjects (biographic, employment and demographic data). The second section focussed on the reasons for the subjects' continued rural employment; one item was blank to allow the subjects both to identify and to rate a reason that was not included on the questionnaire. A comment section was also provided. Respondents were instructed to rate their attitudes towards or reasons for work on a 4-point scale sequentially from 4 (Very Important) to 1 (Not a Factor).

One assumption underlying this questionnaire is that the respondents are rating present employment and not prospective positions. Another basic questionnaire assumption is that the reasons for continued employment lend themselves to a rating scale. Some of the items are more suited to yes-no responses than rating items. I am being paid fairly could elicit a yes or no response so perhaps if the word salary was substituted it would elicit the desired rating response. These assumptions are inherent in the Neeley et al. (1994) survey questionnaire. An assumption made in this present study was that the modified version of Neeley et al.'s (1994) questionnaire would address most of the language differences between the differing American and Canadian contexts. Item six of the questionnaire referred to licensing which is a term used in Arkansas and Sask. but not in B.C. apparently. SLPs are registered in B.C. and so the difference in terminology alone would cause B.C. SLPs to answer no to the licensing question when indeed they were "licensed".

### **Limitations of the Survey Questionnaire and Study**

The limitations in the questionnaire were, in part, due to the assumptions made about standardized inter-provincial terminology (license-register). Another unforeseen limitation was created by adding options to items two and six of the questionnaire. In item two, CSLPA (the Canadian national association of SLPs) was added to the existing American (ASHA) association. Respondents were unclear as to whether to identify dual American and Canadian association certification or just Canadian certification status. In item six, two provinces were substituted for the single state of the American questionnaire. Respondents were unclear as to whether to identify their home province in addition to the "licensing" question or to respond to the "licensing" question alone.

A limitation of the questionnaire research was identified by a respondent on the survey itself. The B.C. respondent stated that the covering letter was too specific as it gave a date by which to return it. The respondent interpreted the date on the covering letter to mean a single, mailing date. No other respondent noted this detail regarding the cover letter. A final limitation of the study was reported by an administrator (by phone) and noted that the cover letter lacked specificity. No other administrator indicated a lack of specificity in the cover letter.

### **Data collection**

After obtaining permission to conduct the study by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Victoria, SLPs were sent survey questionnaires through their school district offices. Attached to each questionnaire was a cover letter which explained the nature of the questionnaire, gave directions and an estimated time for completion. Each questionnaire would take less than 10 minutes to complete. Anonymity, voluntary participation and confidentiality were assured. SLPs were notified that their Superintendents/Directors would be informed by letter of the survey research. Superintendents/Directors were sent similar cover letters and given blank copies of the surveys. The questionnaires were sent out towards the end of the school year as this is usually office time for school-based SLPs. The last survey included in the questionnaire research was received in late June 1995.

### **Data analysis**

A total of seven surveys were deleted before data analysis was completed. Six surveys were not included because their provinces of origin could not be determined (no post-marks or province indications on the survey). A single survey was deleted for statistical purposes because it was blank except for a single comment. Data were then analyzed using the remainder of the survey questionnaires.

Data were analyzed using the computer programme SPSS for Windows 6.1 (1994). Homogeneity of variance was established between the two provincial groups. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and independent sample t-tests were administered for the following biographic and demographic variables: age, length of employment, pay period and salary. All other data were analyzed by calculating percentages. Independent sample t-test findings were not reported in the original study. Comments were grouped by theme and are not reported specifically. Comments are not reported in the original study.

An additional survey from Sask. was received after data analysis was completed and was not included.

### **Summary**

The sample was collected from two provinces. Some of the variation in results may have been due to the terminology used in the survey questionnaire (such as license versus register). The sample had a response rate of 68% overall, a 58% response rate for B.C. and a 92% response rate for Sask. Questionnaires were returned with no identification except by choice. The survey research piqued the interest of some rural SLPs to not only identify themselves, but to request copies of Neeley et al.'s (1994) article and copies of the results. One SLP used the results as a bargaining chip with her administrators. Reference sources were provided but violation of copyright prevented the dispersal of copies of Neeley et al.'s work (1994). Data collection and data analysis replicated the original work but also incorporated guidelines from the University of Victoria and reference material (Borg & Hall, 1989; Howell, 1995).

## CHAPTER V RESULTS

### Overview

The biographic, demographic and employment data will be presented in this results section. The reasons for continued employment in rural B.C. and Sask. will also be identified. The comments were grouped by theme. The biographic and demographic variables of age, length of employment, pay period and salary are presented using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and t-tests for independent samples. All other biographic, demographic and reasons for continued employment variables are presented in terms of percentages. Homogeneity of variance was established between the two provincial groups of rural Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs). The statistics excluding the t-tests were all presented in the same manner as in Neeley et al.'s (1994) study. The level of significance was set by convention at  $p < .05$ .

### Results

The descriptive statistics for the biographic and demographic variables of age, length of employment, pay period and salary are shown in Tables 1 (B.C.) and 2 (Sask.). The independent sample t-tests for the same set of variables follow on Table 3.

Table 1

#### Biographic and Demographic Information of B.C. Respondents

<u>Variable</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Age	52	36.29	8.52
Length of Employment	53	6.06	4.49
Pay Period	48	10.62	.91
Salary	47	\$49,382	\$10,891

Table 2

Biographic and Demographic Information of Sask. Respondents

Variable	n	Mean	SD
Age	34	35.09	8.35
Length of Employment	34	6.76	4.34
Pay Period	34	10.56	.96
Salary	31	\$39,940	\$10,364

Table 3

t-Tests among Variables in B.C. and Sask.

Variable	N	t	df	p (2 tailed)
Age	86	.64	84	.522
Length of Employment	87	-.71	85	.478
Pay Period	82	.32	80	.752
Salary	78	3.82	76	<.001

There appears to be only one variable with a statistically significant difference between the two provinces. Salary was significantly higher in the group of rural B.C. SLPs than that of the Sask. group of rural SLPs ( $t = 3.82$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In B.C., 41 respondents (77.2%) were employed on a full-time basis with a mean 10.62-month salary of \$49,382 ( $SD = \$10,891$ ). In Sask., 23 respondents (67.6%) were employed on a full-time basis with a mean 10.55-month salary of \$39,940 ( $SD = \$10,364$ ). To what extent this merely reflects the cost of living in both provinces is not established. The ages, length of employment and pay periods of the two groups were quite similar. Additional biographic and demographic information for the two provinces follows on Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4  
Biographic and Demographic Information (B.C. continued)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Sex: Female	84	96.5%
Male	3	3%
Marital Status: Married	34	65.4%
Single	15	28.8%
Divorced	3	5.8%
Natives of the District	4	7.5%
Family within : 1 hour	16	32.7%
>5 hours	21	67.7%

Table 5  
Biographic and Demographic Information (Sask. continued)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Sex: Female	29	85%
Male	5	14.7%
Marital Status: Married	20	58.8%
Single	14	41.2%
Natives of the District	5	14.9%
Family within: 1 hour	10	29.4%
>5 hours	10	29.4%

Of the additional items tabled, the following three items seem to be noteworthy when examining the issue of retention in rural Sask.: 1) that a higher proportion of SLPs are single in Sask. (41.2% compared to B.C.'s 28.8%); 2) that the majority of SLPs are female (85% in Sask.; 96.5% in B.C.) and 3) that approximately a third of Sask. SLPs have no family within a five hour driving distance. When these three factors are coupled with the comments made by Sask. SLPs and their survey responses, it would seem to paint a picture of personal and professional isolation. On

the other hand perhaps Sask. SLPs view the distance from extended family in a different manner and do not find this factor isolating. A larger proportion (67.7%) of B.C. respondents have extended families further than five hours driving distance and isolation was not reported by these respondents. Whether the greater number of spouses in B.C. was the balancing factor in the SLPs' support systems is not known. More Sask. SLPs (14.9% compared to B.C. 7.5%) reported being natives of the district in which they are employed. This finding is interesting, as it would seem to offer a network of home support for some of the Sask. SLPs, even though it is limited in impact.

