SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION AND COMMUNITY COHESION IN ONE RURAL KANSAS COMMUNITY: MOUNT HOPE

by

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Abstract

Rural communities continue to consolidate and close schools across the country at an alarming rate. Debates surrounding school district consolidation have been known to cause deep tension throughout many communities. It is widely held that, schools in rural areas not only provide education, but create jobs, provide entertainment, and bolster social relationships within a region. Social relationships are necessary for the health and cohesiveness of any community. This in-depth case study of the rural community of Mount Hope identifies the change in cohesion over time. This research shows that there is a relationship between the closing and opening of the school and levels of community cohesion amongst some, but not all, of the groups. The key findings are that a range of social activities not directly related to the school have been affected by the closure. Personal interviews were conducted with local officials, school employees, group leaders, parents, and community members of Mount Hope. This study is relevant to planners, school administrators, and educators alike, as local communities across the state debate the value of district consolidation. The findings are beneficial to communities and school districts to help determine what is best for a community when considering school consolidation or closure.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my wife Allison for her constant support, love, and encouragement, and to my sons Hawthorn and Atticus.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Figure 1-1: Mount Hope Project Based Learning Elementary School

Photo by author (2015). Mount Hope Project Base Learning Elementary School

Introduction

Mount Hope is like many small rural communities in the Midwest; it has a few small businesses, a post office, and a school. Also like many rural areas, Mount Hope has struggled to keep even minimal economic and social infrastructure in place. I know this because I spent much of my childhood there.

Mount Hope lies on the western edge of Sedgwick County, and is 18 miles northwest of Wichita, Kansas. According to the US Census's Annual Estimates of the Residential Population, from April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013 accessed using American Factfinder the population of Mount

Hope has ranged from 813 to 816 people. (American Factfinder, 2013 Population Estimates). For the past three decades the population has hovered around 800-900 people in the community.

Over the past thirty years the community lost many long standing business, such as a family owned restaurant, two gas stations, an appliance store, a hardware store, a lumber yard, and two grocery stores, along with other small businesses. This is likely due to a number of variables that are interesting but will not be addressed specifically through this research. The community of Mount Hope has historically been dependent on agriculture. There are two grain elevators in the community, one is a Farmer's COOP. There are also many wheat, soybean, and cattle producers in the area.

A new school building was constructed in 1998, which replaced a three story brick schoolhouse built around 1900. The new building was used from 1998 until 2010 when school district USD 312 decided to consolidate and close the Mount Hope Grade School. The school was closed at the end of 2010, and was vacant in 2011 and 2012. In the fall of 2013 the schoolhouse reopened as Mount Hope Elementary, with a Project Based Learning (PBL) focus. Project Based Learning is an alternative teaching method that allows students the freedom to use activities and real world experiences to learn how to reason and problem solve. PBL does not use textbooks or give students grades, this makes the educational style very different compared to the traditional education model.

This research project explores the social relationships surrounding the school's closure, and reopening. This topic is important as there have been 19 school districts eliminated in Kansas between 2001 and 2011. These closures have directly affected over 25 communities whose schools were consolidated. For this study of the closure and reopening of the Mount Hope PBL School, I analyze the impact of community relationships through interviews with city

leaders, school officials, group leaders within the community, as well as residents of the community.

Research Question

The objective of the research is to examine the change within community group cohesion with the loss and subsequent reopening of the local school. My research question asks the following. For the community of Mount Hope, how has the closing of the school (combined with a two year vacancy) and the reopening of a nontraditional school, affected the cohesion of informal and formal groups in the community?

Community cohesion is defined as a willingness of members of a community to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper, by fighting exclusion and marginalization within the community, creating a sense of belonging for members, promoting trust, and offering members the opportunity of upward mobility.

Problem Statement and Significance

Rural communities continue to consolidate and close schools across the state and county at a high rate. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1939 there were 117,108 separate public school districts but in 2011 there were only 13,588 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). As for consolidations with in the state of Kansas, a 2011 report by the *Topeka Capital Journal* titled "School Consolidations in Kansas for the last decade" noted the elimination of 19 school districts in Kansas, between 2001 and 2011 (School Consolidations in Kansas for the last decade, 2011).

Debates surrounding school district consolidation have been known to cause deep tension throughout many communities. Newspaper headlines around the community have reported on

the fiscal impact, rivalry fears, travel concerns, and social and community changes that go along with school consolidations.

Community tensions have even resulted in physical threats. A local Wichita area school board member received threats over the consideration to consolidate with a neighboring town within the district, this was reported in the 2010 *Wichita Eagle* newspaper column titled *Report: Savings from school district consolidation not as great as thought* (Mann, 2010).

A number of academic researchers, as well as many rural community members, believe that schools in rural areas not only provide education for a community, but create jobs, provide entertainment, and bolster social relationships within a region. Social relationships are necessary for the health and cohesiveness of any community. This study focuses on the impact of social relationships within Mount Hope after the school closure and reopening.

Parameters of the Project

This research explores formal and informal groups and their relationship with the local school over the past five years. This was done to evaluate the level of community cohesion, as they are related to the school. Formal groups have elected officers, agendas, and goals. They include monthly civic club, weekly religious meeting, or youth activities within the community. Informal groups have no official membership requirements or elected leaders but likely have a prescribed location. Examples of informal groups would include a group of community members that meet for coffee every morning or a group of young parents that meet at the park weekly.

Relevance

Counties, regions, and states continue to face the decision to close rural schools through district consolidation. Rural areas continue to face challenges related to maintaining a sustaining

population, keeping educational institutions in place and fostering social interaction. This study is relevant in that it assists in understanding the impact of social cohesiveness within a community when a community is impacted by a school consolidation, closure, or opening. This research looks at community interactions in the wake of Mount Hope's closure, vacancy, and reopening of the local school. These research findings might not only lead to healthier, stronger, and more connected communities, but could also inform and aware residents, leaders, and school boards on the social implications of the impact on a school in a rural area.

Chapter 2 - Background

Figure 2-1: Mount Hope Larsen Community Center

Photo by author (2015). Mount Hope's Public Library (left), Community Center (center),
and LMNO Pizza (right)

Introduction

In this section I will outline information that will help in understanding the community of

Mount Hope as well as USD 312, and where they are as of today. I will cover a brief history of

Mount Hope, a history of USD 312 consolidation, the reopening on Mount Hope Elementary

PBL School, and current demographic information.

Mount Hope has been involved with USD 312 for over 40 years. USD 312 had

incorporated some other communities before combining and eliminating Mount Hope's High

School around 1970. It was not until 2010 that the elementary school followed. In 2011 the grade

school was vacated for two years, but was still owned and insured by USD 312. In 2013 the

school was reopened as a charter style PBL school that operates in many ways independently

from the rest of the school district. Figure 2-2 shows USD 312 boundaries in Reno and Sedgwick

Counties.

