

# Training Primary School Teachers to Organize Collective Forms of Work in Small Rural Schools

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**Abstract:** There appears to be an urgent need to improve the system of training qualified specialists for small schools who can respond to modern changes in education, meet socio-economic needs of the village, follow the major trends in the development of school theory and practice and creatively implement the acquired professional knowledge and skills under the conditions of small different age groups. The paper aims to determine pedagogical conditions, develop and theoretically justify a methodology for training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools and experimentally verify its effectiveness. The methodology for training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools involves acquiring the content of professional training in a specially modeled pedagogical environment by students during the whole period of university study. The following empirical methods were used: observations, surveys, expert assessment, an analysis of products of students' creative activity, pedagogical experiment, methods of mathematical statistics (a chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistic). An analysis of the results obtained from the control experiment shows some positive dynamics in the readiness of future primary school teachers for this activity (the percentage of students with a creative-and-interpretive level has increased by 16%, whereas the number of students with a fragmentary-and-formal level has decreased by 17.1%), which proves the effectiveness of the developed methodology. The experimental work has significantly enriched the axiological potential of future teachers from small rural schools and developed their system of psycho-pedagogical knowledge about the organization of collective activities of pupils from different age groups, as well as their skills needed to plan, design and organize inter-age interaction in its various forms and conduct a reflective analysis of their pedagogical activity.

**Keywords:** *pedagogical conditions, pedagogical environment, professionalization of activity, axiological provision, stimulating oversituational activity, reflective analysis.*

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## Introduction

Today, the priority areas in the development of the Ukrainian educational system include solving the problems of learning and education of children in rural areas. This is primarily due to a special status of rural schools in the system of general secondary education. In many scarcely populated areas, these educational institutions perform a village-forming function and serve as the main centre of culture and a source of intellectual and creative enrichment of the younger generations. The ongoing mass closure of rural schools with a small number of pupils leads not only to the decline of the village but also threatens to destroy the ecology of national consciousness and lose the authenticity of the nation and its traditions. Therefore, it is vital to preserve secondary schools in rural areas, create conditions for ensuring a competitive level of education of rural children in the context of reforming education, as declared in educational concepts and documents, including the rural school state programme.

The increasing attention to problems of small rural schools inevitably raises the issue of its staffing. Teachers are particularly responsible for solving this problem. The practice of higher education shows, however, that teacher training for such a type of educational institution is an extremely weak link in their educational activities. The process of rural teachers' professional development at universities does not model the structure of their future activity. The lack of obligatory specialized courses and organizational-and-methodical support for teaching placement results in the spontaneous and episodic nature of their training. All this leads to the reluctance of students to connect their professional future with small rural schools and cope with organizational and pedagogical difficulties rather than economic ones. Thus, there appears to be an urgent need to improve the system of training qualified specialists for small schools who can respond to modern changes in education, meet socio-economic needs of the village, follow the major trends in the development of school theory and practice and creatively implement the acquired professional knowledge and skills under the conditions of small different age groups.

It is also essential to involve special educational technologies aimed at ensuring the cooperation between pupils in small different age groups in the process of personal self-creation of each pupil in the context of a personality-oriented educational paradigm. The latter, among others, is the basis of modern education and learning. After all, it is possible to develop child's personality not only by individual results of his or her activity but by developing his or her abilities to live in society and effectively cooperate with

other people to co-create social values. Collective work helps to enhance pupils' capacity for self-realization through cultivating their autonomy, initiative and creativity in decision-making. Therefore, higher education should encourage future teachers to realize the educational potential of joint activities of pupils from small schools in the system of healthy collective relations.

The problem of training primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work of pupils from small rural schools is of particular scientific and practical interest now. In the context of this research, theoretical and methodological aspects of training primary school teachers (Bibik, 2004; Bondar, 2000; Kolomiets, 2007) and teachers for small rural schools (Kasiarum et al., 2006; Kuz, 2004) are especially important. One should also pay specific attention to scientific works on the improvement of the educational process in small rural schools (Meleshko, 1999; Savchenko, 1999; Suvorova, 1990), the problems of organizing collective learning (Burlaka & Vykhreshch, 1984; Diachenko, 1991; Nor, 1997) and educational (Hilbukh & Kyrychuk, 1996; Karpenchuk, 2005; Kyrychuk, 1983) activities of pupils and students. Different aspects of the problem under study are covered in the works of many scholars (Bakhmat et al., 2019; Behas et al., 2019; Bezliudnyi, 2019; Halaidiuk et al., 2018; Maksymchuk et al., 2018; Melnyk et al., 2019; Nerubasska, & Maksymchuk, 2020; Gerasymova et al., 2019; Sitovskyy et al., 2019; Sheremet et al., 2019; Petrova, 2017; Kaletnik et al., 2011).