The academic and training background among the SLPs from rural B.C. and Sask. were quite similar. The highest level of professional qualifications achieved in B.C. were 43 (77.4%) masters level and 12 bachelors level degree (22.6%). Twenty-two (64.7%) subjects received master degrees in Sask. and twelve (35.3%) held bachelors degrees. A total of 43 (81.1%) respondents in B.C. were certified by ASHA/CSLPA. In Sask. 24 (70.6%) were certified by ASHA/CSLPA. Thirty-eight (71.7%) were licensed to practice in BC. while all 34 (100%) were licensed to practice speech-language pathology in Sask.

In B.C., while salary was significantly higher, only 5 (10.2%) respondents in BC. reported receiving extra compensation or a salary supplement above the "normal" salary schedule. In Sask., however, 17 (50%) respondents reported receiving extra compensation. In B.C., only 6 (12%) confirmed supplemental employment ("moonlighting") as an SLP, whereas in Sask. 7 (20.6%) reported additional part-time SLP employment and 3 (13%) reported other employment. Three (7.7%) B.C. respondents reported other "moonlighting" employment. Forty-eight (94.1%) of B.C.'s respondents were, generally speaking, satisfied with their present employment situations. In Sask. 23 (69.7%) of the respondents were satisfied with their present employment situations. In B.C., 45 (86.5%) anticipated long-term employment in their present employment settings and in Sask., 25 (75.8%) anticipated long-term employment in their present settings.

The 16 reasons for continued employment by rural SLPs in British Columbia are listed in Table 6. The reasons have been organised by ranked percentage of importance and do not appear in the same question order as the original questionnaire (see Appendix A). Questionnaire items are therefore not numbered and are presented in the same format as the original research. The reasons for continued employment

will be abbreviated and be found in their complete version in Appendix A. The ratings ranged from *Very Important (1)* to *Not a Factor (4)*. If no response was given the subject was deleted for the purposes of calculating percentages.

Table 6  
Reasons for Continued Employment by Rural SLPs in British Columbia  
Ranked by Summed Percent for Degree of Importance

Reason for continued employment	Ratings			
	Very Important	Important	Not Very Important	Not a Factor
I enjoy comparative autonomy in terms....caseload selection.	33 (62.3%)	20 (37.7%)	0	0
My school system ...supports my continuing professional development.	24 (45.3%)	28 (52.8%)	0	0
I am being paid fairly.	32 (61.5%)	19 (36.5%)	0	0
The benefit package is adequate for my needs.	20 (37.7%)	31 (58.5%)	2 (3.8%)	0
I like the type of clients I am working with.	28 (52.8%)	23 (43.4%)	2 (3.8%)	0
I enjoy collegial relationships with teachers and other....	26 (50%)	22 (42.3%)	1 (1.9%)	3 (5.8%)
I like having summers off.	26 (49.1%)	16 (30.2%)	7 (13.2%)	4 (7.5%)
Other.	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	0	0
The area in which I work. is... where..like to live.	21 (39.6%)	18 (34%)	3 (5.7%)	11 (20.8%)
This school system has a reputation...quality services...	9 (17%)	30 (56.6%)	4 (7.5%)	10 (18.9%)
I enjoy social interactions with colleagues...	12 (22.6%)	25 (47.2%)	12 (22.6%)	4 (7.5%)

My spouse is employed in the area.	14 (28.3%)	14 (26.4)	5 (9.4%)	19 (35.8%)
My present situation permits part-time employment....	16 (30.2%)	10 (18.9%)	8 (15.1%)	19 (35.8%)
There is an opportunity for advancement..	6 (11.3%)	16 (30.2%)	16 (30.2%)	15 (28.3%)
A college or university is located within driving distance.	1 (3%)	9 (27.3%)	11 (33.3%)	12 (36.4%)
I have or will have children enrolled in this school system(s)	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)	4 (12.5%)	23 (71.9%)
Being employed here is a family tradition.	0	1 (3%)	3 (9.1%)	29 (87.9%)

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In B.C., the reasons identified for continued employment that were either *Very Important* or *Important* for 75% or more of the respondents were issues of professional practice, professional benefit and personal reasons. The top issue identified by B.C. respondents was one of professional practice. All survey respondents chose autonomy in caseload selection as a priority for continued employment. School system support of continuing professional development (98%) and being paid fairly (98%) were also of high priority. Collegial relationships were still a factor for the majority of respondents (92%).

The reasons for continued employment by rural SLPs in Saskatchewan are listed on Table 7. The reasons for have also been ranked by percentage of importance and do not appear in the same sequence as the original questionnaire (see Appendix A). The reasons for continued employment will be abbreviated and can be found in their complete version in Appendix A. Non-respondents were not included in calculations.

In Sask, 75% or more of the respondents identified issues of professional practice, professional benefit and personal reasons as either *Very Important* or *Important* in the reasons for continued employment. Sask. like B.C., placed an issue of employment practice at the top of its list of reasons for continued employment.

**Table 7**  
**Reasons for Continued Employment by Rural SLPs in Saskatchewan**  
**Ranked by Summed Percent for Degree of Importance**

Reason for continued employment	Ratings			
	Very Important	Important	Not Very Important	Not a Factor
I like the types of clients I am working with.	19 (59.4%)	13 (40.3%)	0	0
My school system...supports my continuing professional development.	10 (30.3%)	22 (66.7%)	1 (3%)	0
I am being paid fairly.	11 (33.3%)	20 (60.6%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
I enjoy collegial relationships with teachers and other...	13 (40.6%)	17 (53.1%)	2 (6.3%)	0
The benefit package is adequate for my needs.	6 (18.2%)	23 (69.7%)	2 (6.1%)	2 (6.1%)
I like having summers off.	17 (53.1%)	11 (34.4%)	4 (12.5%)	0
I enjoy comparative autonomy in terms...caseload selection.	13 (39.4%)	16 (48.5%)	7 (9.1%)	4 (3%)
This school system has a reputation ..quality services...	7 (21.2%)	19 (57.6%)	5 (15.2%)	2 (6.1%)
The area in which I work is.... where...like to live.	10 (31.3%)	15 (46.9%)	4 (12.5%)	3 (9.4%)
I enjoy social interactions with colleagues...	6 (18.2%)	14 (42.4%)	9 (27.3%)	4 (12.1%)
My present situation permits part-time employment...	7 (22.6%)	10 (32.3%)	4 (12.9%)	10 (7.5%)
My spouse is employed in the area.	11 (33.3%)	7 (21.2%)	1 (3%)	14 (42.4%)
There is an opportunity for advancement.	4 (12.5%)	8 (25%)	8 (25%)	12 (37.5%)

A college or university is located within driving distance.	1 (3%)	9 (27.3%)	11 (33.3%)	12 (36.4%)
I have or will have children enrolled in this school system(s).	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)	4 (12.5%)	23 (71.9%)
Being employed here is a family tradition.	0	1 (3%)	3 (9.1%)	29 (87.9%)
Other.	0	0	0	1 (100%)

The support for continuing professional development (97%) and being paid fairly (93.9%) were the second and third most important reasons for continued employment identified by 75% or more of the Sask. respondents. Collegial relationships (93.7%), autonomy in caseload selection (87.5%) and school system quality of service (78.8%) were also issues identified by the majority of respondents.

The comments made by rural B.C. and Sask. SLPs were grouped by theme and appear on Table 8. Verbatim comments are not provided as in the original study.

Table 8

B.C. and Sask. Respondents' Comments Grouped by Theme

Theme	Frequency	
	B.C.	Sask.
Eligibility for survey.	4	0
Interest in results.	5	4
Feed-back regarding survey instrument..	2	2
Discontinued employment..	1	
Dissatisfaction:		
1) advocacy for SLP		
a) lack of support, value and respect by teachers.		2
b) appropriate salary		1
2) inadequate service.		4
3) caseload too high.		4

4) amount of driving.	1
5) isolation.	1
Need for professional development.	2
Love career choice (being SLP).	2
Need for collegial contact	2
Rural quality of life.	2
Political climate:	
1) Provided information .	1
2) Dissatisfaction regarding current climate.	2

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B.C. SLPs' comments were focussed mainly on improving the survey and affirming the quality of rural life. Some of the B.C. respondents questioned their eligibility for the survey for a variety of reasons from a differing definition of rural (respondent did not consider her area as a rural one) to an explanation of differing employer relationships (contracted by school district and work in non-district office count as school-based SLP). Another respondent noted the cutback of her position in the comments section.