Figure 2-2: USD 312 District Map
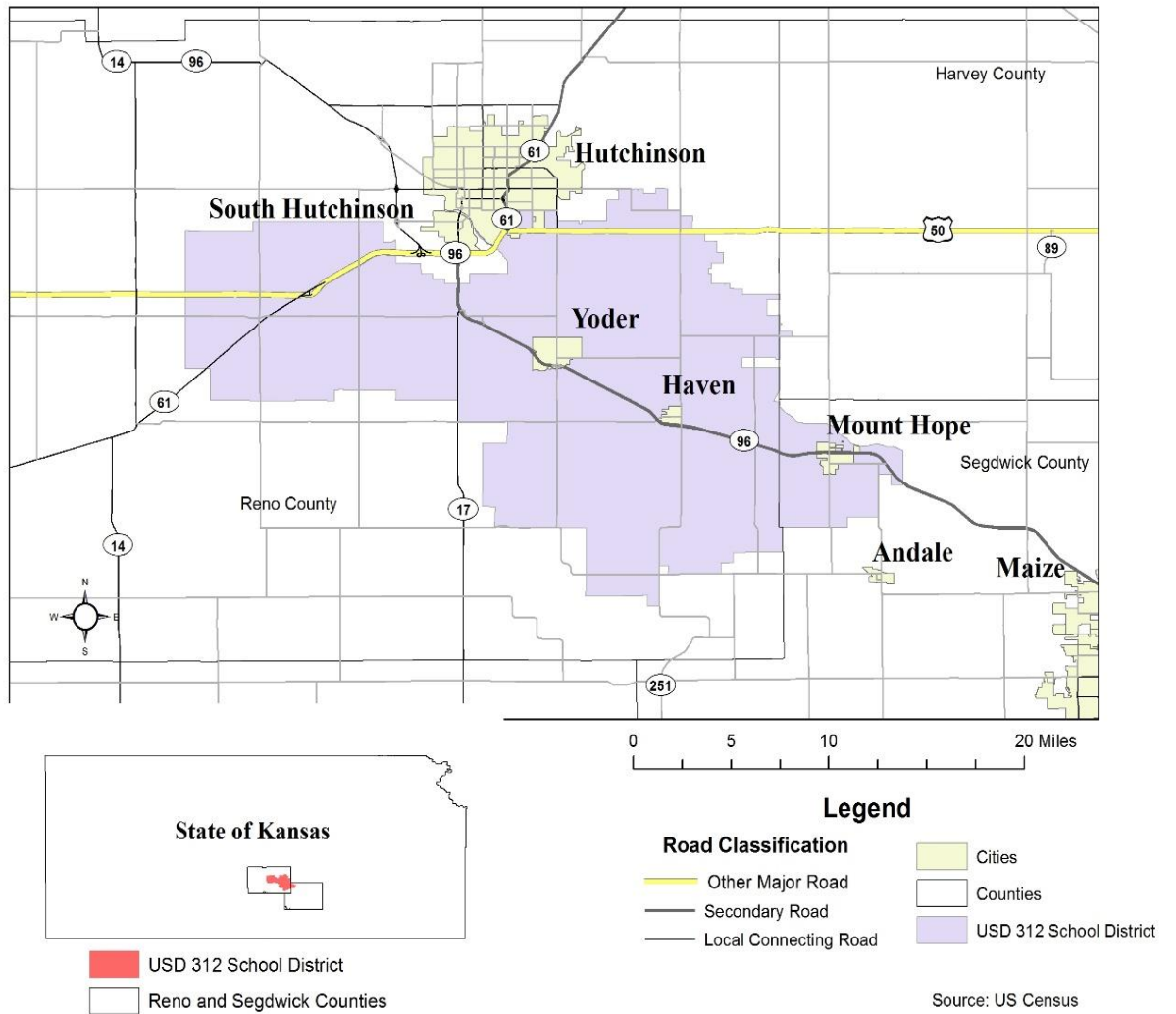
Source: shape file from US Census Bureau. 2014. TIGER/Line File,
https://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/tiger.html

Brief History of Mount Hope:

The City of Mount Hope was incorporated in 1887, as indicated on the city's website. In 1883 William Cutler wrote in the book *A History of the State of Kansas,* "The growing village of Mount Hope is situated in Greeley Township in the northwestern corner of the county. It has two stores of general merchandise, one agriculture implements store, and one blacksmith shop" (Cutler, 1887).

According to a 1910 historical account Mount Hope was praised for its location on the Missouri Pacific Railway. It was called a "thriving little city of about 700 wide awake and progressive souls" (Bently and Cooper, 1910).

The same author notes that:

> Mount Hope is prosperous in every way. It has up to date business concerns, fine churches and an excellent school building. The enrollment this year exceeds 300, which is remarkably well for a town of its size. In one part of the business section three different business concerns are located in the same building. (Including the) printing establishment of The Clarion. Mount Hope is really, in a botanical sense of the word, the greenest town in Sedgwick County.
>
> [It has] two banks, three restaurants, one weekly newspaper, general merchandise stores, one drug store, an independent telephone system, two first class hardware stores, two barber shops, one men's furnishing goods store, one jeweler, one meat market, two livery barns, one elegant opera house with a seating capacity of 600, one lumber yard, two blacksmith shops, one photograph gallery, one millinery store, two elevators and several doctors. Mount Hope's opera house is one of the finest in the state. It is fitted up with opera chairs, seats which are seldom found in theater buildings in much larger places, and a stage 40x30 (Bently and Cooper, 1910)

Today, that same Mount Hope is much different. It still is situated on a major transportation route, the four-lane K-96 Highway that runs from Hutchison to Wichita. But today, Mount Hope has limited establishments; one restaurant, and no grocer, gas station, hardware, or retail shops. The regional newspaper, *The Clarion,* (formerly the *Mount Hope Clarion*) is still in operation, but has moved the office and printing operation to a neighboring

community. Multiple interviewees noted that a many in the community blamed the completion of 4 lane K-96 Highway for the decline of local business, services, and goods.

USD 312 School Consolidation History:

According to Haven High Alumni Association's website, USD 312 was established in 1965 with the implementation of the Kansas Unification Law (Haven High Alumni, 2014). In the mid 1960's, Kansas school districts state wide saw many school closures and consolidations as the Unification Act allowed for the organization of planning boards throughout newly redrawn school districts (Kansas Heritage, 2014).

As part of USD 312 reorganization, the Haven school district expanded substantially. As growth continued voters passed bonds for a new Haven high school in 1968, and the building was completed in 1969 at a cost of $1,000,000 (Haven High Alumni, 2014). In 1973, the schools and communities of Mount Hope, Partridge and Elreka petitioned the Haven district to allow them to become a part of USD 312. This petition was approved and the enrollment reached an all-time high of 1,370 students, including 444 students enrolled in Haven High (Haven High Alumni, 2014). Mount Hope High School was still in existence until the 1973 merger with Haven.

The Mount Hope Grade School (K-8) continued operating in the former three story brick schoolhouse that was built around 1900. This is the same structure that the 1910 historical account mentioned was "impressive" (Bently and Cooper, 1910). The brick school was demolished in 1998, and a new school was built to the west of the former school. The new K-8 elementary school was in operation from 1998 until 2010 when the school was closed due to district consolidation. At the time of the closure there were over 100 K-8 students at the school.

Mount Hope School Reopening:

In 2012, the USD 312 School Board voted 4-3 to reopen Mount Hope Elementary PBL School. The school was closed for two consecutive years prior to reopening in 2013. USD 312 applied two times to be a Charter School but both requests were rejected. McPherson College played a large role in developing and encouraging alternative uses for the school (Malaby, 2014).

In the fall of 2013, Mount Hope Elementary PBL School opened and about 30 K-8 students were enrolled. Two full time teachers were hired, as well as a principal who split his time between Mount Hope and another school in the district. The PBL School attempted marketing outreach to the west side of Wichita to try to get higher enrollment, with limited success (Malaby, 2014).

Current Demographics

According to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Mount Hope's population has been stagnant for the last 5 years, with the population estimated around 800. Figure 2-2: Mount Hope Population Pyramid reveals that there are a large number of females under 19 years old, as well as males age 40 to 49.

The US Census's Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010 Demographic Profile Data reported that Mount Hope's Medium age is 43.8 years old, with 76.6 percent of the population over the age of 18. About 25 percent of the population consists of children under the age of 18. Other demographic findings using America Factfinder conclude that 98.2 percent of the community identifies as one race, with 94.1 percent identifying that race as white. The average household size is 2.47, with the average family size as 3.09 people. As for occupied housing, there is a vacancy rate of 10.1 percent for total housing units in Mount Hope. That means 35 of the 348 houses in the community are vacant. Nine percent of the vacancies are

on rental properties. Rental properties make up 27.8 percent of all occupied housing, with the

population in renter occupied units at 199 persons (2009-2013 American Community Survey, 5-

year Estimates, Table DP05).

