The Effect of School Consolidation on Fidelity to Traditional Value Systems.

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THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION ON FIDELITY TO TRADITIONAL VALUE SYSTEMS

by
Steve Kay
Nancy Harpood
Rosanne Kruzich Russell

Termination Report
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Kentucky State University
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Frankfort, Kentucky
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THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION ON FIDELITY TO TRADITIONAL VALUE SYSTEMS*

Steve Kay
Nancy Hapgood
Rosanne Kruzich Russell**

Abstract

Two rural Kentucky counties were sites for a survey measuring the effect of school consolidation on the transmission of values between parents and children. Owen County, in Central Kentucky, has a completely consolidated school system. Johnson County, in Eastern Kentucky, has a county system with multiple elementary sites and an independent system. Traditional community values chosen for examination were social responsibility, acceptance of authority, individualism, expression vs. restraint, equalitarianism, and localism vs. cosmopolitanism. It was expected that in the highly consolidated school system the effects of consolidation would be reflected in a greater disparity between values of parents and their children. Results indicate various social, economic, and cultural influences have greater impact than consolidation on values held by individuals. Knowledge of the history and economic development of the two differing areas came to be seen as fundamental for an adequate interpretation of results.

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**The authors are, respectively: Program Director and Principal Investigator, Co-Investigator, and Research Associate.
INTRODUCTION

It is a basic tenet of modern educational theory that students should be offered as consistent and broad a spectrum of study as possible, and that this broad course of study is best achieved by larger, centralized schools. In rural areas this has meant a tradition throughout the present century of pressure for consolidation of schools. This attitude toward education, accelerated by James B. Conant’s writings in the late 1950’s, forever changed the pattern of rural schooling in the U.S. (1) No longer was a simple basic education considered adequate. Modern instruction was deemed necessary for success in an increasingly modern world. Rural education was made to look more and more like its urban counterpart. Rural children were encouraged to seek broader horizons, to value a life different than their own. The inherent conflict between traditional rural values and the modernizing influence of the schools sets the theme for this study.

When the policy of consolidation in rural areas was first debated in the late nineteenth century, three reasons contributed to its being so readily accepted. First, schooling was a hazardous affair in many places, often conducted by barely educated teachers in inadequate facilities. Critics could point convincingly to numerous examples of poor or non-existent opportunities for education, and they could point to rural areas more convincingly than to urban areas as illustration. Second, professional educators and other reformers often blamed poor schooling for the widespread disintegration of rural life which accompanied industrialization and urbanization. Third, policy discourse in education was dominated by urban and urban-oriented educators who tended to advocate extension of an urban, centralized model of education to rural America. (2)

This approach to education inherently devalued rural education and, implicitly, rural life. Throughout this century, by national trend and state legislation, school districts were drastically reduced in number, centralized larger schools became predominant, and rural families migrated to other areas. (3)

In Kentucky, school systems have responded differently to the various pressures to consolidate. Given diverse geographic and economic situations combined with varied and often adamant local attitudes, school systems vary considerably in their organizational structures. The two counties in this study present quite different school system organizational structures. Where one system is completely consolidated, with one elementary and one high school, the other has two school systems: a county system with multiple elementary sites, and an independent system. Given the belief that education is central in the transmission of values, it was expected that these three widely different school systems would affect the transmission of values differently.
Specifically, it was hypothesized that children attending consolidated schools away from their home communities would reflect the traditional values of their communities less than children attending school within their home communities.

This paper examines these two counties and their school systems, considers relevant historical, geographic, and economic information, and places within this context the analysis of data relevant to the transmission of values between parents and their children in these two counties. (4)

DISCUSSION

Values and attitudes of people are influenced and shaped by countless factors, not the least of which in rural areas is the land on which they choose to live. The productivity of that land largely determines the people's bond to it, hence, their economic and social well-being. Productive land yields employment opportunities and money to spend, invest, or to promote further economic, cultural, educational, or recreational growth. In turn, such growth enables expansion of services, accessability to markets and differing ideas, enlarged resources and facilities.