Sask. SLPs' comments focussed on identifying areas of need: 1) the need to be supported and valued by school staff (from teachers to administrators); 2) the need for professional development, collegial contact and "connected-ness"; and 3) the need to be supported by their professional associations. Three SLPs expressed concerns regarding the political climate and the need for support during the "licensing" procedures. Concerns were voiced regarding possible job loss either resulting from the licensing procedures or other factors. One respondent with a masters degree and certification noted that "we may have to compromise our profession to put food on the table". The comments made by Sask. SLPs do not provide a complete picture but do provide some very illuminating windows on their retention issues and present employment settings.

### Summary

The average length of employment for both rural SLPs in B.C. and Sask. was six years. In both groups, the subjects were predominantly female but Sask. showed a

larger proportion of male SLPs. More than half of both groups (B.C. and Sask.) were married though a little under half of Sask. respondents were single compared to a smaller number in B.C. The majority of SLP respondents in both provinces were not indigenous to the areas of employment. Approximately a third of respondents in B.C. and Sask. reported extended family within an hour's driving distance of employment. In Sask. approximately a third reported no family within a five hour driving distance of employment. In B.C. approximately two thirds of respondents reported no family within a five hour driving distance of employment.

The majority of respondents reported masters level degrees and ASHA/CSLPA certification. In Sask. all SLPs were licensed compared to 71.7% of B.C. respondents. Age and pay periods were similar but the salary was significantly larger in B.C. Extra compensation and supplemental income were reported in higher percentages in Sask. than in B.C. so perhaps this has to do with the salary difference. The vast majority of B.C.'s respondents (94.1%) were satisfied with their present employment situation and of those most anticipated long-term employment (86.5%). The Sask. percentages were quite a bit lower with a 69.7% satisfaction rating and 75.8% anticipating long-term employment in their present settings.

The reasons for continued employment were quite similar in priority. continuing professional development and being paid fairly were the top second and third rated items in both provinces. The difference in the top issues for both provinces of autonomy in caseload selection and satisfaction with types of clients may reflect each province's unique employment situation.

The reasons for continued employment were identified clearly with high numbers of respondents rating each question. The only question that did not seem to invite response was the open-ended question which asked the respondent to identify a reason for continued employment (in BC. only 4 responded; in Sask. only 1 responded).

Comments by B.C. SLPs were brief and mainly regarding the survey methodology. Comments made by Sask. SLPs were lengthy and detailed both areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

## CHAPTER VI DISCUSSION

### Overview

This section will discuss the results of the study in terms of answering the three research questions:

- 1) What are the reasons for continued employment for rural Speech-Language Pathologists in British Columbia and Saskatchewan?
- 2) Can Neeley et al.'s (1994) survey research on identifying the factors impacting the employment and retention of Speech-Language Pathologists be replicated in Canadian rural contexts?
- 3) Will the results be comparable to the previous studies? To provide the foundation for future research and act as a catalyst for change to support Speech-Language Pathologist and the communicatively disordered population?

### Research Question #1

What are the reasons for continued employment for rural Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) in B.C. and Sask.?

In B.C. the reasons for continued employment that were either *Very Important* or *Important* for 75% or more of the respondents are listed here in order:

1. I enjoy comparative autonomy in terms of professional decisions regarding caseload selection (100%);
2. My school system encourages and supports my continuing professional development (98.1%);
3. I am being paid fairly (98%);
4. The benefit package I receive is adequate for my needs (96.5%);
5. I like the types of clients I am working with (96.2%);
6. I enjoy collegial relationships with teachers and other professional staff in this school system (92.3%);
7. I like having summers off (79.3%);
8. Other (75%)\*.

\*This percentage is based on only four responses. Two respondents cited personal reasons, and two respondents cited employment opportunities.

In Sask., 75% or more of the respondents identified the following reasons as being either *Very Important* or *Important*:

1. I like the types of clients I am working with (100%);
2. My school system encourages and supports my continuing professional development (97%);
3. I am being paid fairly (93.9%);
4. I enjoy collegial relationships with teachers and other professional staff in this system (93.7%);
5. The benefit package is adequate for my needs (87.9%);
6. I like having summers off (87.5%);
7. I enjoy comparative autonomy in terms of professional decisions regarding caseload selection (87.5%);
8. My school system has a reputation for providing quality services to students with disabilities (78.8%);
9. The area in which I work is located close to where I'd eventually like to live (78.2%).

In the reasons for continued employment that were either *Very Important* or *Important* by 75% or more of the respondents, both provinces' SLPs identified salary as the third most important reason for continued employment. A significant difference in pay was shown between the two provinces in the employment data section of the survey. The lower paid rural SLPs from Sask. augmented their salaries through moonlighting or supplemental employment (33.6%) and extra compensation (50%). Supplemental employment was reported by 19.7% of B.C. respondents and few B.C. SLPs (10.2%) received extra compensation.

The benefit packages received were, interestingly, of lower priority for Sask. respondents (ranked fifth: 87.9%) than B.C. respondents (ranked fourth: 96.5%). This result must be seen in the light of the differing provincial basic health care costs (Sask. health care is free to residents; B.C. has a minimum monthly charge). Perhaps the higher percentages in B.C. reflect a need for reimbursement. Benefit packages themselves, are varied depending on union protection (in-scope) and individual bargaining with administrators (out of scope). As B.C. SLPs are presently covered under the teacher union umbrella, perhaps the higher percentage increases the SLPs expectation of support. Another feature of employment benefits noted was that

approximately three out of every four respondents in B.C. and Sask. cited having summers off as a reason for retention. It is clear that the vacation package available in the school system remains an attractive feature of employment.

Salary and benefit packages differed between the two provinces even though the two groups of rural SLPs had similar levels of qualifications (Sask. had a slightly lower percentage of SLPs with masters level degrees). The same was true for national association membership. Just under three-quarters of B.C. SLPs were licensed to practice in B.C while all respondents were licensed to practice in Sask. so the answer to the salary-benefit differences does not lie in the "quality" of personnel.

The vast majority of B.C. respondents (94.1%) reported being satisfied, generally speaking with their present employment situations. In Sask., a notable 30.3% indicated that they were not satisfied with their present employment compared with the 5.9% rating of B.C. respondents. Perhaps the difference in satisfaction has to do with the difference in salaries received, presence of extended family nearby or yet other factors. Satisfaction ratings are backed up with comparable ratings in terms of anticipated long-term employment in present positions (B.C. 86.5% anticipated long-term employment whereas in Sask. 75.8%).

One component that may account for the higher dissatisfaction rating in Sask. is the absence of family support. A higher percentage of single, quite often female (85.3%) SLPs work in rural Sask. settings with no extended family living nearby (29.4% had family further than five hours driving distance from employment). This combination of factors could present a retention problem for rural Sask. SLPs or exacerbate the isolation felt in their present employment settings (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988). In B.C. isolation from extended family (67.7% had family further than five hours) was also noted but it was paired with a higher proportion of married SLPs. In the reasons for continued employment, however, both B.C. and Sask. respondents did not rate family presence (spousal employment, children in the school system, family tradition of employment) very highly. The rating of home location preference was rated more highly by B.C. and Sask. respondents. One B.C. respondent identified her present location as the ideal location. Few respondents from B.C. (7.5%) or Sask. (14.9%) reported being natives of the district in which they were employed.

In B.C., autonomy in caseload selection was the most important reason for continued employment while in Sask. it rated eighth position in terms of importance (87.5%). The B.C. results could indicate the need for more autonomy or recognize the

importance of autonomy in effective caseload management. The Sask. result may indicate that autonomy in caseload selection is an integral feature of SLP programming in Sask. It may also suggest that SLPs are given more freedom to make these decisions than SLPs in B.C. The sparsity of SLPs in rural settings lends itself to self-starting, autonomous professionals who are very isolated. The degree of job satisfaction would seem to bear this out with the higher levels of satisfaction reported by SLPs in B.C. The comments made by Sask. SLPs in this 1995 research would also support these points (such as "very isolated" and "overwhelming job..no other SLPs in area). Seemingly the voices of Sask. SLPs have yet to be heard as the 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services survey cited isolation as the number one personnel related issue.