Figure 2-3: Mount Hope, KS Population Pyramid by Age and Sex (2013)
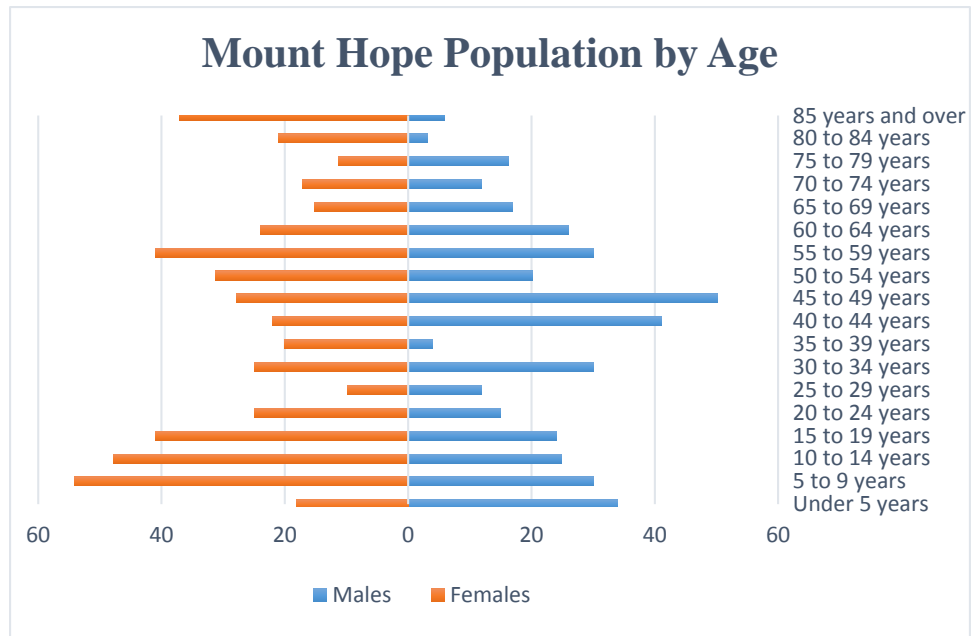
Created by author. 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates SO101 AGE AND SEX.
American Factfinder. US Census. Retrieved on March 18, 2015

Chapter 3 - Comparable Analysis

Figure 3-1: Mount Hope PRIDE Thrift Store and Office

Photo by author, (2015). Mount Hope civic organization PRIDE office and donation center

Introduction

The closure of public schools due to consolidation, budget cuts, or a lack of student population is nothing new. To help understand the issues of school consolidation and social cohesion, the following is an overview of each. Looking at my topic in two broad categories, school consolidation and social cohesion, I have been able to succinctly share the available literature on these topics and isolate examples to further use the information in my own research.

There are a number of academic journals, books, and papers written on the topic of school consolidation and school closures. There are also a number of newspaper, and popular

magazine articles that discuss issues with school closures, however information from these sources will be limited. A majority of the academic resources on school closures and consolidations were found through educational academic journals.

A comparable analysis on social cohesion and school consolidation is relevant for this project. This chapter will examine how public education and school district consolidation can effect community, it will also explore how social cohesion impacts a community through the educational institutions, and lastly I will explore the importance of social cohesion on a community.

Consolidation and Community

School consolidation is simply the merger of one school into another within a unified school district. Many communities, urban as well as rural, have and continue to face the issue of consolidation, often with a great deal of turmoil. Much research exists on the impact of school closures within a community, but Howley, Johnson, and Petrie (2011) indicate that the most recent studies on school consolidation deal with educational effectiveness, not economic, class struggle, or social concerns. My research presents some the impacts of the closing and reopening of the local school on social group cohesion.

Formal and informal groups play are part of a community, especially in rural areas where social interaction is often focused around the school according to Egelund and Laustsen (2006). These writers show that school closures mirror the life of a community. What does this mean for Mount Hope, as it is a rural town that has experienced the loss of a school, as well as the return of a school?

Communities face tension around the loss of a school within their community. Mount Hope is no different. Many community members and researchers alike debate the pros and cons

of district consolidation. Lyson (2002) explains that while some communities might benefit economically from school consolidation, they money saved could be forfeited in lost taxes, declining property values, and lost businesses Lyson (2002). Lyson (2002) emphasizes that within rural village's schools serve not only for a place for education but as a place sports, theater, music, and other civic activities. According to Lyson (2002) school's serve as symbols of community autonomy, community vitality, community integration, personal and community tradition, and personal and community identity (Lyson 2002). Regardless of the best intentions of a community or school district, school consolidation continues to challenge many communities.

Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2010) report that most students view consolidation positively and that parents and teachers view consolidation negatively. Surface (2011) expands on this, noting that when a community interest were ignored during consolidation proceedings, educations absenteeism and community disintegration increased Surface (2011). Surface reveals that because of consolidation, schools were no longer seen as a contributors to the local community (Surface, 2011).

Howley, Johnson, and Petrie (2011) state that with over a century of school consolidations that fiscal efficiencies have been met and it is no longer beneficial to consolidate in some areas. While this idea is not focused on in this study, it is relevant as the Howley, Johnson, and Petrie (2011) study is current, and an academic study on school consolidation that can and will influence other research.

Martens (2003) concludes in his study that within school-consolidation decisions, leaders should reconsider the value of smallness, respect the limitations of technical rationality, balance business and efficiency models with social and human considerations of fairness and equity, and

honor the sacredness of place, local culture, values, history, and tradition. Martens (2003) implies that the size of a community and school matters for leaders, as well as for the community as a whole. Martens' (2003) contribution to this research is important as Mount Hope's reopened school has a much smaller population of students and staff, and the community as a whole has a stagnate population.

Consolidation can have far-reaching effects on student, school staff, parents, and the community at large. Transportation time and transport costs can weigh heavily on a school district and its students, but so can the daily life of school administrators, teachers, and students, whose daily lives are transformed by working or studying in a new place or by the arrival of dozens of newcomers (Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel, 2010).

In contrast, research from Duncombe and Yinger (2007) found that school consolidation among small communities and rural districts showed some financial benefits. These would include such things as increased building funds for projects, lower operating cost per student, and larger districts might be able to employee specialized teachers (Duncombe and Yinger, 2007).

Social Cohesion Impact through Education

In the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* article, "What We Know about Social Cohesion," Stanley (2003) defines social cohesion as, "the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper" (Stanley, 2003, p. 16).

A more useful definition by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development further defines the roles within social cohesion, as the following: A cohesive society works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility. (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011).

For this research I have combined both of the above definitions. I define community cohesiveness as:

> a willingness of members of a community to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper, by fighting exclusion and marginalization within the community, creating a sense of belonging for members, promoting trust, and offering members the opportunity of upward mobility.

To further understand this definition, "willingness of community members to cooperate," refers to the action of community members to participate in voluntary (non-paid) activities within the community that are beneficial to the community in some way. These activities can be measured by the number of attendees within an organization, and the organizations can be measured as well. Schools within a community often offer a potential for organizations to form, and the potential for participants to form other organizations outside of the school.

Educational institutions play an important role in a community's ability to survive and prosper. The phrase 'in order to survive and prosper' may seem dramatic, but I believe it is valid considering the number of Kansas communities that have failed or are failing, with the loss of a school being part of the reason for the demise. It should be noted that a community might survive but not prosper. For example, a community might have its basic social needs met as a whole, but lack growth socially, economically, and in other domains.

How does education influence social cohesion? Forrest and Kearns (2001) and Heyneman (2003) draw conclusively that school systems affect social cohesions through four mechanisms. First, school systems are expected to teach the rules of the game- those that govern interpersonal and political actions. Second, school systems are also expected to provide an experience consistent with those citizenship principles, in effect decreasing the "distance" between individuals of different origins. Third, school systems are expected to treat all students

16

fairly. Fourth, school systems are expected to incorporate a range of interests and objectives to students as to provide a common underpinning for citizenship. The success of a school system is based in part on the ability to garner public support and consensus, and hence its ability to adjudicate differences expressed by different portions of the public over educational objectives (Heyneman, 2003).

Heynemen (2003) concludes that from the outset, public education has had social cohesion as one of its central purposes. Although there have been attempts to gauge the effects of the education experience on more or other aspects of behaviors or attitudes to date, there has been little effort to gauge the impact of an education institution's role on social cohesion as a whole (Heynemen, 2003).

Social Cohesion and Community

Dr. Pamela Rutledge wrote an article in *Psychology Today* titled "Social Networks: What Maslow Misses". In the article Rutledge notes that Maslow's hierarchy of needs model, which was developed in 1948 and is used in a range of disciplines, missed the connection to the function of social networks and basic needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs model is classical psychology model that is used to explain human motivation. The needs form a pyramid with the base layer being physiological, followed by a need for safety, then love, followed by esteem, and self-actualization at the top (Maslow, 1943).