Without underestimating the value of these studies above, the authors of the paper are forced to state that the problem of methodological and organizational-methodical support for training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in rural schools has not been widely covered yet. The theory and practice of professional teacher education have outlined certain contradictions that need to be resolved experimentally: between the need of society to provide high-quality education to rural children and the lack of teachers' readiness to implement professional functions under specific conditions of small rural schools; between the need for proper staffing of secondary schools in rural areas and the ineffective system of training rural teachers in higher education; between the existing value of collective activity in terms of developing the personality of a primary school pupil in different age groups in small rural schools and the insufficient level of future primary school teachers' readiness to organize it.

The need to resolve these contradictions has influenced the choice of the research topic.

**The research hypothesis** is as follows: the effectiveness of training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in rural schools depends on the following pedagogical conditions: ensuring

professionalization of educational activities of future primary school teachers based on a sign-oriented contextual approach; implementing the axiological provision of using collective forms of work in future professional activities; stimulating over situational activity of future teachers from small rural schools; developing students' skills in conducting a reflective analysis of their pedagogical projects on the organization of cooperation between pupils.

**The paper aims** to determine pedagogical conditions, develop and theoretically justify a methodology for training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools and experimentally verify its effectiveness.

### **Materials and methods**

The following theoretical and empirical **research methods** were used: *theoretical methods* (analysis, synthesis, comparison, classification, concretization and generalization of relevant scientific sources on the research problem; a study of pedagogical experience, regulatory documents, modelling) used to clarify the basic concepts of the research; to specify the structure of future primary school teachers' readiness to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools, as well as criteria and levels of its identification; to determine pedagogical conditions and develop the corresponding model of students' effective training for the specified activity; *empirical methods* (observations, surveys, expert assessment, an analysis of products of students' creative activity, pedagogical experiment, methods of mathematical statistics (a chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistic) used to identify the levels of future primary school teachers' readiness to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools; to verify the effectiveness of the proposed methodology, summarize the obtained results and ensure their reliability and objectivity.

**Experimental facilities of the research.** The experimental work was conducted at the premises of Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University, Lesia Ukrainka Eastern European University, Lutsk, Rivne State University for the Humanities, Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University. The experiment involved 722 students (future primary school teachers) pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees.

A theoretical analysis of psycho-pedagogical literature on the research problem, as well as the results of the ascertaining experiment, has made it possible to determine and justify *pedagogical conditions* for effective training of primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools: ensuring professionalization of educational activities of

future primary school teachers based on a sign-oriented contextual approach; implementing the axiological provision of using collective forms of work in future professional activities; stimulating oversituational activity of future teachers from small rural schools; developing students' skills in conducting a reflective analysis of their pedagogical projects on the organization of cooperation between pupils.

These pedagogical conditions have laid the basis for building the model of training future specialists for these activities. The structure of the model consists of goals, content, technologies and results, which ensure its integrity and functioning. *The goals component* includes its main goal, which predicts the end result of such training: students' professional readiness for these activities. *The content component* is a relatively independent part of the content of teacher education, which is the basis for developing students' professional knowledge, skills and values-based orientations related to the organization of collective activities of pupils from different age groups in rural schools. Future teachers master the content of professional training in a specially modelled pedagogical environment during the entire period of university study, which is a rather dynamic process. It implies a sequence of content- and values-based, reflective-and-modelling, operational and activity-related stages, which are followed by the expedient realization of these pedagogical conditions. The process of modelling tasks, content, forms and methods of work at each stage took into account a sign-oriented contextual approach, which involves transforming students' learning activities into their professional inclusion in the context of future activities. All the stages present *the technologies component* of the model. *The results component* of the model focuses on obtaining the expected results.