Another aspect of caseload selection may factor into the different provincial rankings is the one of caseload size. Perhaps the Ministry of Education in B.C. is enforcing guidelines for SLPs per certain school populations more strictly, or school systems are more aware of the guidelines and request more service as mandated. Caseload size was not mentioned in any of the comments from B.C. respondents. It was, however, mentioned repeatedly by Sask. respondents as being too large (such as, "my caseload is 60", "I know of others with caseloads of 200-400" and "caseload numbers are a concern"). Some SLPs visit only two schools, and others visit 50 plus schools. The results of this study suggest that school SLPs in B.C. are well supported regarding caseload selection. It would seem, however that Sask. SLPs need the active support of administration and legislation to ameliorate their present caseload problem; without support they may, in fact, decide either to relocate or leave the profession.

In Sask., satisfaction with the clientele was rated, by all respondents, as the number one reason for continued employment while in B.C. it rated fifth position in terms of importance (96.2%). Respondents were not asked to identify the characteristics of the client populations as in the original study. The Sask. SLPs may be indicating satisfaction with clientele in terms of many factors such as age (the school aged population), the cultural milieu in which they work (Hutterian, farming etc.), the variety or lack of variety of disorders, the types of disorders, the socio-economic groups (affluent to indigent) and so on. Regardless of the nuances in interpretation, satisfaction with clientele was of the utmost importance to rural SLPs in Sask. for continued employment. The clientele would seem to be an incentive in retaining employment in rural Sask. settings. The positive rating by Sask. respondents

is underscored by their comments (such as, "I enjoy being an SLP" and "I love working with school age children"). Though lower in rating, the vast majority of B.C. respondents also rated satisfaction with clientele highly.

Both B.C. (98.1%) and Sask. (97%) respondents identified support for continuing professional development as their next priority for continued employment. The high ranking may reflect the amount of support SLPs receive or need given the continuing expansion of the role of rural SLPs. The results from the comments sections of the questionnaires appear to support the latter point. The exact type of encouragement or support was not identified as in the original study.

While the findings in B.C. (92.3%) and Sask. (93.7%) indicate the importance of collegial relationships with teachers and other professional staff, the results may lead to multiple interpretations. These results may suggest that a majority of respondents identified the importance of collegial relationships as a counter to the perception among SLPs that teachers and others do not value the role of the SLP. The SLPs in the two provinces rated highly the importance of collegial relationships; it may, perhaps, make a difference in SLPs' job satisfaction, and it may also support the new direction in Canada of collaborative consultation in the field of education. The SLPs in rural Canada may perceive that they are not valued (this perception seems to be borne out by direct comments by Sask. SLPs) because they are isolated, itinerant and, for all practical purposes, distanced from school teams. If curriculum-based assessment and collaborative consultation become a working reality for SLPs, then collegial relationships may develop and provide the much needed support for all team members. From the studies conducted on rural SLPs, it is obvious that school systems and their SLPs need to identify ways both to develop positive relationships and to support one another.

Interestingly, in B.C. the respondents did not identify their schools' reputations for providing quality services as a priority in their reasons for continued employment which received a 75% or more ranked percentage. The majority of respondents (78.8%) of respondents in Sask., however, indicated that their school systems had reputations for providing quality services to students with disabilities.

Personal "other" reasons received a ranking 75% and above in B.C. in the two highest scale levels of *Very Important* and *Important* but only four SLPs responded to the question. Other reasons rated were employment opportunities, location of a marital partner and lifestyle. In Sask. a single SLP rated the item other as not a factor.

As few B.C. respondents and only one Sask. respondent rated an unlisted reason for continued employment it may suggest that either the reasons listed are representative or that respondents did not identify them.

In B.C. the reasons for continued employment that were either *Very Important* or *Important* with ratings of less than 75% are listed in order:

1. The area in which I work is located close to where I'd eventually like to live (73.6%);
2. This school system has a reputation for providing quality services to students with disabilities (73.6%);
3. I enjoy social interactions with colleagues who work in this system (69.8%);
4. My spouse is employed in the area (54.7%);
5. My present employment situation permits part-time employment if I so desire (49.1%);
6. There is an opportunity for advancement (41.5%);
7. A college or university is located within driving distance (30.3%);
8. I have or will have children enrolled in this school system(s) (15.7%);
9. Being employed here is a family tradition (3%);

In Sask., less than 75% of the respondents rated the following items as being either *Very Important* or *Important* :

1. I enjoy social interactions with colleagues who work in this system (60.6%);
2. My present situation permits part-time employment if I so desire (54.9%);
3. My spouse is employed in the area (54.5%);
4. There is an opportunity for advancement (37.5%);
5. A college or university is location within driving distance (30.3%);
6. I have or will have children enrolled in this school system(s) (15.7%);
7. Being employed here is a family tradition (3%);

Home location preference, a school system with quality services and social interaction with colleagues are identified as important reasons for continued employment by just under three quarters of the B.C. respondents. Interestingly the first two reasons were of more importance to Sask. respondents and the third reason

was of more importance to B.C. respondents. Perhaps the lower priority of social collegial contact by Sask. SLPs reflects the reality of far flung SLPs and the unlikelihood of this occurring without much orchestration. collegial contact, if not social contact, has been clearly established as a priority by both provincial groups.

Approximately half of B.C. and Sask. SLPs identified part-time employment as an incentive for continued employment which may mean that only half are offered the opportunity of part-time work as most jobs are full-time positions. It may be that administrators receive funding based on full-time positions only. Spousal employment was also identified by approximately half of the respondents in B.C. and Sask. This result may suggest that provincial (and national) economies necessitate two income families regardless of the desire for family unity. Issues surrounding the profession (professional practice and benefits) far outweighed family issues in terms of retention. However the fact that approximately a third of B.C. respondents, regardless of their ratings, identified family within reachable distances seems to suggest disparity between the demographic variables and the reasons for continued employment. This disparity may be explained by the fact that one section of the questionnaire (or particular questions) elicited responses about a current position and the other section elicited responses regarding a prospective position.

The presence of a college or university nearby was identified by only a third of B.C. and Sask. SLPs as a reason for extending employment. This result was surprising for the researcher as all clinical experience had indicated this factor as having much more significance in SLPs' decisions to relocate from rural settings. Perhaps with the advent of more technology (universities on-line with computers and distance education through satellite) rural schools and rural SLPs have more access to colleges or universities. Of course, the advent of more technology does not presuppose the funding to match its development.

A family tradition of employment and having children in local schools both received low ratings by rural SLPs in Sask. and B.C. The lack of a family employment tradition supports the earlier findings that most respondents are not from these rural areas. The low ratings of children enrolled would support the earlier findings in Sask. that just under half were single (and may not have children). It may simply indicate that rural SLPs' children are not enrolled as yet (too young or home-schooled). Whatever the implication the results do indicate that family issues (for a

prospective position) are not of the highest priority in determining the extension of employment by SLPs in B.C. and Sask.'s rural settings.

Opportunity for advancement was of lower priority for both Sask. and B.C. SLPs as a reason for continued employment. This may simply reflect the nature of the positions as single member departments with no room for movement.

### **Research Question #2**

Can Neeley et al.'s (1994) survey research on identifying the factors impacting the employment and retention of Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) be replicated in Canadian rural contexts?

The answer to this question is clearly yes. The description of the original study's methodology was clear and provided a framework for its successful replication. The biographic, demographic and employment data of the replication research was quite comparable to the original Arkansas research done by Neeley et al. (1994) as were the identified reasons for continued employment. The final sample was almost identical. The respondents were slightly older. This difference may be explained by the fact that the original research had a larger pool of SLPs to draw from and could exclude all candidates that had not worked for four or more years. It was noted by the 1995 research that the length of employment was, on the average, longer than four or more years anyway. The original research also noted a longer average duration of employment by a school district which seems logical given its exclusionary four year clause. The pay periods were similar in the two-province, Canadian research but a month less on average for the single state, American respondents. The differences in bi-country pay periods may reflect American and Canadian school years and pay dispersal. Of course, the difference found could be locale-specific or be affected by the somewhat stronger trend in America for year-round schooling.