Rutledge (2011) states that,

None of Maslow's needs can be met without social connection. Humans are social animals for good reason. Without collaboration, there is no survival. It was not possible to defeat a woolly mammoth, build a secure structure, or care for children while hunting without a team effort. It's more true now than then. Our reliance on each other grows as societies become more complex, interconnected, and specialized. Connection is a prerequisite for survival, physically and emotionally (Rutledge, 2011).

Rutledge (2011) statement is important and should be considered in the discussion of social cohesion and community. So is the question, "What is social cohesion?" Koonce (2011) addresses this in the article, "Social Cohesion as the Goal: Can Social Cohesion Be Directly Pursued?" he notes that, although difficult to define, social cohesion is not difficult to recognize. A cohesive society demonstrates its strong social cohesion in the way it manages conflicts and its citizens' propensity to stick together (Koonce, 2011). These ideas will be explored through the interviews.

Koonce (2011) also provides a very useful definition. Social cohesion is, "a measure of the degree of trust members of society have in each other and in society itself—their willingness to cooperate with each other, manifested in voluntary actions that are in accordance with social norms."

While Koonce (2011) examines cultures as a whole and not small groups or neighborhoods, the definition applies universally. The research finds that the idea of cohesion should be thought of in broad terms. Koonce also notes that social cohesion is a performance variable, a byproduct of other activities and conditions. These "other activities and conditions" can be impacted on the local level, like from community groups, or public intuitions such as schools (Koonce, 2011). This is applicable to my research as I will be looking at how the performance variable (Mount Hope School) impacts social cohesion in community groups.

Social capital is defined as networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectivity (Collins English Dictionary, 2012). Heyneman (2003), states that economic development is only possible through human cooperation (social capital) and that cooperation can be broken into two major elements: 1)

institutional rules that guide organizations, and 2) stabilizing traditions within the organizations themselves. The latter would include schools and educational institutions (Heyneman, 2003). It is interesting that social capital can play a role in cohesion. Capshaw (2009), summarizes that government actions need to be positive to influence social cohesion and thus influence, social capital. Capshaw (2009) shows that voluntary groups create greater social cohesion, which equals less crime, and in turn equals less social breakdown of "social capital."

Chapter 4 - Methodology

Figure 4-1: Mount Hope Farmer Coop

Photo by author (2015). Mount Hope Farmer's Co-op grain elevator

Introduction

This study investigates the possible loss or gain of community cohesion through the use of in-depth single case study, using in-person interviews, with the objective to analyze the impact of community relationships with the closing and reopening of the school. The research question asks: for the community of Mount Hope, how has the closing of the local school (combined with a two years vacancy) and the reopening of a nontraditional charter school, affected the cohesion of informal and formal groups in the community?

Case Study Selection:

Much thought has gone into the decision to explore a single in depth case study as my research method. The decision to research a single case study appeared to be the best option to answer the research question and because it allowed time for research, interviews, coding the interviews, and summarizing the data. The selection of Mount Hope is also important to me, as it is a community I am familiar with and have insight into as I lived in the community, and attended USD 312 public schools from 1994-2000. Mount Hope is at an interesting place and time that is both unique in many ways but relevant to the broad issues of school consolidations and community cohesion. For example, Mount Hope is rural but surrounded by growing urban areas, it has lost many local businesses but has seen a stable population in the last 5 years, and lastly it lost a school but also was able to revive a different type of school. All this said, the selection of Mount Hope serves as an excellent example of the issues surrounding school and community relationships.

Relationship to Participants:

This project required multiple days in the community to complete the interviews. Some interviews were scheduled in advance and some were not. I allotted time to be available to meet with community members based on recommendation of others. I allowed for spontaneous meetings while I waited in public settings, such as the library and the local pizza parlor. While I did know some of the interview participants, I did not know many of them. Having not lived in the community since May 2000 there was a great deal of time and distance from the participants I did know.

Community Interview Selction:

City officials, group leaders and participants, school officials, and both new and lifelong members of the community were asked to participate in the interviews. Nineteen interviews were conducted with the original goal of interviewing approximately 20 key members with connections to the community.[1]

There was a large number of organizations within the small community that were represented and discussed by the interview participants. These include: the mayor and city council members, the police department, two local churches, current and former Mount Hope School employees, a Masonic Lodge, a volunteer fire department and emergency response team, a Boy Scout and Girl Scout troop, a Little League Baseball organization, the Farmers' Co-op, and the K-96 Corridor Development Association. While these groups are in Mount Hope some of the active members lived outside of the city limits. Active group members, for this research paper, would be members who might have been elected, or are long standing members who attend meetings at least 50% of the time. I interviewed active group members regardless if they lived outside the city limits, but this only applied to two participants.

For this research, I have divided the interviewed groups mentioned into two categories, Formal and Informal. A subset of the Formal group, mentioned is the Semi Formal Group. Formal groups will have some or all of the following characteristics: elected officials, dues, voting by members only, and a scheduled meeting time. City Council would be an example of a formal group. Another subset of the formal group is the Semi-Formal groups. Semi-Formal Groups have common goals and largely focus on learning and/or problem solving. For this

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[1] As for the interviews, participants were informed that this project was approved by the Kansas State University Internal Review Board and that it was compliant with Human Subjects as mandated by federal laws and regulations.

project semi-formal groups have some of the following; regular meetings, voting on issues, possible dues, more open membership than formal groups, and can have non-elected officials. Semi-formal groups are less structured than formal groups, but still meet to serve a community need. An example of this would be the community bus that transports students to Andale School.

Informal groups, have common interests and aim to foster friendship in the community. For this project informal groups are defined as organic gatherings, which allow for open membership, with no elected officials, no official agenda, and no monetary obligations. A prime example for this is a group of community members who meet for coffee every morning. Informal groups, like the other groups, range is size and scope. An example would be a group of youth who meet after school at the library, they play computer games, and hangout nearly every day at the same place and around the same time.

Interviews

Participants for this project were selected in multiple ways, by using public information I attained a list of city officials, a few civic organizations and members, and some local school employees. Starting with this list, I was able to make initial contact (Appendix A), and asked participants for recommendations for other interview candidates. By doing this I was able to get the number of interviews I desired. The IRB Constant Form was emailed to the first group of participants.

Interviews took place at the location of convenience for the interviewee. Interviews were mostly done in the home or place of business of the participant. A few were conducted at the public library, or a religious center. Interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to over and hour. All participants signed the informed consent form after reading it. A copy of the IRB

Application was also made available to them, as well as access to the final report, and a copy of the transcript if requested.

Questions evolved as the interviews progressed, questioned were then built off of previous interviews (Appendix B). Questions aimed at understanding the participant's history with the community, and explored the groups they were involved or aware of in the community and how these groups might have changed in the last five years. Interviewees were given non-leading questions concerning the closure and reopening of the local school. If not brought up naturally throughout the interview, questions concerning the schools' effect on the community was discussed towards the end of the meeting.

Interview Strategy

For my project I interviewed formal, semiformal, and informal group members. Groups ranged in size, scope and function. Key group members along with current and former group participants, school staff and parents were interviewed, as well as civic and religious organizers in the community. Each interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis as outlined below.

Interviews explored the existence, continuation, and growth or decline of rural social groups within the community due to district consolidation. Key members of the community were asked to participate in the interviews. Interviews were completed one-on-one, in a setting that was the most comfortable for the participant. There were 15 interviews conducted with 19 total participants, as some of the interviews were with more than one person. Interview participants were given the option to self-identify their name and title for the publication of the findings.

Formal and Informal group members were asked questions regarding their role in the community or within their group, to explain how the closure and reopening of the local school

has changed group dynamics also the groups relationship to the school. Lastly, the participants were asked to provide other potential interview subjects.

After being in the community for two and half days on January 5-7, 2015 I determined I had reach a good stopping point, as participants were stating the same general information time and again.

Methods of Analysis

The method of analysis involved identifying key themes and indicators, such as the perceived levels of social activity within a community, possible problems, and prominent attitudes in the community concerning the school, and natural community strengths that relate to community cohesion. All interviews were recorded. Interview data was collated, analyzed, and reviewed to answer the research question.