County Description

An extensive economic and sociologic survey of Owen and Johnson counties would overshadow the purpose of this study. However, to lend depth to the data presented and to offer a fuller perspective on the differences that have been found, we describe the counties by location, resources, use of land, and growth and development of the land by its inhabitants. We also provide information about the development of the school systems and how this reflects and influences development of the counties and communities within them.

The first and most noticeable difference between Owen and Johnson counties is physical or topographic. Owen County lies in the outer edge of the fertile Bluegrass Region of central Kentucky; Johnson County lies in the rugged mountain region of far eastern Kentucky. The Kentucky River forms Owen County's western border and Eagle Creek its northern boundary. The land of the county consists of wide ridge tops and richer bottom lands along the waterways. The Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River and its tributaries chiseled the Cumberland Plateau to form the ridges and hollows of Johnson County.

Examining in more detail the people and land of the two counties, we find shades of difference in their rural character. For instance, Owen County covers 351 square miles with a population of 7,500, while Johnson County covers 264 square miles with a
population of 22,300. (5) This makes Owen County one of the largest counties in the state with one of the least dense populations. In Johnson County, people are more concentrated in the larger towns and cities.

The use of the natural resources in both counties established a pattern of growth which has continued to the present. The fertile bottomlands of Owen County, which drew its earliest settlers to the region, have continued to support approximately 900 farms representing three quarters of the total land area. Of these farms, over three quarters depend on their produce for a livelihood. Johnson County's soil, though the richest of the mountain counties, is generally poor and growing worse because of mine drainage and lack of proper farming techniques. Most farms are still of the subsistence type. Johnson County has nearly 300 farms comprising about one fifth of the land area and less than one third of these farms are considered commercial. (6) In both counties the main cash crop is tobacco, with corn and hay of secondary importance to the agricultural economy. Owen County uses a greater proportion of its land as pastureland for beef and dairy cattle, while Johnson County uses a generous amount of its land in extracting coal reserves, and to a lesser extent, oil and natural gas.

With the emergence of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad in 1882, Owen County was effectively cut off from its former markets. Although the railroad only reached Owen County's northernmost border, it absorbed much of the county's river traffic and commerce and ended the promise of the flourishing river towns as potential cultural, economic, and social centers. Population in Owen County peaked in the 1890's at 17,000. (7) Except for a brief rise in 1940 when iron ore was mined to meet the shortage caused by the war, population has been on the decline. As a result of the declining population in the county, the economic base has remained small, services are few, and facilities limited or non-existent.

Unlike Owen County, Johnson County was not devastated by the introduction of the railroad. On the contrary, the railroad established an important link to markets outside the region and attracted Eastern capital to invest in the county's coal and fuel products. Johnson County is served by the Chessie rail line which runs through the middle of the county and by highways running north-south and east-west. Because of these adequate transportation networks and the natural resources which have remained in high demand, Johnson County experienced industrialization sooner than Owen County.

It must be noted that despite the abundance of its natural resources, Johnson County residents historically have not been the primary beneficiaries of their county's richness. The land and its inhabitants have consistently been exploited by people
outside the immediate county and state. The fuel demands of our
industrialized nation have been cyclical and the capital neces-
sary to extract the mineral wealth subject to the whims of out-
side investors. Residents often have been forced to seek employ-
ment outside the region or be unemployed or underemployed as an
external market dictates. Therefore, though figures indicate a
sound and specialized economy in Johnson County, fluctuating
demand for coal has created a boom or bust economy. This trend
has implicit repercussions on the stability of social systems and
the internalization of social and individual values.

The residents of Owen County are primarily natives, a quarter
of whom work the land for their livelihood. (8) Retail trade and
service occupations provide the greatest percentage of jobs out-
side the field of agriculture. Many people, however, commute to
one of the nearby cities -- Louisville, Lexington, Frankfort, and
Cincinnati -- for employment.

Johnson County has a somewhat smaller percentage of natives,
relying more on in-migration to meet its employment needs during
periods of economic boom. The Johnson County work force is pri-
marily involved in non-agricultural jobs. (9) Mining, manufactur-
ing, and providing services to county residents provide the larg-
est share of available jobs; construction, transportation, com-
munication, and utility companies offer employment to others.
Industrialization in Johnson County has made significant advance-
ment in the last fifty years, providing a variety of skills and
job opportunities to the residents and an opportunity to remain
in the county. Few jobs are available outside the county other
than in the coal industry, so there is little commuting to larger
cities.