While both studies rated salary as the third most important reason (of the summed percent ratings for *Very Important* and *Important*) for continued employment, respondents from Canada rated it more highly in terms of percentages. The actual salaries were significantly higher in B.C. than Sask. and both mean provincial salaries exceed Neeley et al.'s (1994) respondents by \$6,000-15,000 even after an exchange rate of .30 cents per U.S. dollar is calculated. The cost of living in the two provinces seems to be much more expensive than in the state of Arkansas. Public school SLPs tend to make more money than SLPs in Health settings in B.C. and Sask. unlike Neeley et al.'s (1994) subjects for which it is the reverse. However, the salaries are not always assured, as there are inconsistencies within the different

school systems. For example, one school system may include SLPs in the teachers' union and guarantee certain wages, while others may exclude them, leaving the SLPs to negotiate separately with administration. It is not known whether Arkansas SLPs are protected by union status or if their status is subject to varying conditions of employment within the different counties or school districts.

Neeley et al.'s (1994) study showed similarities with both provinces in the areas of moonlighting and extra compensation. Neeley et al.'s (1994) respondents had more in common with Sask. SLPs regarding supplemental income (almost identical percentage). Interestingly, the original respondents shared the same percentage with B.C. respondents in terms of extra compensation. These results would seem to indicate that the lower salaried SLPs, whether in Sask. or Arkansas are having to supplement their incomes. As the item of extra compensation is subject to different interpretation, it is hard to say whether the Arkansas respondents are expressing a favourable salary package (inclusive of mileage, consultant's fee etc.) or just stating that extra compensation while needed is not received.

On the whole rural SLPs, in the two studies had similar levels of qualifications. Sask. SLPs had slightly lower percentages of SLPs with masters degrees and national association certification. All Sask. SLPs were licensed by the provincial association compared to a lower percentage of B.C. respondents and an even lower state licensing percentage. While the provincial difference may be explained by its wording (license-register), it is not clear why the state percentage is lower given the high levels of qualifications reported.

More than half of all respondents in the two studies were married. The highest percentage of married SLPs was reported in Arkansas. The slightly older population surveyed could provide the reason for this difference. The majority of respondents (86%) in Arkansas reported family within three hours of employment which differs from B.C. respondents (1 hour: 32.7%; >5 hours: 67.7%) and Sask. respondents (1 hour: 29.4%; >5 hours: 29.4%). In the reasons for continued employment, both the provinces and the state respondents did not rate family presence (spousal employment, children in school system, family tradition of employment) very highly. The rating of home location preference was rated more highly by both Canadian and American respondents. Three of every four Sask. SLPs rated home location preference as a priority (78.2%) compared to slightly lower percentages for B.C.

(73.6%) and Arkansas (71%). The original study showed a much higher percentage of indigenous rural SLPs (38.7%) than either B.C. (7.5%) or Sask. (14.9%).

Satisfaction-with-present-employment ratings showed a trend of decreasing satisfaction and increasing dissatisfaction in the two studies' results. B.C. showed the vast majority of its SLPs were satisfied (only 5.9% dissatisfied). In Arkansas the majority of its SLPs were satisfied (15.1% dissatisfied) and in Sask. most SLPs indicated that they were satisfied (the dissatisfaction rating grew to 30.3%). The uniqueness of each employment setting seems to be reflected here. In both studies, the respondents' ratings for anticipated long-term employment seemed to confirm the levels of satisfaction reported.

Neeley et al.'s (1994) Arkansas study identified satisfaction with the types of clients as the number one reason (95.7%) for continued employment as did the Sask. SLPs (100%). B.C. respondents identified autonomy in caseload selection as their number one reason for continued employment. All three groups (two provinces, one state) identified fair pay as the third most important reason for continued employment. Both studies (all three groups) rated the following reasons for continued employment as being *Very Important* or *Important* by 75% or more of the respondents: satisfaction with the types of clients, autonomy in caseload selection, school system encouragement and support for continuing professional development, being paid fairly, collegial relationships, adequate benefit packages and having summers off. The three groups ranked the items slightly differently but the issues were clearly the same. Three retention issues that also received ratings of 75% or above but were not agreed upon by all three groups were the quality of the school system and personal reasons. Both Sask. and Arkansas SLPs identified the quality of the school system as being a higher priority in their reasons for continued employment. Both Sask. and B.C. SLPs identified personal and "other" reasons (from employment opportunities, location of a marital partner and lifestyle in B.C. to home location preference in Sask.) as being of higher priority in their reasons for continued employment. Both B.C. (96.4%) and Sask. SLPs (87.4%) identified an adequate benefit package as a priority compared to the lower percentage by Arkansas SLPs (76.3%).

The reasons for continued employment that received a rating of under 75% in both Canadian and American studies were the following: social interaction with colleagues, part-time work permitted, spousal employment, opportunity for advancement, college or university nearby, children enrolled in the school system and family tradition of employment. Most of these items were close in terms of

percentages, particularly between provinces; for example, the presence of a college or university nearby received these ratings B.C. 30.3%, Sask. 30.3% and Arkansas 48.4%).

The areas which were most dissimilar between the two studies were in the opportunities for advancement (B.C. 41.5% and Sask. 37.5%; Arkansas 18.4%) and enrollment of children in the school system (B.C. 15.7% and Sask. 15.7%; Arkansas 44.4%). The higher ratings by the provinces for the opportunities for advancement may reflect the need to remove themselves from front-line field positions and to express this in terms of a prospective position. The lower percentage rating from the state group may reflect a rating of their present position for which there is often little movement given the nature of the job. The higher percentage of children enrolled may simply reflect the older group of SLPs surveyed in Arkansas are more likely to have families that are school-aged.

Three retention issues that also received a below 75% rating that were not shared by all three studies were: home location preference, quality of school system and "other". In B.C. and Arkansas, SLPs identified home location preference as a lower priority. The quality of the school system was of lower priority in B.C. than in Sask. or in Arkansas. Only Sask. rated "other" as not a factor in the reasons for continued employment. "Other" reasons were not listed at all in the Neeley et al. (1994) study.

As expected, there were individual differences in the results from all three groups (two provinces and one state) but the Canadian study and American study were comparable on all levels of the questionnaire from the biographic, demographic and employment data to the reasons for continued employment. The current bi-provincial study demonstrated that Neeley et al.'s (1994) methodology and results could be replicated in Canadian rural contexts.

### **Research Question #3**

Will the results be comparable to the previous studies? To provide the foundation for future research and act as a catalyst for change to support Speech-Language Pathologist and the communicatively disordered population?

The results are clearly comparable to the Neeley et al. (1994) study but they are also comparable to the other previous American studies. All four American studies (Hall et al., 1991; Neeley et al., 1994; Prichard, 1991; Schetz &

Billingsley, 1992) are paralleled in the 1995 Canadian research, regardless of their slightly different foci. Sample sizes are similar among the Hall et al. (1991), Neeley et al. (1994) and replication research studies. Prichard's (1991) study was quite a bit larger and Schetz & Billingsley's (1992) research quite a bit smaller. The majority of respondents held masters degrees in all studies except Hall et al.'s (1991) which did not report qualifications. The length of employment in all studies was approximately 6 years and above. The vast majority of SLPs in the replication research, Neeley et al. (1994) and Schetz & Billingsley (1992) studies were female. Hall et al. (1991) did not report this item.

Specific caseload sizes and number of schools served were only identified by Hall et al. (1991) and Schetz & Billingsley (1992). Hall et al. (1991) reported large caseloads and multiple schools for rural SLPs. Schetz & Billingsley (1992) reported a smaller caseload size and single (1.5) schools served which may indicated a stronger urban influence in the study. Although caseload size was not listed as a reason for continued employment, Sask. respondents in the replication study identified high caseload numbers in the comments section of the surveys. Caseload reduction was identified as an area of non-support by half of the participants of the Schetz & Billingsley (1992) study. Although the other studies did not identify specific numbers (Neeley et al., 1994; Prichard, 1991) caseload size was identified as a concern. The need to reduce caseload size was also noted by the respondents in the 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services survey.