To address contradictions between the interviews, the recorded interviews were studied in more detail. No contradictions were apparent, but slight inaccuracies in some accounts did accrue. Outside relevant sources could have been used to explain the differences (like newspapers within the region) but were not needed.

As for summarizing the research findings, there were over 25 groups mentioned during the interviews, groups included religious organizations (Methodist Church, Federated Church, ALF Group), civic groups, (Tree Board and PRIDE), and social groups (Senior Center), as well as informal gatherings at a local restaurant (LMNO Pizza), and Woodland Park Pond. Of the 25 groups mentioned, 19 of the 25 were deemed as significant. A group needed to be mentioned 6 times by different interview participants to be significant. That is roughly a quarter of the total interviews.

Chapter 5 - Findings

Figure 5-1: Mount Hope KS

Photo by author (2015). Mount Hope, downtown looking north.

Introduction

The interview process provided a great deal of insight on the community's thoughts and feelings about the local school, USD 312, and community engagement as a whole. Over the course of two and half days, I met with a range of community members to hear their thoughts concerning community cohesion within groups over the past five years. Through the interviews I heard much information. I heard about the hopes and dreams of a community on the fringe of a growing metro area. I heard the fears and anger of some that believe the community was dying. I heard rumors and gossip about suspicious allegiances and retribution. I also heard about what the local school means to community, and how social groups within the community have been affected by recent events.

Research Summary

A majotiry of the particpaints invloved in the study were upset about the closure and even the reopening of the school. The shock of the closure sparked some within the community to attempt to organize and reopen the school by force (having a majority of pro Mount Hope school board members voted in), remove the school from the USD 312 (through a petition), and for some a total boycott Haven as a community. This intitial attempt did not continue. There are a number of community groups that have stopped meeting due to individuals who have chosen to distance themselves for a variety of reasons. A few groups have expanded because of the closure and reopening (ALF, Federate Church). Most have not, based on interview responses. The new school is not largely supported by the community because of the confusion of what a Project Based Learning school is. While the community wants a school, they appear to be unsure about the school they now have. Staff even expressed concerns that the school could be be closed again.

General Perceptions

Nearly every interview mentioned some level of resentment towards the school board or even to the community of Haven as a whole due to the closure of the local school. Some of the participants, who had school age children, were not informed about the strengths of the new school. Other participants refused to have anything to do with USD 312, even though their children wanted to stay within the district. A few participants had children at the new Mount Hope Elementary PBL School and noted that their children growing and learning and enjoyed the non-traditional structure.

At this time it appears that the school age students of Mount Hope have three options for education. For K-8 grade students there is Mount Hope Elementary PBL School, Haven

Elementary School, or Andale Elementary School. With the closing of the school in Mount Hope in 2010, Andale become one option for Mount Hope residents. About 30 Mount Hope children are now attending Andale schools. Andale is a rural community 7 miles southeast of Mount Hope and importantly it is outside of USD 312, as seen in Figure 2-2. It is also interesting that Andale High School has been a longtime rival to Haven High School.

From the interview responses, there has been some surprising growth within the community over the last 5 years. This appears to be mainly from religious, and community focused civic organizations. For example the local Methodist Church affiliated youth group, Accepted Loved Forgiven (ALF), has been attracting students from the three schools in the area weekly. They have grown considerably in the past 2 years from 15 students in 2012 to over 40 students today. ALF serves students from ages 12 to 18, and is in the process of starting a weekly group for younger students as well.

While it appears that ALF has been successful, others groups, like the Prairie Festival Committee have not been. Table 1, The Growth and Decline of Mount Hope reveals some surprising findings by showing active and declining groups within the community. It also includes groups that were active in the past 5 years, but are not currently. While this does not represent every group in the community, it does provide an idea of what kind of groups the community is supporting, and it also displays the influence of the local school.

Table 5-1: Growth and Decline of Groups within Mount Hope

	Activity Growth	Average Participation Score	Number of Respondents	Activity Decline	Average Participation Score	Number of Respondents
Formal Groups	Library Board	0.8	8	Prairie Festival	-0.429	6
	City Council	0.5	7	Federated Church	0.166	10
	PRIDE	0.86	15	--	--	--
	Methodist Church	0.2	9	Carpool/ Bus group	-0.222	9
	MHCD	0.636	9	Scouts (Boys/Girls)	-0.222	9
	Tree Board	1	9	96 Development Cord.	-0.333	6
	--	--	--	School Activist	-0.333	12
	--	--	--	T-Ball/ Little League	-1	9
Informal Groups	Senior Center	0.8	9	Carpool/ Bus group	-0.222	9
	ALF (youth group)	1	11	--	--	--
	LMNO Pizza	1	14	--	--	--
	Library Group	1	7	--	--	--
	Pond	1	10	--	--	--
Average		0.800	9.82		-0.324375	8.75

Coding Interviews

After the interviews were conducted, I was able to listen to them again and code them accordingly based on involvement, relationship to the school, and current and past operation. This process evolved over time. Having recorded interview conversations allowed me the opportunity to listen, and re-listen to the interviews to fully understand the responses. No two interviewers were alike, though many had similar thoughts and feeling about the school's impact on the community.

In my first review of the interviews, I tallied information on the interviewees concerning what groups they personally were involved in, and what groups were they no longer active in. This helped bring understanding to interviewee participation in the community, but it did not

help with answering my research question. As I reviewed the recorded interviews again, I expanded my search to include all active and inactive formal and informal groups in the community that they interviewees mentioned. I tallied these findings as, growth (1), no change (0), and decline (-1) in an excel document. This allowed calculations to view the growth, decline, non-activity, and average active scores, and helped to better understand the range of the groups discussed.

After reviewing and discussing these results, the data was refined further in order to measure the change from 2010 to 2014. By asking the questions "was the group active in 2010", "is the group currently active in 2014", and "did the interviewee reference the school?" I was able to code the responses and draw definitive conclusion regarding the level of change within the community. The newly added categories, were coded with a yes (1) or no (0), and provided a 0 to 1 range on which was used to measure the impact on the community. The range from 0 to 1 in each cell is the average for the groups.

Table 2, Change in Community Activity, shows the bridge from the impact on the school to community groups in order to measure the levels of community cohesion. As seen in the table, groups were separated into four categories, Was Active Average, Is Active Average, Change, and Relationship to School. Change was calculated subtracting the Is Active Average by the Was Active Average. This results ranged from -1.00 meaning great decline or activity to 1.00 meaning great positive growth and activity. The Relation to School results also varied in scope from 1.00 equaling the greatest significant impact to .025 equaling the least substantial impact. As shown in the table, the Methodist Church for example had a 2010 Activity Level of .55 and a decreased 2014 Activity Level of .36, showing a Change of -0.18. It shows a strong Relation to School with 1.00.

Table 5-2: Change in Community Activity from 2010 to 2014

	2010 Activity Level	2014 Activity Level	Change	Relation to School
Methodist Church	0.55	0.36	-0.18	1.00
PRIDE Civic Organization	0.86	1.00	0.14	0.93
MH Comm. Development	0.91	0.55	-0.36	0.36
Senior Center	0.90	0.90	0.00	0.80
Carpool	0.22	0.88	0.65	0.89
Library Board	0.90	0.90	0.00	0.80
City Council	0.75	0.88	0.13	0.25
Scouts (Boy and Girl)	0.89	0.11	-0.78	0.89
Tree Board	0.33	1.00	0.67	0.78
ALF	0.45	1.00	0.55	1.00
96 Development Corridor	1.00	0.75	-0.25	0.50
Prairie Fest.	0.57	0.43	-0.14	0.86
Federated Church	0.67	0.55	-0.12	0.75
School Activist	0.83	0.50	-0.33	1.00
LMNO Pizza	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.86
Library Hangout	0.29	1.00	0.71	1.00
Woodland Park Pond	0.20	1.00	0.80	0.90
T-Ball/Little League	1.00	0.00	-1.00	1.00

Comprehensive Analysis

After coding and tallying the interviews, I was able to draw some conclusions concerning the school's relationship on community cohesion. Table 2, Change in Community Activity, shows the range of activity within the community. Of the 25 groups mentioned 19 were deemed significant. Nineteen groups had more than 6 responses, making them substantial for the study.