School History

School history in these two counties parallels their develop-
mental history. It is useful in this context to briefly review the
more important changes and the conditions which influenced
them. (10)

Earliest records show actual operation of public schools in
Owen and Johnson counties began in 1845 although private schools
existed in both counties prior to this time. These school dis-
tricts depended on local taxes and tuition for their establish-
ment and survival. By 1860 there were sixty district schools in
Owen County and fifty two in Johnson County. Z.T. Smith, Super-
intendent of Public Instruction in Kentucky in 1867, recognized
the inefficiency of the district system and recommended consoli-
dation as a means of remedying many of the problems. (11)
Although educators realized the district system of schooling had
grown too large, social and economic forces external to education
made reduction of schools impossible. Population and commerce
dramatically increased after the Civil War causing the number of
By the turn of the present century, the policy of school consolidation was almost unanimously approved by educational administrators. The County Board Bill of 1908 mandated school district consolidation. This law was financed by a compulsory twenty cent tax, the first required tax since 1848. Response to the County Board Bill differed in Owen and Johnson counties. Owen County established four independent districts, outside the regulation and tax of the new legislation, but overall the number of school districts did decrease. There was no noticeable difference in the Johnson County system as a result of this bill. Johnson County School Superintendent Fred Meade stated in 1910 that the physical features of Johnson County are such that "I fear consolidation and transportation can never be had." (12)

With additional legislation passed in 1920, the legislature moved to mandate school consolidation in 1934 with the passage of the New School Code. This code mandated that the number of school districts be reduced in order to provide better curricular offerings and facilities, that administrative costs be reduced, and that the disparity between rural and city schools be corrected. In 1934, Owen County had fifty-five white schools, two colored, and four independent school districts. By 1938, three independent districts had merged with the county system and only twenty-nine schools remained throughout the county. The only significant change in Johnson County was in the reduction of independent school districts from seven to four. There were no efforts to consolidate the eighty-one schools throughout Johnson County until 1954 when the state began subsidizing transportation.

Much educational legislation after World War II reflected concerns raised by wartime conditions. More and more educational requirements were being handed down to local districts by state and federal government. More financial responsibility was assumed by sources outside the local districts and fewer policies and procedures could be devised at the local level. Bitter opposition began to mount in communities wanting to maintain some semblance of control over their schools. Unfortunately, the economic situation in most Kentucky counties prohibited local districts from maintaining existing buildings, building new ones, or hiring personnel to meet the ever-expanding government requirements. Consolidation was once again promoted as the means of alleviating the fiscal, personnel, and administrative woes of the public school system. In 1949, the remaining independent school in Owen County merged with the county system, and by 1954 the county had reduced the number of schools to nine. Between 1954 and 1955 Johnson County reduced the number of its schools from seventy-eight to fifty-nine.
From 1954 to the present there has been a steady reduction in the numbers of schools in both counties. In 1968, Owen County voted to completely consolidate its remaining six elementary schools into one centrally located school. Their school system has remained stable with one elementary and one high school since that time. In 1968, Johnson County still had twenty-five county schools and two independent school districts, but by 1972 these were reduced to the present six elementary schools and one high school in the county system and an elementary and high school in the one remaining independent district.

This brief review of the systematic reduction of schools in these two counties stresses the point that regardless of local circumstance or opinion, prevailing educational attitudes often determine the course of action. We now examine the effect these structural decisions have had on value transmission in the two rural counties.

SURVEY METHOD AND RESULTS

Method

In considering the question of the effects of consolidation on value orientation, a two-part questionnaire was designed to investigate demographic factors and consonance of values between parents and children under differing conditions of consolidation. The questionnaire was administered to fourth and tenth grade students and a portion of their parents in Johnson and Owen counties.

Of six elementary schools in Johnson County, three were chosen as sites for the testing based on their location in the county and their size. In total, 177 out of 350 fourth grade students completed the questionnaire. Forty-four parents from this group completed the questionnaire representing 25% of the tested population. In Johnson County, ninety tenth grade students from the Paintsville High School and 435 tenth graders from Johnson Central High School completed the questionnaire. Forty-four parents from this total group completed the questionnaire, representing only 9% of the total tenth grade population.