Schetz & Billingsley (1992) and Prichard (1991) did not include whether SLPs were natives of their employment districts or if they anticipated long-term employment in their present settings. Hall et al. (1991) reported that the majority of urban and rural respondents reported being from urban areas. The Neeley et al. (1994) study and the replication research reported that the majority of respondents were not natives of the district in which they were employed. This survey questionnaire item did not, however, identify specifically whether respondents were from urban areas initially.

Approximately one third of Hall et al. (1991) respondents planned a job change within the next two years. Of those SLPs planning a change, 53% were from rural settings and 47% were from urban settings. To what extent this is comparable to the results of Neeley et al. (1994) and the replication research which surveyed anticipated long-term employment is not known. Of the Arkansas respondents 19.4%

did not anticipate long-term employment compared to 13.5% in B.C. and 24.2% in Sask. Job satisfaction was commented on directly in the review of literature by Schetz & Billingsley (1992) as being an issue for retention and indirectly by their identification of areas of non-support by administrators. The respondents in the Hall et al. (1991) survey who reported a planned job change within two years may also indicate dissatisfaction with employment. It should be noted that the majority of Hall et al. (1991) SLPs reported being satisfied or extremely satisfied regardless of their employment settings. Neeley et al. (1994) reported 84.9% were satisfied with their present employment compared to 94.1% in B.C. and 69.7% in Sask. in the Canadian study.

Quality of the school system was mentioned as a priority in the Prichard (1991), Neeley et al. (1994) and replication studies. While it received a rating of 75% or above by the Neeley et al. (1994) respondents and the Sask. respondents surveyed; it was of lower priority to the B.C. respondents. The results by Prichard (1991) reveal that the quality of the school system was second in terms of priorities for SLPs in terms of locale and job criteria but of very little priority (2%) for SED administration in providing recruitment incentives.

Advocacy for SLPs and their programming was an area of non-support reported by the Schetz & Billingsley (1992) respondents. Within this category, the provision of appropriate salaries was identified by only two respondents as an area of support and by only one as an area of non-support. The category item which received the most responses was in the failure of administrators to "be aware/knowledgeable/interested in program/job". The other studies did not look at this particular item but most did identify salary as an issue in retention of rural SLPs. The studies by Prichard (1991), Neeley et al. (1994) and the replication research all identified salary as the third most important issue in the retention of rural SLPs. In the Prichard (1991) research, salary was identified by the (19%) as an SLP employment incentive and seems to reflect the different priorities of the administration. Contract (salary) and benefits were identified as the second most important personnel related issue in the 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services survey.

Benefit packages were not mentioned specifically by the Schetz & Billingsley (1992) research but may be included in the advocacy category in terms of "valuing" (salary, benefits) SLPs and their programmes. Benefit packages were of concern at the very least, to three of every four SLPs in the Neeley et al. (1994)

survey and the replication survey in 1995. Benefits were broken down into specifics in the Prichard (1991) survey (medical insurance, dental insurance, life insurance and optical insurance). Medical insurance was identified as the number one priority of SLPs in the criteria for selecting a job or locale. The dissemination of the benefit package may reflect accepted employment procedures in West Virginia or simply the American health care system. Regardless of the presentation in the different studies, salaries and benefit packages are clearly a common denominator in the American and Canadian studies.

Facilitation of staff development is yet another thread binding the studies. A little less than half of the SLP respondents identified the provision of in-service workshops for SLPs as an area of support by administrators in the Schetz & Billingsley (1992) Virginia study. A quarter of the respondents identified facilitation of conference attendance as an area of support and only one SLP identified assistance with continuing education as an area of support. Both Sask. and B.C. SLPs, in the 1995 replication research, rated support for continuing education as the second most important reason for continued employment. In Neeley et al.'s Arkansas study, support for continuing education was rated as the seventh most important reason for continued employment. Support for continuing education was important in Prichard's (1991) West Virginia study but it was not as highly rated as other issues in the study. Hall et al.'s (1991) Washington study looked at the number of in-services attended per year and found no significant difference between the rural and urban groups of SLPs. It was found, however, that significantly more urban SLPs attended workshops and that there was a significant difference in the number of hours spent in continuing education activities between the rural and urban groups (>hours for urban). While the differences were found between the urban and rural groups in terms of attendance, it is not clear that these factors examine or identify the need for continuing education support. In the 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services survey, the need for professional development activities specific to shared services was identified. Perhaps the need for in-services specific to shared services is really an expression of the need for support serving primarily rural areas. Isolation from services and colleagues can be factors that affect retention of rural SLPs.

Isolation was the number one personnel issue for SLPs in the 1988 Saskatchewan Shared Services survey. The need for collegial contact is a recurring theme throughout the American and Canadian studies. In the Schetz & Billingsley

(1992) study, a little more than a quarter of respondents identified support for the facilitation of "departmental sharing/collaboration between SLPs". Less than a quarter of the respondents identified consideration of "SLPs/programme as part of total school program" as an area of support (and this result was among primarily urban SLPs with theoretically more access to support!).

Urban SLPs (84%) were able to talk with another SLP at least once per week compared to lower percentages by their rural counterparts (27%) in the Hall et al. (1991) study. However a lack of collegial contact was not identified as a retention issue by SLPs in the study. Collegial contact was represented by two items in the Prichard (1991) survey. Cooperation among professionals received a higher ranking (5th) than did opportunity to interact with other SLP (ranked 13th). SEDs reported these items as having no incentive use in the recruitment and retention of rural SLPs.

Neeley et al. (1994) and the replication research (1995) rated collegial contact as being of primary importance in retaining employment. The majority of SLPs in Arkansas rated collegial contact (78.5%) as an important reason for continued employment as did B.C. (92.5%) and Sask. (93.7%) respondents. Collegial contact was yet another common denominator among the American and Canadian studies.

Data collection was another source of commonality. Survey instruments were used to gather data in all the studies. The Schetz & Billingsley (1992) study was the only study to use telephone interviews and reported frequency of responses. The Prichard (1991) study used a 4-point rating scale and percentages to rank responses. The Hall et al. (1991) study used chi-square analysis for the survey responses. The replication (1995) research reported homogeneity of variance, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), independent t-tests, percentages and grouped comments by theme.

The results of the Canadian replication research compliment the previous American studies and highlight the issues of retention for rural SLPs in B.C. and Sask. Hopefully it will provide the foundation for future research and a catalyst for change to support Speech-Language Pathologist (SLPs) and the communicatively disordered population.

The replication research has provided further foundation for research into the retention issues of rural SLPs. The methodology has been described and the terminology defined such that future researchers could replicate it or refine it. The biographic, demographic and employment data have provided a description of the

practising rural SLP in B.C. and Sask. The degree to which the data reflect issues of school-based SLP service, regardless of setting (rural or urban) has yet to be investigated. Perhaps when the issues of school-based SLPs are identified then the unique issues of rural service can be seen more clearly. The questionnaire could be refined in a number of ways for future research purposes including perhaps different sections identifying specific topic areas such as; present employment data and prospective employment data. A check-list could be added to address the school-based SLP issues versus rural service issues and it would allow respondents to identify reasons for continued employment as being a feature of school service or rural service. The check-list may also simply complicate matters and a single open-ended question could ask respondents to identify specific rural issues apart from issues of school based service. The refinement of the items in the survey questionnaire provide a starting point for future research.

The findings on job satisfaction for rural SLPs are clearly a direction for future research on their retention. A clear definition of job satisfaction is needed as it not clear, in the replication study or for that matter in all the previous American studies, what is meant by job satisfaction. It may be useful to address the issue from different viewpoints and assess needs through standardized instruments such as the Manifest Needs Questionnaire cited in Sapriati's 1984 work on job satisfaction or through ethnographic techniques such as journals etc.. Job satisfaction must be differentiated from satisfaction with one's choice of occupation. Career satisfaction may hold yet another avenue for research. The present replication study would seem to indicate that satisfaction with career choice is a priority in SLPs' reasons for continued employment. The contexts of present employment versus prospective employment are also areas that need to be clarified when studying SLP job satisfaction. Another area of related job satisfaction research could be in the identification of incidence levels of school-based SLPs departures from: a) school employment; b) rural school employment; and the c) profession of speech-pathology.