The gradual implementation of the model of training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools began with *the content and values stage*. It was aimed at creating a theoretical and axiological foundation for further development of practical and collective skills in pupils. Its tasks are the following: to provide the necessary professional knowledge to future teachers from small rural schools; to shape values-based orientations towards future professional activities related to the organization of collective forms of work in different age groups of pupils. The content and values stage covered obligatory psycho-pedagogical and professional courses. The basic form of organizing students' activities at this stage was the educational activity of an academic type. It was implemented through traditional forms of higher education: lectures, practical classes (seminars), laboratory work. The following methods, techniques and technologies were widely used at this stage: role-playing games, pedagogical

situations, discussions, interactive learning technologies. The axiological potential of future teachers from small rural schools was enriched in two directions. The first one, that is the subjectivation of pedagogical values within future professional activities of a teacher from small rural schools, involved using such techniques as “immersing in the problem”, “overcoming the inertia of pedagogical thinking”, “designing a figurative vision of future professional activities”; the technologies for developing critical thinking adapted to the research problem (spidergrams; Euler diagram and Venn diagram; question boards; reading with marks; Cinquain; essays). The second one, that is the correction of values-based orientation related to future professional activities, included reinforcing professional growth as a purposeful system of psycho-pedagogical influences on the values and motivation sphere of future teachers from small rural schools.

The inclusion of students' learning activities in the space-time context of the future profession took place *at the reflection and modelling stage* of training future primary school teachers for this activity. This stage was aimed at strengthening the professional knowledge of future teachers from small rural schools, developing their practical skills to model pedagogical situations associated with the organization of collective forms of work in different age groups, cultivating pedagogical reflection, igniting and deepening their interest in a future career. The basic form of organizing students' activities at this stage was quasi-professional activities, which are aimed at recreating the content, conditions and dynamics of the future profession in the classroom and the context of relevant educational courses. The reflection and modelling stage was implemented in the process of studying specialized seminars on “Topical Problems of Small Rural Schools” and “Organizing Collective Forms of Work in Different Age Groups of Pupils”. It involved using the methods, techniques and technologies of active learning and reflective analysis, modelling future professional activities, working in creative projects, creating a positive learning atmosphere and organizing productive communication between students. The stage was based on the idea of creating such an educational environment which recreates the thematic and social context of future professional activities. Thus, students acquired the necessary professional knowledge and skills through their active involvement in collective and productive work. The most common forms, methods and methods of work used at this stage were brainstorming and clustering; the six thinking hats method; the methods of solving debatable issues (the PRES method; the take a position method), business games, modelling.

The systemic-and-contextual elaboration of training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools

ended with *the operations and activities stage*. This stage ensured the integration of learning, research and professional activities. It was aimed at teaching students the technology of organizing collective activities in different age groups of pupils at the effective-and-practical level, developing future teachers' creative thinking, their style of professional activities and skills in using a research-oriented approach towards it and cultivating values-based and activity-related professional position of future teachers. The basic form of organizing students' activities at the operations and activities stage was learning-and-professional activities, which involved future teachers in real or almost real pedagogical situations. It was implemented in the process of teaching placement and research activities. The experiment made it possible to develop a series of additional tasks which clarify and supplement the content of teaching placement at each stage under the specifics of the specified pedagogical activity in small rural schools and expand the list of thesis topics on the research problem.

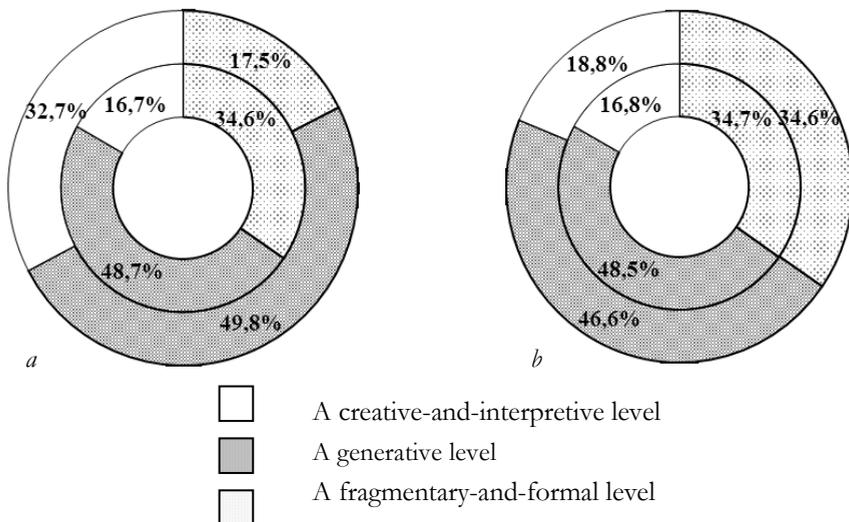
## Results

The ascertaining experiment was conducted to identify the current levels of the specified readiness in future primary school teachers. It included certain three-stage identification procedures. The results of such identifications show an insufficient level of future teachers' readiness for this activity (the prevalence of generative and fragmentary-and-formal levels was recorded in 48.7% and 34.6% of respondents, respectively; only 16.7% of respondents were at a creative-and interpretive-level). The authors believe that such results are caused by several factors: the lack of students' sufficient motivation towards professional activity in such educational institutions; no vision of prospects for professional self-development within such activity; the lack of systematicity in professional training of teachers for small rural schools; the violation of coherence and integrity within the teaching of academic courses that underlie its knowledge-based and practical foundation; the insufficient professionalization of knowledge and skills in organizing collective activities in different age groups of pupils acquired during university education. There appears to be the need for special training of future teachers for this activity.