In Owen County, 128 fourth graders and 123 tenth graders were given the questionnaire. Thirty-four grade parents completed the survey, representing 23% of the population. Thirty-four parents of tenth graders responded, representing 27% of the tenth grade population.

No characteristics were determined to be representative of those not responding. Success rates of various field testers were a primary determining factor in parent response.
Demographic Data

The first questionnaire measured various demographic factors, such as length of residence, number of family members living in the county, and the distance they lived from the school. The sample closely resembled county profiles related to income and family size, with only slightly higher percentages of higher income respondents. The vast majority of respondents in both counties were Baptists, with fewer than 10% indicating other denominations. Church activity does vary between counties, though, with a much higher percentage of activity indicated in Owen County. For related figures, see Appendix A. The more fundamental nature of religious practice in Eastern Kentucky allows for more informal activity, and thus may account for the difference. Interestingly, rates of church activity compared between parents and children indicated that in Johnson County families are involved more as a unit, whereas in Owen County, children's attendance, especially older children, was significantly less.

Residence and social network information helps form impressions of characteristics of the county population as a whole. Owen County has a slightly more indigenous population with 84% having lived there longer than 10 years. In Johnson County this percentage dropped to 76%. Both counties revealed a fairly high degree of mobility within their populations, especially among younger families. Seventy-five percent of residents in Owen County and sixty percent in Johnson County had lived at their present house less than 10 years.

Family network data revealed that a full 12% of respondents in Johnson County indicated no relatives living nearby. In Owen County, there were no such respondents and over 56% claimed to have extensive extended family networks within the county or nearby. This information suggests that Owen County has a more rooted population, grounded in extended family situations. In Johnson County, we would more likely see smaller, more mobile, less connected family units. In soliciting information about who people called on for assistance, those responding in Owen County showed higher percentages in the family categories. This information plays a significant role in interpreting the information presented on value transmission.

Value Scales

The second questionnaire consisted of an amalgam of value scales designed to measure degree and consonance of value orientation. In the data analysis we focus on the scales measuring social responsibility, orientation to the values of acceptance of authority, expression vs. restraint, individualism, equalitarianism, and localism/cosmopolitan orientation. The remaining scales, which test personal competence, ego strength, focus of control, and additional measures of localism, were used...
for validity test measures. In the data analysis several filtering procedures were utilized to lend useful perspective to the data and to isolate the prominent determining variables. Distance from school and size of family produced the most significant correlations. Near and far distance was determined by a 10 mile radius around the school. Large families consisted of six or more in the household. Other filtering variables used were income, length of residence, and religious preference.

The Social Responsibility Scale used in our study was developed by Berkowitz and Lutterman in 1968. It was based on an earlier scale developed by Dale Harris and on one developed by Gough et al. These scales indicate that high scorers embrace the traditional ideals of society, are more likely to participate in and contribute to various organizations, and are more apt to be concerned with problems outside their immediate surroundings. The socially responsible personality typically values thinking for oneself and exhibits more tolerance, inner direction, sociability, and self confidence.

The Dimension of Value scales were developed by Wilthey based on previous research by Bales and Couch. These four scales were designed to measure orientation and strength of the values identified as acceptance of authority, need determined expression vs. value determined restraint, individualism, and equalitarianism. Information provided on these scales allows for comparison with national averages.

Attitudes of localism are usually dominant in rural settings. This survey sought to measure the degree of difference between parents and their children with regard to these attitudes by administering scales designed to measure localistic as opposed to cosmopolitan orientation. The scale developed by Dye in 1966 was used which measured interest in local as opposed to national affairs. Results show that high localistic scorers generally are leaders among the community, long time residents, older, and influential within their community or social networks. Responses to items on this scale showed high validity test correlations with other test measures of localism.