After the groups were found and summarized in Table 2, the relationship to the school was analyzed. This provided the needed information to bridge community groups to the local school.

Some of the findings were expected, such as the reduction of Girl and Boy Scouts with the impact of the school in the last 5 years. This is also the case with little league baseball and T-ball. A possible explanation for this is that youth are participating in these activities where the attend school (Haven or Andale).

A surprising finding was the Methodist Church results from Table 2. Change ranked -.18, and relationship to school was 1.00. This illustrates that the church has become inactive because of the school closure and reopening. From the interviews conducted, there was much said about the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church appears to serve a different roles within the community, and it provides in many ways for the community at large. It has also struggled to keep a full time pastor, and maintain a vibrant congregation. The most interesting aspect of this is that the church hosts a thriving youth groups, (ALF) that continues to grow. ALF was spoken of highly by most of the participants within the community, there did appear to be tension concerning the lack outreach efforts in Mount Hope with references to the desire to see the ALF group participate or involved in church services on Sunday.

The ALF group results from Table 2, indicated that they have been directly affected by the changes in the local school. In fact, with interviews from two leaders of ALF, it was made known that the division in the community over the school closure and reopening has made ALF grow abundantly, from 15 students to over 40. It was noted that when the group started only local Mount Hope youth who attended, but the leaders stated that they are seeing an influx of youth from the surrounding communities (Haven, Andale, Burrton, and Colwich). The fracturing of the student population throughout the region has helped recruit more students to attend the weekly Wednesday service. While ALF is related to the school, in that participants are students, it is a group that is thriving because of community connectivity and youth connections. In fact ALF makes it evident that cohesion can happen without the school.

Another surprising finding was the Tree Board, with a significant relation to the school, and a change rate of .67 (Table 2). The Tree Board is a long standing civic organization that's primary aim is to provide funds to plant and maintain public trees. While interview participants noted that the groups has been less active in the past, it recently has seen an increase in activity thanks to the Project Based Learning philosophy of Mount Hope Elementary School. School staff, and community members noted that the Tree Board had put in a request for proposal and that the local school students had submitted a design for the project. School staff and Tree Board Members appeared pleased by the arrangement that was still in the works when interviews were conducted. The connection between the school and the Tree Board is a positive example of how the impact the school has had on a formal group in the community. Noticeably that is fostering a more cohesive community.

Comparing 2010 and 2014 Activity Levels

Figure 5-2: 2010 and 2014 Activity Levels represents in a bar chart the change in groups over time. These findings were created from Table 2, Change in Community Activity from 2010 to 2014. Figure 5-2 shows both decline and growth ranging from group to group. Only the Senior Center and the Library Board show no change from 2010 to 2014.

Figure 5-2: 2010 and 2014 Activity Levels
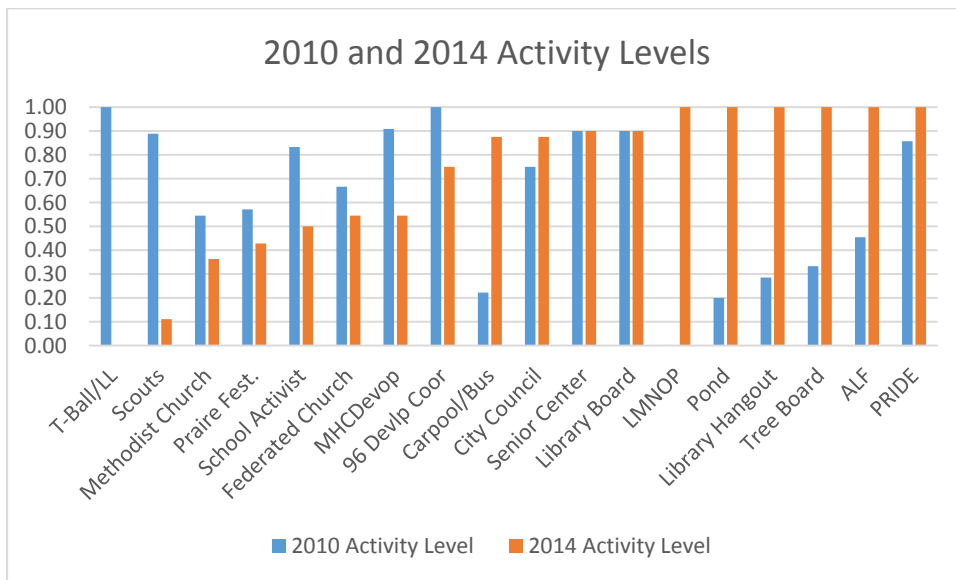
Activity Levels to the Relationship to the School

When interview participants were asked about community groups and their relationship to the school, it was stated or inferred that this was in reference to the 2014 PBL School and not the 2010 Mount Hope Grade School. Figure 5-3: Activity Levels to School Relation provides a visual of the groups' relationship to the school. Figure 5-3 shows some unpredicted results, such as the PRIDE's connection to the school, or the Tree Board. The closer to 1.00 the Relation to School is the more impact the school had on the 2014 activity levels.

Figure 5-3: 2014 Activity Levels to School Relation

2014 Activity Levels and Relation to School
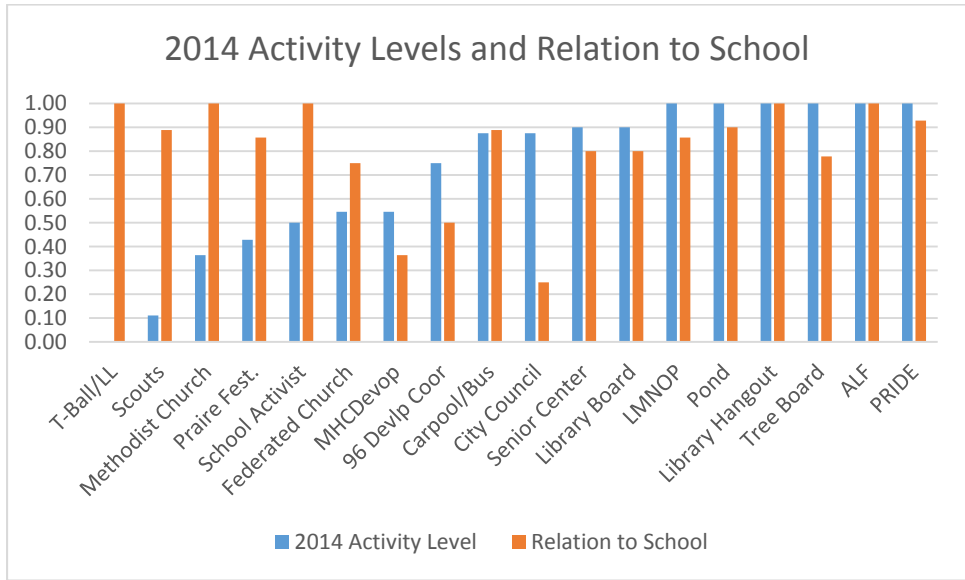
Change and Relationship to the School

Figure 5-4: Change and Relationship to School is scatter plot adapted from Table 2. Figure 5-5 shows the same data as a bar graph. The results from Figure 5-4 show no significant trend line. This demonstrates that groups were affected in different ways over the change in time according their relationship to the school.