The results of the control experiment conducted at the final stage of the experimental research show some positive dynamics in the readiness of EG students to organize collective activities in different age groups of pupils in small rural schools. At the beginning of the experiment, the number of future specialists with a creative-and-interpretive level of such readiness amounted to 16.7%. After the experiment, this percentage increased to 32.7%.

At the same time, the number of students with a fragmentary-and-formal level decreased from 34.6% to 17.5%. At the beginning of the experiment, 48.7% of respondents were at a generative level of readiness for this activity; 49.8% of respondents – at the end of the experiment. In CG, the dynamic of students' readiness ranges within 1-2%. Indeed, the number of CG students with a creative-and-interpretive level increased from 16.8% to 18.8%; the number of CG students with a generative level decreased from 48.5% to 46.6% and with a fragmentary-and-formal level – from 34.7% to 34.6% (see Fig. 2).

Thus, a comparative analysis of the levels of students' professional readiness to organize collective forms of work in rural schools before and after the experiment proves the effectiveness of the developed methodology. The experimental work has significantly enriched the axiological potential of future teachers from small rural schools and developed their system of psycho-pedagogical knowledge about the organization of collective activities of pupils from different age groups, as well as their skills needed to plan, design and organize inter-age interaction in its various forms and conduct a reflective analysis of their pedagogical activity. The obtained qualitative and quantitative results indicate the credibility of the authors' assumptions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the selected pedagogical conditions and the developed methodology.



**Fig. 2.** The dynamics in the readiness of future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools (a – EG, b – CG; an inner circle of the diagram – the before-experiment results; an outer circle – the after-experiment results)

## Discussion

An analytical review of documents regulating the relations in the system of Ukraine's general secondary education specifies the legal framework for activities of schools with a small number of pupils in rural areas and the need to train teachers for such institutions. There are certain differences between such concepts as "small staffing school" and "small school". This research defines a *small staffing school* as a general education institution (Level 1) with a small number of pupils, who are taught in different age groups, that is classes. A *small school* is understood as a school with a small number of pupils, where children study in separate classes or individually. At the same time, a situational association of schoolchildren into different age groups (classes) at its primary level is allowed.

A study of teacher training for rural primary schools in the historical retrospective shows that its development was caused by the reforms in school education taking place in the mid-60s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as by the mass establishment of primary schools in rural areas with one- and two-set structures. There was also an urgent need to provide such educational institutions with teaching staff. The research defines the role of zemstvos (district councils) and the government in solving the issue of special training for rural school teachers. It reveals the scientific and pedagogical contribution of M. Bunakov (1906) and V. Vodovozov (1873) to the elaboration of ideological and organizational principles of such training. Besides, it clarifies the changes in the content and organization of professional training for rural primary school teachers from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present. Finally, the research analyzes the scientific and methodical achievements of the researchers who work on the problem of training future specialists for small rural schools (Kuz, 2004; Meleshko, 1999).

Such aspects as the current trends in education, the changes in its methodological trajectories and the need of society to ensure the stability of socio-cultural and economic development of the village make it possible to identify the paradigms of professional teacher training for working in rural schools. It allows one to methodologically build and significantly adjust the professional-and-personal attitude of students towards future pedagogical activities and define strategic areas in their training. The research also focuses on personality-oriented, axiological, acmeological, synergetic and competency-based paradigms and clarifies their influence on the development of the future small school teacher's personality.

