

ABSTRACT

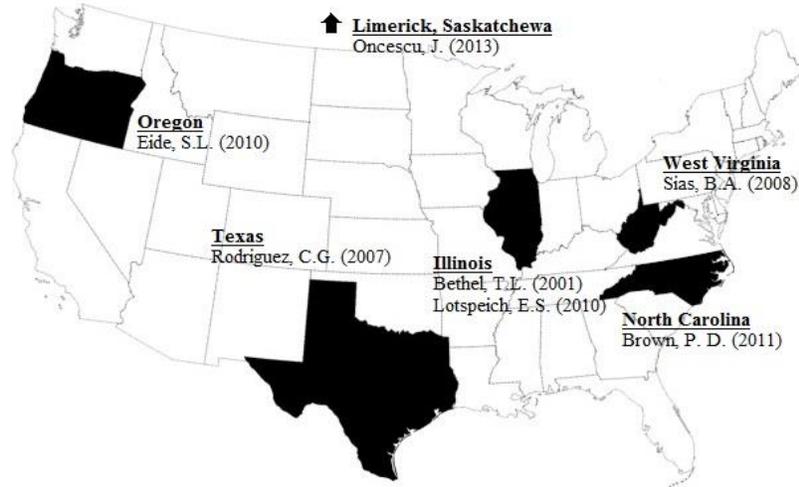
ADHERENCE TO THEMES IN RURAL LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY
REORGANIZATION RESEARCH: A META-ANALYSIS REVIEW

As the United States education system has developed, local education agencies (LEAs) have found the role of serving as a tool to define collective identity within rural communities. The goal of this study is to critically evaluate and analyze completed case study survey research on perceptions of reorganization by community members within rural LEAs—informing macro-level education policy experts with this rural sociological, emic perspective in an interdisciplinary analysis

For the process to begin, two district viewpoints had to be identified through the browsing of newspaper articles on school district reorganization. Using database resources, two researchers were found that had similarly distinct views (or themes) and were used as grounds for analysis:

| | Theme 1: “A sociological analysis of rural education in Louisiana” (Smith, 1938). | Theme 2: “Consolidation of schools and districts: what the research says and what it means” (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011). |
|--|--|---|
| LEAs as a tool of social identity for the community. | LEAs, once reorganized, provide a natural center of social life for a larger community (Smith, 1938). | When a LEA leaves the control of the local community, so will each community’s sense of democratic identity. Within time, the town itself will take on characteristics of abandonment (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011). |
| Economies of scale in education operations and administration. | LEAs that are reorganized provide greater efficiencies with highly qualified staff. This is in addition to the new facilities and resources in which to draw from (Smith, 1938). | Reorganization is highly unlikely to improve educational outcomes or reduce budgetary expenses for education as additional expenses arise in transportation (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011). |
| A more ‘diverse’ institution in regards to academic and extra-curricular opportunities. | Consolidated LEAs, in offering a broadened academic, extra-curricular, and social education for students, will provide wholesome competition amongst a wider group of peers (Smith, 1938). | While consolidated districts offer a broadened program of studies and activities, students will receive less individualized attention, spend more time in transportation, and have less opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities due to increased competition (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011). |

This rubric was then used, along with a Glassian meta-analysis approach to "quantitatively aggregate the results of multiple studies to arrive at an overall conclusion or summary across these studies" (Arthur, Bennett, & Huffcutt, 2001, p. 8). For this research, only published studies accessible through ProQuest Dissertations and Theses were queried from a time period of 2000-2014 with Boolean operators ("case study" "survey research"), ("reorganization" "consolidation"), and "*rural" "*school." Citations were further narrowed down through a method of search refinement and human reading to dissertations that solely utilized a case study approach that examined either one district that has already been reorganized, or multiple LEAs reorganized into one district. The studies selected were as follows:



| Author of Study/Year | State | School District(s) | Demographics | Free/Reduced Percentage | Type of Study | Stage Completed |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Bethel, T. L. (2001) | Illinois | | 90.8% White* 3.6% A. Amer.* 3.6% Hispanic* | 24.0 percent | Case Study – Survey Research | After reorganization |
| Rodriguez, C. G. (2007) | Texas | | 4.0% White* 0.0% A. Amer.* 95.2% Hispanic* | 82.0 percent | Case Study – Survey Research | After annexation (state forced) |
| Sias, B. A. (2008) | West Virginia | | 99.04% White Unknown | 62.63 percent | Case Study – Survey Research | During/after reorganization (state forced) |
| Eide, S. L. (2010) | Oregon | Detroit/ Mill Creek | 84.6% White* 0.4% A. Amer.* 8.3% Hispanic* | 61.1 percent* | Case Study – Survey Research | After annexation attempt/ reorganization |
| Lotspeich, E. S. (2010) | Illinois | Bradford | 98.7% White 0.0% A. Amer. 1.6% Hispanic | 50.7 percent* | Case Study – Survey Research | After deactivation |
| Brown, P. D. (2011) | North Carolina | Buncombe County | 94.7% White* 1.3% A. Amer.* 2.1% Hispanic* | 69.3 percent* | Case Study – Survey Research | After reorganization |
| Oncescu, J. (2013) | Limerick (Saskatchewan Canada) | Assiniboia School Unit #5 | 81.6% White* 3.6% Minority* 14.9% Aboriginal* | | Case Study – Survey Research | After annexation |

The completed rubric and contextual data was assessed for the degree of inter-rater agreement using computer software which calculated a mode and mean, whereas potential discrepancies can be sorted and reanalyzed with additional statements in the computational program. Collected data has been aggregated graphically on a bar graph-- studies on the left side identify closer to Smith (1938) [-10], with studies on the right side identify closer to Howley, Johnson, & Petrie's

(2011) [+10] brief. Their strength of adherence to -10.00 or 10.00 determines how distant they are from a neutral stance, or 0.00.