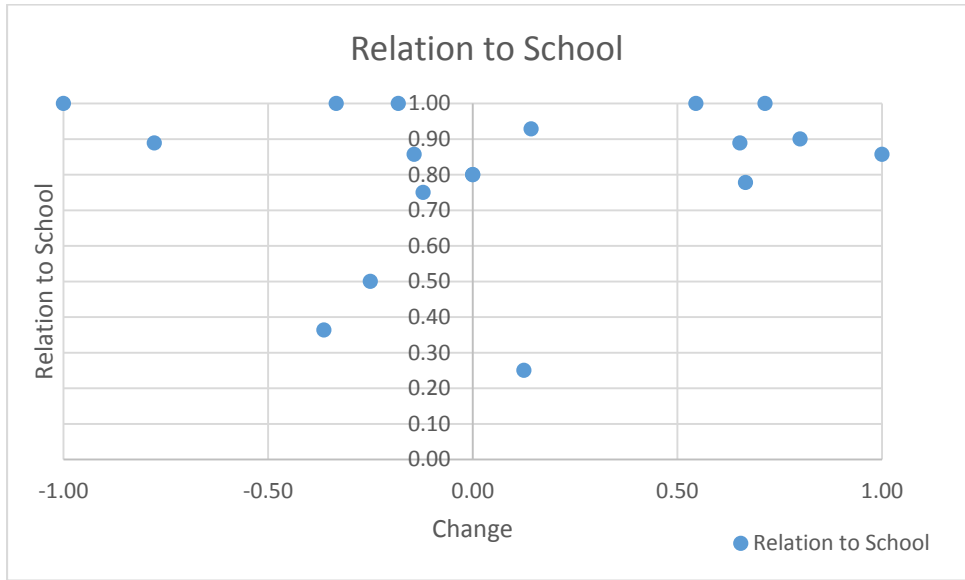**Figure 5-4: Change and Relationship to School (Scatter)**
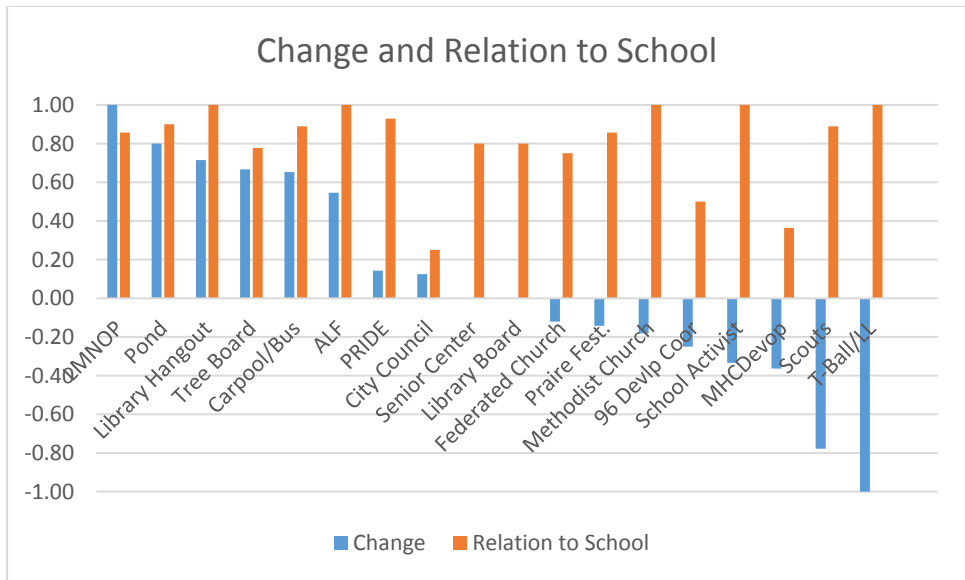

**Figure 5-5: Change and Relation to School (Bar)**

2014 Activity and Relationship to School

As 2014 was addressed more by participants a majority of the results related closer to 2014. Figure 5-6: 2014 Activity and Relationship to School shows a negative linear trend line on a scatter graph comparing 2014 group activity levels to their relationship to the school. As the

relationship to school goes up activity levels decrease. This figure does take into account the outliers in this model without this it would have neutral trend line.

Figure 5-6: 2014 Activity and Relationship to School
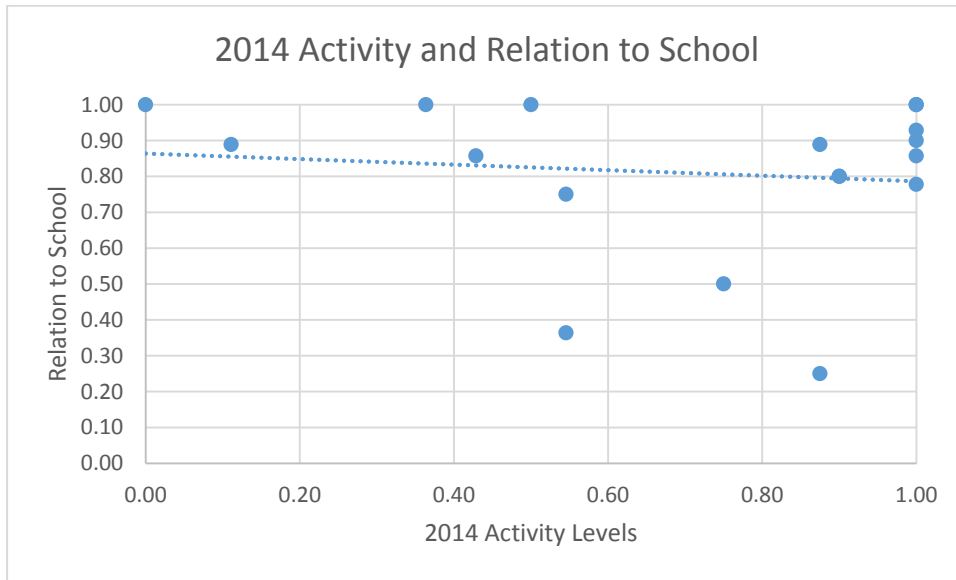
Summary of Findings

Initial findings indicate that Mount Hope's aging population that has been active is becoming less active as they are "dying off" according to multiple interviewees. There are also younger families in the community who are less engaged due to time pressures with work, and children school obligation outside of the community. From the 15 interviews conducted 19 groups were identified and measured to show the change in community cohesion over time. There was change in community groups' activity levels, as well as group in relationship to the group's connection to the school. This resulted in mixed findings with some groups being stagnant, others declining, and still other increasing in activity.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

Figure 6-1: Mount Hope City Pond

Photo by Sheri Cauble Jones (2012). Woodland Park walking trail and fishing lake
Retrieved from http://www.city-data.com/picfilesc/picc79212.php

Introduction

My research question asked, for Mount Hope, how has the closing of the school and subsequent reopening of the school, affected the cohesion of informal and formal groups in the community? This investigation shows the connection between social cohesion in group relationships to the closing and reopening of the local school. The findings confirm that different groups were impacted in different ways, such as some groups increased and others decreased in size because of the school. While there are many possible areas of interest, for this chapter I have highlighted accounts that show the most dramatic changes, and explain why these changes are important to the research question. The findings discussed look at the impact on youth focused

groups in the community, the growth of some informal groups, and the differences between the Methodist Church and the ALF youth group.

Brief Summary of Key Findings

Importantly is there a correlation between the closing and opening of the school and levels of community cohesion amongst most of the groups. The closing and reopening of Mount Hope Elementary PBL School, has had a wide effect on the community. While some of the results presented in this research were as expected, other results were not.

Relation to Anticipated Results

It was anticipated that rural social groups would have fewer social activities, shorter lived groups, and total loss of formal groups and/or organizations. This decline would be directly related to the closure of a school within the community. This proved to be true with a few groups, but not for every group.

Upon the reopening of the school, I predicted that there would be a minor resurgence in social cohesion within the community groups but, that the two year closure of the school disturbed recognized formal and informal groups that took years to establish. This cannot be verified, as some groups have increased, and other decreased during the same time.

The two year closure, did appear to impact morale on the community, but was also a rallying cry for a few groups. In fact, a few groups organized immediately after the school closed. The Carpool/Bus Group, as well as a School Activist Group both become active to make changes after the loss of the school. As for long established groups, PRIDE has increased in activity and is more connected to new school than it was in the past.

Youth Groups

Groups related to youth actives suffered the largest impact overall, such as the decline of Girl and Boy Scouts, and T-ball. But unexpectedly one youth focused group (ALF) has seen huge growth in the past 4 years. Why are these groups at the opposite end of the spectrum from each other? These youth centered groups require many of the similar features to function, such as adult leadership, organization, funding, and space to meet. One difference is that ALF is a co-ed group, which by be why it draws a large crowd. ALF is also an open group, with no membership dues, and no requirement to attend every week. One of the leaders, Cristina Parsons, noted during the interview that the group has been so successful because, "kids bring more kids" every week.