A theoretical analysis of socio-psychological (Hilbukh, & Kyrychuk, 1996; Kolominskiy, 1976; Petrovskiy, 1973), psychological (Davydov, 1986;

Leontev, 1975; Markova et al., 1990) and pedagogical (Burlaka & Vykhreshch, 1984; Shchukina, 1988; Vykhreshch, 1997) literature helps to specify the basic research definitions. The research understands *joint educational activity* as a special type of socially determined interaction of pupils in the learning process, which involves restructuring all components of the structure of individual educational activity based on the common goals, motives and ways to achieve results. The highest stage of developing joint educational activity is *a collective educational activity*, whose goal is universally recognized and personally significant. At the same time, the relationships between its participants are characterized by coherence, responsible interdependence, interchangeability and are mediated by the content of joint activities. The structure of the joint and, consequently, collective educational activity includes the following components: goals, motivation, operations, communication, information, reflection, production. The research finds that collective educational activity is realized in *collective forms of work*, which are viewed as the ways of organizing educational interaction based on cooperation, which involve the active participation of all pupils in solving a common educational and cognitive task under the direct or indirect guidance of the teacher. I. Cheredov (1983) and I. Pervin (1985) differentiate collective forms of work into pair, group, frontal-and-collective under the conditions of implementation, as well as the levels of collectivity.

According to modern approaches to education, this research defines the *collective creative activity* as joint and voluntary collective activities characterized by socially useful goals, emotionality, obligatory participation of all participants in self-government, which implies creating an original product. The most effective way to organize collective creative activity is collective creative work, which is an educational technology enabling democratic cooperation, cultivating life positions of pupils, revealing their internal reserves and creating conditions for self-determination and self-realization.

Given that a small rural primary school is a multi-age association of children (grades 1-4) and the educational process in it is organized jointly for all pupils, this research focuses on the psycho-pedagogical features of organizing collective forms of work in different age groups of pupils. They include the need to determine the collective subject based on the chosen collective form of work (pairs, groups, altogether), taking into account the requirements for quantitative and qualitative composition; the need to choose an optimal way of organizing collective activity within the chosen form; the need to organize the collective activity of pupils under its structural elements (setting tasks, instructing on their implementation; distributing

roles in joint activities and ensuring the implementation of role obligations; following the rules of joint work; building business and interpersonal relationships based on cooperation and mutual assistance; combining efforts to achieve the overall result; conducting a reflective analysis of collective work); the need to create emotionally favourable personal relationships in the team using an inter-age approach. The identified features of organizing collective forms of work in different age groups of pupils, as well as the previously identified structural components of collective activity, have laid the basis for developing the content of training future primary school teachers for this activity.

A theoretical analysis indicates a significant value of collective activity and forms of its organization for developing the personality of primary school pupils in different age groups in small rural schools. Certain researchers of the research problem state that collective activity promotes mental development of children (Anan'ev, 1968; Bozhovich, 1995; Vygotsky, 1991), ensures their inclusion in society (Bodalev, 1982; Mudrik, 1983; Umanskiy, 1975), and has significant educational potential (Bekh, 2002; Karpenchuk, 2005). Also, it develops children's cognitive activity and ignites their interest in learning (Bibik, 2004; Kyrychuk, 1983), as well as enhances skills in constructive communication and cooperation (Markova et al., 1990; Tsukerman, 1992). The ever-increasing interest of scholars in the problem of collective activity in different age groups of pupils has caused the need to develop the readiness of future primary school teachers to organize it.

An analysis of some psycho-pedagogical studies on the development of future teachers' readiness for professional activity (Durai-Novakova, 1983; Kondrashova, 1983; Linenko, 1995) interprets *the readiness of future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools* as a professionally important personal quality of students which is characterized by an integrative combination of three interrelated components (motivational and axiological, theoretical and gnoseological, projective and technological) and reflects the structure of their future professional activity. *The criteria and indicators* of the quality under study were determined to identify the readiness of future specialists for this activity following the selected components. They are the following: expressing professional orientation towards organizing collective activities in small rural schools (the nature of professional motivation associated with activities in small rural schools; awareness of personal and social value of collective activity; intensity and stability of professional interests; the nature of target settings in terms of using collective forms of work in different age groups of pupils; the quality of values-based professional orientations of students); mastering the

system of psycho-pedagogical knowledge needed to organize and manage collective activities of pupils from different age groups (completeness, depth, realization and strength of the acquired knowledge); developing practical skills in organizing collective forms of work in different age groups of pupils (structure completeness of such activity; the efficiency of subjective actions underlying it; the level of their implementation; the degree of comprehending the internal action plan; the level of basic operations and techniques automation related to the organization of collective activities in different age groups of pupils). These criteria made it possible to identify *the following levels of future teachers' readiness* to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools: fragmentary-and-formal; generative; creative-and-interpretive.