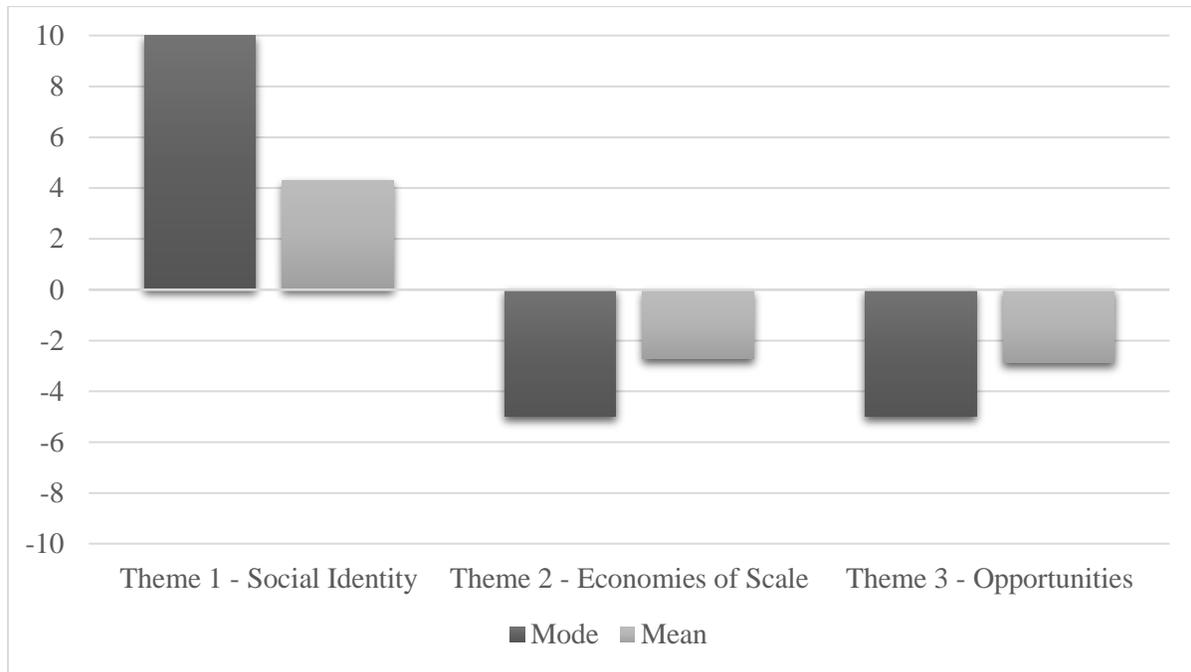


Figure 24. Table of Themes, Mode/Mean of Sample

| | T1 – Mode | T1 – Mean | T2 – Mode | T2 – Mean | T3 – Mode | T3 – Mean |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Overall Sample | 10 | 4.286 | -5 | -2.7142 | -5 | -2.879 |

Within the sample, it was found that the researcher’s first null hypothesis concerning perceptions of social identity aligned with Howley, Johnson, & Petrie’s (2011) policy brief [the community’s perceptions of loss of democratic identity (+10)]. The researcher’s second and third research hypothesis concerning perceptions of economies of scale and opportunities available, however, fell in line with Smith’s (1938) research [reorganized LEAs provide greater efficiencies with highly qualified staff and that a broadened academic and extra-curricular education would provide competition in more activities, versus less opportunities (-10, -10)]. Results were determined through the use of five independent coders to collectively verify themes. There is a shift in rural communities in the face of globalization, but this change should

take place with the knowledge of research-based perceptions of rural identity to replace vanishing regional social structures and diversifying commodities markets.

In terms of this thesis, the researcher found through analyzing the community members' perceptions with contemporary literature that (1) social identity is diminished through local education agency reorganization, but districts attempt to counteract this through athletic and extra-curricular success as a rallying point; (2) feasibility studies should be used to test for cost savings, instead of relying on research theories or community perceptions. Just because the community or board thinks reorganization will save money, doesn't mean it will, and (3) by sheer size, larger schools can offer more sections or elective courses. In terms of the argument for less athletic spots, students participate in different sports. There was, however, documented research that the distance traveled to school would directly disadvantage poverty students. In order to maintain the small school feel, building administration should be trained or work in a mentoring relationship with local education agencies that have been successful.

The connection of this interdisciplinary theory to contemporary literature and practice falls into a sea of information already pioneered—yet serves a unique purpose to examine seven case studies holistically for community perceptions. But because there is so much research already published with different viewpoints, and this study (in itself) did not verify a sole researcher's overall theory, this researcher cannot make an ethical assertion that this document supports or disconfirms previous findings. What this theory does do is “verify” certain portions of Smith's (1938) and Howley, Johnson, & Petrie's (2011) theories. This conclusion, ultimately, demonstrates that no one theory on reorganization will fit every case, but serves as a step closer towards fully understanding what shapes individual perceptions on rural local education agency reorganization.