The degree of job satisfaction may rise and need to be re-examined with the evolving collaborative-consultation focus of special education and speech-language pathology. How collaborative-consultation impacts the field of speech pathology and education may hold exciting and positive opportunities for supporting staff in identified need areas and provide a wealth of research in the area of job satisfaction.

Yet another avenue of study on SLP job satisfaction, may be the examination of SLP and teacher perceptions of the value of the SLP role in the school setting. The perception, reported by SLPs in the Schetz & Billingsley's (1992) study and the replication study, was that their role is not valued by administrators or teachers. The SLP role may not be valued because it is not understood and for a host of other reasons. The solutions must lie with teachers and SLPs sharing responsibility and working collaboratively as equal members of the school team. Awareness campaigns (about speech pathology and speech pathologists) may need to become an integral feature of SLP's programming if understanding and support is to grow in the school setting (and in the community). Provincial and national associations will need play a role in providing leadership and funding. Prominent figures in the media (who have received SLP services) could be approached for free media spots aimed at increasing public awareness. Effective campaigns could be studied for their impact in supporting SLPs.

The monetary value awarded SLPs from province to province could provide another area of study in job satisfaction and retention. The higher paid, union protected B.C. SLPs seem to have higher levels of job satisfaction than their lower paid Sask. counterparts. Is there a correlation? Is it significant? What can be done to support Sask. SLPs? These questions could become interesting focal point for future research.

Another area for future research on retention issues, apart from job satisfaction, would be in the area of professional development. Professional development was identified by B.C. and Sask. rural SLPs as the second most important reason for continued employment. The amount and type of professional development and the "preparedness" of pre-service training received by practising rural SLPs could be examined. Do rural SLPs in B.C. receive the same opportunities for professional development as their urban B.C. counterparts? As rural SLPs in Sask.? Does the pre-service training received prepare SLPs for work in Canadian school-based settings in rural areas? In urban areas? American pre-service training versus Canadian?

The replication research has provided a springboard for the study of a wide spectrum of retention issues of SLPs in rural B.C. and Sask. The reasons for continued employment identified by the replication study could serve as a foundation for change and this may indeed be occurring. An SLP from B.C. provided a fax number to have the results sent so that they could be used in salary negotiations. The

degree to which this study has impacted the retention issues of rural SLPs in B.C. and Sask. could also be a focus of future research.

### **Summary**

The identification of the reasons for SLPs continued employment in rural B.C. and Sask. formed the basis of this first research question. A comparison of the Canadian, bi-provincial, replication study to the original study by Neeley et al. (1994) formed the basis of the second research question. The final question was comprised of a comparison of all the American studies (Hall et al., 1991; Neeley et al., 1994; Prichard, 1991; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992) with the Canadian study. A strong thread of similarity was found between all the compared studies.

The two provincial groups compared were similar in terms of biographic, demographic and employment data. The reasons for continued employment that were either *Very Important to Important* for 75% or more of the SLPs in both rural B.C. and Sask. are the following: satisfaction with clientele, autonomy in caseload selection, continuing professional development, fair pay, collegial contact, summers off and benefit package received.

Neeley et al.'s (1994) SLPs were similar in terms of biographic, demographic and employment data to the bi-provincial respondents. The reasons for continued employment that received a 75% or above rating by SLPs that were similar to the B.C. and Sask. findings are: satisfaction with clientele, summers off, fair pay, autonomy in caseload selection, continuing professional development, collegial contact and benefit package received.

The areas in which similarities could be found in three or more studies were: sample size, qualifications, length of employment, caseload (size or management), continuing education or professional development, data analysis, instrument, quality of school system, advocacy for SLPs and programs (salary, benefits), collegial contact, job satisfaction, "indigenous-ness", and anticipation of long-term employment.

While similar in spirit, interpretation of the meaningfulness of the similarities must consider the nuances of the questions asked, the contexts for the studies, the limitations of the studies and the changing field of speech-language pathology itself. Perhaps different answers would be elicited once effective classroom-based collaboration becomes a reality. Support (or the lack of support) is an omnipresent need that demands attention today or there may not be SLPs in rural areas tomorrow.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Overview

The conclusions will be based on the research questions. The conclusions, limitations, implication and recommendations for future research will be presented in this section.

#### Conclusions

The pieces of the retention puzzle are forming a clear picture of the issues facing Speech-Language Pathologist (SLPs) in Canada and the United States. The framework of the puzzle is nicely illustrated by three of the four categories of Schetz & Billingsley's (1992) study on SLPs' perceptions of support and non-support by administrators. The provision of adequate working conditions and resources (the provision of time, caseload reduction, hiring additional personnel etc.) is an issue for rural SLPs whether in B.C., Sask., West Virginia, Arkansas or Washington. Advocacy for SLPs and speech-language programming (administrators knowledge of SLP's programme or job, consideration of SLP as part of the total school, provision of appropriate salary etc.) are also of priority for B.C., Sask., West Virginia and Arkansas SLPs (not specifically addressed by Washington study). The facilitation of staff development (provides workshops, facilitates sharing between SLPs, facilitates conference attendance, assists SLPs with continuing education etc.) is an issue for all the studies' rural SLPs.

The present replication study found:

1. The top reasons for continued employment identified by B.C. and Sask. respondents were primarily issues of professional practice and professional benefit. Although it was hard to tell whether respondents were rating prospective positions or current positions, there was a remarkable amount of similarity. Both provinces rated satisfaction with clientele, autonomy in caseload selection, continuing professional development, fair pay, collegial contact, summers off and benefit packages highly in terms of priority for retaining employment.

2. The top reasons for continued employment identified by Neeley et al.'s (1994) respondents were also primarily issues of professional practice and professional benefit. The top seven reasons for continued employment for Arkansas

SLPs were identical to those of B.C. and Sask. (though different rankings). As with the replication research, it was not clear as to whether subjects were rating a present position or a prospective position.

3. The previous studies on the retention and recruitment of rural SLPs were also similar to the replication research and the original study by Neeley et al. (1994) in some very important details. Sample size, qualifications, length of employment, caseload (size or management), continuing education (or professional development), data analysis, instrument, quality of school system, advocacy for SLPs and programs (salary, benefits), collegial contact, job satisfaction, "indigenous-ness" and anticipation of long-term employment were all areas of similarity among three or more studies.

Some feedback as to the impact of the replication research has been received. Requests for results and the copies of the original research by Neeley et al. (1994) seem to be indicative of interest in the topic. The request for information for a masters thesis to further research and the request for information and the use of the results to facilitate salary negotiations seem to indicate that perhaps the replication research has been a catalyst for change as hoped at the onset.

Replication research results are considered more "significant" if the new study yields similar results or repeats the findings of the previous research (Borg & Gall, 1989). By this definition, then, the replication research of Neeley et al. (1994) was indeed "significant" as it yielded similar results and repeated findings of the previous research. The extent to which the replication research can be compared to other research (apart from the original study) is really not clear. While parallels among the studies can be found, it may not be justifiable to link the studies, due to somewhat different foci and contexts.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study may be that the surveys were sent out to only 39% (128/328) of the total number of SLPs registered/licensed to practice in B.C. (91/259 or 35%) and Sask. (37/69 or 53%). The representativeness of the sample is not known as it reflects one definition of rural and may exclude some of the truly rural participants unknowingly. Not all SLPs are registered/licensed for a variety of reasons and some SLPs could be missed from the population (e.g. new to province so license

application not cleared yet or perhaps have not yet applied for license/ membership in provincial association). The response rate from B.C. (53/91 or 58%) was lower than Sask. (34.37 or 92%) and the results may not be as representative as a result. Forty percent did not respond in B.C. and there was no follow-up (due to the assurance of anonymity) done to find out the reasons.