**The scientific and theoretical value** of the obtained results is as follows:

-*for the first time*, the pedagogical conditions for effective training of future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools (ensuring professionalization of educational activities of future primary school teachers based on a sign-oriented contextual approach; implementing the axiological provision of using collective forms of work in future professional activities; stimulating oversituational activity of future teachers from small rural schools; developing students' skills in conducting a reflective analysis of their pedagogical projects on the organization of cooperation between pupils) have been determined, justified and experimentally verified;

- the model of training future primary school teachers for such activity has been theoretically justified and realized in practice;

- the criteria (expressing professional orientation towards organizing collective activities in small rural schools; mastering the system of psycho-pedagogical knowledge needed to organize and manage collective activities of pupils from different age groups; developing practical skills in organizing collective forms of work in different age groups of pupils) and levels (fragmentary-and-formal; generative; creative-and-interpretive) of future primary school teachers' readiness to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools have been elaborated and identified, respectively;

- such concepts as "collective forms of work", "collective activity", "readiness of primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work" have been *specified* under the research problem;

-theoretical approaches to the professional training of future primary school teachers to organize educational work in small rural schools have been *further developed*.

**The practical value of the obtained results** lies in developing and implementing the methodology of training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools; elaborating the methodical support for the specialized seminars on “Topical Problems of Small Rural Schools” and “Organizing Collective Forms of Work in Different Age Groups of Pupils”, training programmes, methodical recommendations.

The materials of the research can be used in the practice of primary school teachers, after-school club teachers, as well as in teacher graduate training.

## Conclusions

The results obtained in the process of theoretical and experimental work have made it possible to formulate the following **conclusions**:

1. In the context of the research, *the organization of collective forms of work in small rural schools* is interpreted as the process of coordinating and systematizing the ways of interaction between teachers and pupils based on multi-age cooperation, which are at solving some common educational task. The organization of collective forms of work seeks to ensure the optimal management of pupils' collective activities by teachers. *The readiness of future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools* is defined as a professionally important personal quality of students which is characterized by an integrative combination of three interrelated components (motivational and axiological, theoretical and gnoseological, projective and technological) and reflects the structure of their future professional activity.

2. The research singles out the criteria (expressing professional orientation towards organizing collective activities in small rural schools; mastering the system of psycho-pedagogical knowledge needed to organize and manage collective activities of pupils from different age groups; developing practical skills in organizing collective forms of work in different age groups of pupils) and levels (fragmentary-and-formal; generative; creative-and-interpretive) of future primary school teachers' readiness to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools. The results obtained from the identification of levels of students' professional readiness to organize collective activities in different age groups of pupils in small rural

schools indicate an insufficient level of the professional quality under study (such levels as generative (48.7%) and fragmentary-and-formal (34.6%) prevail), which proves low readiness of respondents for this activity.

3. A theoretical analysis of psycho-pedagogical literature on the research problem, as well as the results of the ascertaining experiment, has made it possible to determine and justify pedagogical conditions for effective training of primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools: ensuring professionalization of educational activities of future primary school teachers based on a sign-oriented contextual approach; implementing the axiological provision of using collective forms of work in future professional activities; stimulating oversituational activity of future teachers from small rural schools; developing students' skills in conducting a reflective analysis of their pedagogical projects on the organization of cooperation between pupils. These pedagogical conditions have laid the basis for building the model of training future specialists for these activities. The structure of the model consists of goals, content, technologies and results, which ensure its integrity and functioning.

4. The research presents, justifies and experimentally verifies the author's methodology of training future primary school teachers to organize collective forms of work in small rural schools. It involves acquiring the content of professional training in a specially modelled pedagogical environment by students during the whole period of university study. It implies a sequence of content- and values-based, reflective-and-modelling, operational and activity-related stages, which are followed by the expedient realization of these pedagogical conditions. The process of modelling tasks, content, forms and methods of work at each stage took into account a sign-oriented contextual approach, which involves transforming students' learning activities into their professional inclusion in the context of future activities. The experimental work was implemented in the process of studying psycho-pedagogical courses and specialized seminars on "Topical Problems of Small Rural Schools" and "Organizing Collective Forms of Work in Different Age Groups of Pupils", teaching placement and research activities. An analysis of the results from the control experiment shows some positive dynamics in the readiness of future primary school teachers for the specified activity (the percentage of students with a creative-and-interpretive level has increased by 16%, whereas the number of students with a fragmentary-and-formal level has decreased by 17.1%, which proves the effectiveness of the author's methodology. Thus, the research aim was achieved; the research hypothesis was confirmed; the research objectives were realized.

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