Boy and Girl Scouts require more of a commitment of time and money, and these groups are not co-ed. Likewise Little League baseball is seasonal (summer), and also requires a commitment of time and money. The ALF group has a wider scope of participants and requires less commitment of time, and money to attend. It has also had strong leadership and direction. The ALF groups is not achievements based like Scouting and competitive sports.

Methodist Church and ALF

Upon the reopening of the school, I predicted that there would be a minor resurgence in social cohesion within the community groups, but that the two year closure of the school would disturbed established groups that took years to establish. The Methodist Church is a group that has experienced a decline in the last few years, and a lack of cohesion, as one church member noted "I no longer feel that I fit in or accomplish anything". It is interesting that while the Methodist Church as an organization has struggled to maintain a full time pastor and keep have an active congregation, their sponsored youth group (ALF) has thrived.

Interviewees noted that the ALF group acts largely as a separate entity from the rest of the congregation that meets on Sunday mornings. A few interviewed members expressed that the ALF group does not attend at the Methodist Church because "there is no children in the services anymore, so anyone who has a young family stay for a month or two and then seeks some place where there are children."

The Methodist Church and the Federated Church have both experienced a decline in the last few years, both of these groups have also had a relatively strong association with the school. The decline of religious institutions in Mount Hope, might very well be due to the aging population, and the natural decline of members. The ALF group has been successful by capturing a niche in the community. There are no other activities for the youth of the area that are able to capture the youth in a way that does not interfere with school or other activities. ALF does not appear to compete between high school sports, community loyalties, or other conflicting issues but bridges the gap between Andale, Haven and Mount Hope. Tate Strasner, founder of ALF noted that "It's helped my youth group in a way, because now it brings more students from more places that bring more students from more place."

Informal Groups

When interview participants were asked where unofficial meetings, hangouts, and groups within the community meet, many responses focused on the new restaurant called LMNO Pizza, as well as the recently paved and lighted walking trails around a small pond in the north section of Mount Hope.

As the only eating establishment in the community LMNO Pizza has been able to cater to the needs of the community by providing food, entertainment, and social respite. LNMNO Pizza has also provided some part time jobs for local high school students. Interview participants did

not brag about the service, speed, or quality of the pizza but most appeared to be impressed with the void the pizza shop filled in that it offered a place for community to happen. One interviewee noted that the owner was "like family", but that the store hours were "a little laid back."

The owner Vance Summer expressed his thoughts on community this way, "I didn't get into this thinking I was going to be rich, but oh wow, look how happy some of these people are that this place is here. And look at this youth group, with 20 kids with a place to hang out and eat. Even if it's not busy all the time, it doesn't really matter, as long as the bills are paid, I don't care."

Another organic place for community member to meet is the walking trail around Woodland Park Community Lake (known just as "the Pond"). Accord to City Manager George Dick, the city applied for several grants and were able to dredge the pond, add fish, build a gazebo, add an ADA paved walking trail around the pond, install street lights, and add restroom facilities. From the interviews, it appears that the updated features are having a positive impact on the community. Multiple interviewees noted that it was the place to meet up with local residents, as well as an attractive spot for family to stop as they pass through the area.

The improvements to the Pond, have turned an overgrown muddy hole into a destination for some in the community. According to George Dick, there has been weddings held at the gazebo, and there is good fishing in the water. The newly added restroom is the only public restroom in the community.

The Pond and the LMNO Pizza serve a need, as well as foster community informally. They are both newer ventures that went into place since the school closed in 2010, and have come fully into their own since the reopening in 2013.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendations for further research could be conducted on a range of school consolidation and community cohesion issues. This would include doing multiple case studies within a region to view cohesion levels of several communities. Another recommendation for further research would be to broaden the data collection methods to include more interviews or surveys, this would provide a larger pool of information from the public and could reveal information about groups that might not have been represented in this study. Lastly, conducting similar research to look at urban school consolidation and cohesion could be an interesting comparison to this research.

Concluding Thoughts

Based on interviews with community members, it is apparent that the community has undergone an identity crisis of sorts. With the drastic change of the local school in the last five years, community relationships continue to strive for a healthy balance of keeping the past alive, while striving to accept the current changing dynamics. This is seen in a number of ways: Mount Hope is rural but no longer just an agricultural hub. Mount Hope has a school, though it is non-traditional, and has a drastically smaller student population. Mount Hope lacks the businesses that once kept the town in motion, such as the recent sale of First National Bank of Mount Hope to the First National Bank of Hutchison in 2012.

The initial perception after conducting and reviewing the recorded interviews was that the Mount Hope residents continue to strive for harmony within and outside the community, but largely feel that forces beyond their control have left a negative impact on the community. A number respondents expressed concerns related to community involvement, notability that

Mount Hope's older involved population is literally dying off, and that younger families are less engaged due to time pressures.

In many ways Mount Hope is similar to many other communities of the same size and scale that dot the map across the state. Mount Hope is also unlike many similar communities in that it is located close to two larger communities (Hutchison and Wichita), it is located on a major thoroughfare (K96 Highway), and it has had some new housing developments in the last decade, and has had a stable (but low) population for the last 30 years.

While most of the interview participants were dishearten by the loss of the traditional school, many were also optimistic about the future of the new school and the future of Mount Hope as a whole. Some participants noted that losing the school caused irreversible damage but not everyone agreed with this. Lifelong Mount Hope resident and PRIDE member Jeremy Caffrey stated, "Closing the school has made us (Mount Hope) stronger, because we are all pissed off about one thing."

Community cohesion might be a standard of measurement for communities, like Mount Hope, who are facing the challenges of school district consolidation, elimination, or closure. While community cohesion is needed for groups to "survive and prosper" within a community, it is not the only factor that needs to be considered when a community faces the decision surrounding education. Nevertheless this research shows that community cohesion is important at the individual, community, and regional levels and should be taken into account for this matter.

Update

       As of March 9, 2015 USD 312 voted 4-3 to close the Mount Hope Elementary PBL School. The three votes to keep it open came from the board members with Mount Hope addresses. The Hutchison Newspaper reported that there was about 35 Mount Hope citizens at the School Board Meeting (Clarkin, 2015). As it stands now, 2015 will be the last year that for the PBL School to be open, the fate of the building and future of the student and community is unknown.

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Appendix A - Initial Contact Letter

Initial Contact Letter:

Dear (Mount Hope Community Member)

My name is Joseph (Joe) Foster, and I am a graduate student at Kansas State University finishing my Masters of Regional and Community Planning. Part of my degree requires a Master Research Project. My project is focusing on Mount Hope and the impact that the Mount Hope Elementary School closure and reopening has had on community groups.

Your name was given to me from (Community Member). Thank you for your continued efforts in Mount Hope. Civic, Economic, religious, social, fraternal, or agriculture groups play an import part of any community. Your role is of interest for my project.

The purpose of my project is to come to an understanding on the level of change within community groups before and after the school closed, as well as since it has reopened. It is my goal to interview about 20 community members for this project, to be able to get a variety of responses from as many groups as possible. Interview will be face to face if possible, and should take roughly 30 minutes to complete. Your name, title, and organization will self- identified, or confidential if you wish.

You have been asked to participate in this project as you are connected with the community. Your insight in valuable, and import to this research, and could be beneficial to the community and the area in the future.

Thank you for your help and participation!

Joseph Foster

Appendix B - Interview Questions

Sample Interview Questions:

Background:
- How would you like to identify your name, title, and organization involvement for this interview?
- How long have you lived in Mount Hope?

Community:
- What group(s) are you involved in the community of Mt. Hope? How long have you been involved?
- How long has the organization been in Mount Hope? Why did you join?
- Has your role changed since joining?
- How often do you meet? Are the meetings open to anyone?

School:
- What is your knowledge of the Mount Hope School 2010 closure and 2013 re-opening?
- After the 2010 closing of the school, what changes did you see in your group? (Membership, attendance, funding, ect)
- Since the school has re-opened as a Mount Hope Elementary Charter School, what changes have you seen within the group? What changes have you seen in the community at large? What has surprised you the most?
- Is the community healing with the addition of the new school in the community?
- How do you see your role within the group changing with the re-opening of the school?
- In your opinion, is Mt. Hope a cohesive community?
- Based on the conversation we have had, who would you recommend that I talk to next?