The limitations of language that were previously identified did not seem to be of serious consequence in the successful replication of the Neeley et al. (1994) study. However the extent to which respondents were rating a prospective position versus a present position would still seem to be an important issue in retention. More effective support could be given when the issues are clarified. The differing vocabulary regarding licensing from state-to-province, and province-to-province did not seem to affect the outcome of the research. The phrasing of some questions which did not seem ambiguous seemed unclear when other studies were perused. For example, the item regarding job satisfaction would seem straightforward but it became evident that job satisfaction could mean a multitude of things from satisfaction with career choice to satisfaction with present employment setting. Job satisfaction was not clearly defined by most of the studies including the replication research.

One of the mistakes in survey questionnaire research is that the researcher uses a questionnaire when other research tools would have been better (Borg & Gall, 1989). Would the research have identified retention issues better if another tool had been used becomes an interesting question. The questionnaire was the tool of choice by all the researchers. Perhaps it is not the tool but the lack of "significance" testing that becomes a limitation in some of these studies. Significance testing was reported in the replication research.

Another mistake made in survey questionnaire research is that the researcher fails to check the non-responding subjects for possible bias (Borg & Gall, 1989). The non-responding subjects in the replication research were not checked for possible bias. The main reason for not checking non-respondents was that it would identify the non-respondents and forego the study's assurance of anonymity.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

SLPs are leaving school-based positions (Schetz & Billingsley, 1992). SLPs are leaving rural positions (Farmer, 1994; Hall et al., 1991; Prichard, 1991) and as a result the needs of the communicatively disordered must go under-served (Helge,

1991; Teas, 1991; Saskatchewan, 1983; Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1988). The differences between rural and urban employment for SLPs (Hall et al., 1991) and SLPs perceptions of support by administrators (Schetz & Billingsley, 1992) factor into the issues of recruitment and retention. SLPs prospective employment ratings and administrators' incentives for SLP employment also play a role (Prichard, 1991). The reasons for continued employment identified by the replication research and by Neeley et al. (1994) add a needed perspective. It is clear that SLPs need support. The results of all these studies would seem to imply the need for legislation (to guarantee caseload size, number of schools served and provide the environment that would enable collaboration) and the active support of administrators (advocacy of SLPs and programmes, facilitation of staff development and adequate working conditions).

From the studies to date, it would seem that SLPs are in need of support from administrators, legislators and researchers to facilitate both their retention in rural settings (for that matter school-based service) and quite possibly the field itself. Obviously administrators have different priorities than field-based professionals but the gaps do not have to be as wide. SLPs and administrators are on the same team and the onus must be shared in creating a "retention-friendly" environment. Individual SLPs or their provincial/national organizations could heighten the knowledge, need, awareness of the profession of speech-language pathology by administrators (and others) through campaigns, literature, in-services or the hiring of public relations representatives (whose job it would be educate administrators and promote the field). Administrators could demonstrate their advocacy of SLPs through commitment to change (ie. mission statement including SLP as staff member) and active support (provision of adequate working conditions, facilitation of staff development, assistance with programme activities). As reported by Harijati in 1986, leaders' behaviours may increase the feeling of staff satisfaction.

Legislation could provide limits in which SLPs could be effective. If caseload sizes and numbers of schools served were assured perhaps comments such as "overwhelmed" would be addressed. An environment of collaboration may be supported through legislation such as what is ideally described by Freeze et al. (1989) that would focus on curriculum-based assessment and classroom-based collaborative service. Speech-language pathology as a field is moving towards classroom-based collaborative models of service delivery so perhaps this is the answer. A classroom-

based SLP may be better understood (increased contact), accepted (seen as a staff member), valued (may be readily accepted under the teacher-union-protected-salary-umbrella as the role and importance of the field is understood) and supported (working conditions, collegial support and advocacy) because of the different delivery model of service.

The lack of an extensive body of research into the perceptions of SLPs (whether rural, urban or school-based) would seem to imply that there is still much to learn about SLPs' attrition, stress, burn-out, leadership effectiveness, retention and recruitment issues. Further research would need to address (if possible) recruitment (prospective positions) and retention (present positions) issues distinctively (perhaps by labelling survey sections but this may affect results also). Job satisfaction was an area in need of clarification for future research. Perhaps future research would expand Neeley et al.'s (1994) survey question regarding job satisfaction to include other interpretations. "Are you extremely satisfied/satisfied with your \_career choice, \_present position?" could be the revised question for the survey. A question identifying rural or urban origins could be substituted for Neeley et al.'s (1994) question regarding upbringing which lacked specificity. The Canadian study identified the reasons for continued employment of rural SLPs in B.C. and Sask.. Through its successful replication of the original American study, the replication research opens the door to a truly national study on the issues of retention for SLPs from coast to coast.

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**APPENDIX  
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Retention of Rural SLPs**

*box here* : please check if employed for 4 or more years  
in the same position

1. What is your highest degree: \_ BACHELORS \_MASTERS \_DOCTORATE
2. Are you certified by ASHA/CSLPA?\_ YES\_NO
3. Annual Salary \$\_\_\_\_\_for\_\_\_\_\_ months
4. Are you employed a total of full time?\_ YES\_NO (If "NO", % of full time:\_\_\_\_\_%)
5. Do you receive extra compensation or a salary supplement which is above the "normal" salary schedule:\_\_\_ YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_ DON'T KNOW
6. Are you licensed to practice SLP by the Province of B.C./Sask.?\_ YES\_NO
7. Age: \_\_\_\_
8. Sex:\_\_\_\_
9. Marital Status:\_\_\_\_\_
10. How long have you been employed in your present position in this school system(s)?\_\_\_\_\_years
11. Do you anticipate continued, long-term employment in this school system?\_ YES\_NO
12. Are you a native of the district in which you are employed?\_ YES\_NO
13. Do you have extended family who reside within one of the following driving times: (circle one)  
(1 HOUR) (2 HOURS) (3 HOURS) (4 HOURS) (5 HOURS) (NO FAMILY WITHIN THESE DISTANCES)
14. Generally speaking, are you presently satisfied with you present employment situation?\_ YES\_NO
15. In addition to your employment in this school system(s), are you "moonlighting" (1) as a SLP?\_ YES\_NO..and/or (2) in some other line of work:\_\_\_ YES\_\_\_ NO

**DIRECTIONS:** Please review the following list of REASONS FOR CONTINUED EMPLOYMENT. Then place a check mark or "x" in one of the columns to the right indicating the degree to which that reason is important to you..

Reasons for Continued Employment	Very Important	Important	Not Very Important	Not a Factor
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16. The area in which I work is located where I'd eventually like to live.

17. I am being paid fairly.
18. The benefit package I receive is adequate for my needs.
19. There is opportunity for advancement.
20. I like having summers off.
21. I like the types of clients I am working with.
22. My spouse is employed in this area.
23. Being employed here is a family tradition.
24. I have or will have children enrolled in school in this school system(s).
25. This school system has a reputation for providing quality services to students with disabilities.
26. A college or university is located within driving distance.
27. My school system encourages and support my continuing professional development.
28. I enjoy collegial relationships with teachers and other professional staff in this system.
29. I enjoy social interaction with colleagues who work in this system.
30. I enjoy comparative autonomy in terms of professional decisions regarding caseload selection.
31. My present situation permits part-time employment if I so desire.
32. OTHER REASON: (please specify)

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**COMMENTS**

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## VITA

Surname : Foster                      Given Name : Felicity  
Place of Birth : Leeds                      Date of Birth :  
1, May 1959

### Educational Institution Attended :

Western Washington University, U.S.A.                      1979 to 1982  
University of Victoria, Canada                      1994 to 1996

### Degree Awarded :

Bachelor of Arts (Speech Pathology)                      1982

### Honours and Awards :

### Publications :

Foster, F. & Harvey, B. (1996). The retention of rural speech-language pathologists. Rural Special Education Quarterly, 15 (3).

Foster, F. & Harvey, B. (1996). The retention of rural speech-language pathologists. In, First National Congress on Rural Education Conference Conference Proceedings. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Education Leadership Unit.

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Title of thesis : The Retention of Rural Speech-Language Pathologists -  
A Comparative Study

Author :



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July 18, 1996.

(Date)