These value scales combine to present a profile stressing consistent characteristics within scores. They all relate to similar dimensions of personality and how those dimensions present themselves in daily life. We were looking for significant differences between the respondents from the two counties and for differences between parents and their children within each of the counties.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data reveals a general difference in the value profiles between Johnson County parents and their children as
compared to a general similarity among Owen County profiles. The children in both counties tend to have stronger, more positive views of themselves and society and are less tied to localities where they grew up. Individualism and equalitarianism are values held strongly by the total sample. There are more marked differences between parents and children in areas such as need determined expression, where children tend toward expression and their parents tend toward restraint, and acceptance of authority, where again the value is held more strongly by parents than their children.

Data information for parents and their corresponding child/student groups is presented in Appendix A.

Owen County respondents, overall, score higher on the Social Responsibility Scale, exhibiting a strong leaning toward the traditional values of society; they show higher levels of formal participation in church and civic organizations; and they exhibit more tolerance for the beliefs of others. Johnson County respondents are highly individualistic, show less tolerance for others, and are involved less in formal community activities. Scores for Johnson County parents and children show significant positive correlations on the localism/cosmopolitanism scales. Younger parents in both counties tend to be more involved, more concerned about issues, and more accepting of others. Large families also show a greater inclination in passing beliefs on to children, with a high number of significant, positive correlations between parents and children in that group.

The disparity between Johnson County group scores as opposed to the noted similarity of Owen County group scores is unexpected. The rural setting of Johnson County and its non-consolidated school system would lead us to expect a high degree of value transmission. Clearly, other demographic factors play a major role here. We found in Owen County that families were more settled in their lives, were grounded in extended family situations, and while not prosperous, were living more stable economic lives. Johnson County residents exhibited a desire to be elsewhere; there were fewer extended family situations; a greater awareness of urban areas; and marked increased mobility. Certainly, economic and employment opportunities have contributed to the development of these attitudes and values. Owen County's attachment to the land based on their primarily agricultural situation compared to the varities of the Johnson County situation with a dependence on mining and outside economic influences can explain some of this difference.
CONCLUSION

The consolidation movement at the turn of the present century was part of a larger movement of significant change in our society. Education was seen as the means for maintaining the values of the society and training young people for new and changing roles. Formal schooling became, in part, a means to make children different from their parents, or different from their immediate community or sub-group. This role of formal schooling was most obvious in relation to immigrant groups, and, as the century progressed, in relation to low income groups and the rural population. In rural areas consolidation has been the foremost vehicle intended to counter what was once viewed as provincialism and lack of concern for formal education and to prepare rural youth for urban life and upward mobility. Reformers have often pictured rural residents as unambitious and old-fashioned, with a lifestyle and values that inhibit future possibilities for their children. Consolidation has been seen as the means to improve rural education, in part by removing control over education from the immediate community.

Given such an impetus for the consolidation movement we would expect to find notable discrepancies in values between parents and children sent to consolidated schools, especially in rural areas. But such an expectation is too simple. Consolidation as a national movement is one thing, and its impact on a particular place is quite another. While such impact cannot be denied, it must be understood in the context of particular places. Consolidation of the school system is only one factor among many which influence values. In the two counties considered, we conclude that by itself consolidation is not a major factor in shifting values despite theoretical intentions of consolidation advocates. Our research suggests that factors such as the degree of homogeneity of the community and the strength of other institutions such as the family and the church, may mitigate for the loss of the community school or soften the influence of consolidation where it is present. In addition, generalized descriptions about changes in rural culture do not always apply. Both counties are atypical in many ways and their situations counter theoretical descriptions offered regarding change in rural areas. Except for their schools, neither county is very industrialized, bureaucratized, centralized or professionalized; they still have a strong sense of community.

Kentucky as a whole generally lags behind national trends related to modernization and has done so also in the area of school consolidation. Kentuckians have, nonetheless, been aware of national trends in consolidation and have been affected by them. Local circumstances and local opinion have often yielded to outside pressures. At both the state and national levels there is a seemingly single-minded determination to apply
wholesale solutions to individual problems with little regard for particular needs.

The descriptive information and demographic data we have offered about the two counties suggests a richness of difference with regard to developmental history, community structure, occupational patterns, and the organization of the schools. Despite differences, the question of consolidation and the pressure for it seem to have been the same in both counties.

The inferences we are able to draw from the value profile data, especially in the context of the question of school consolidation, have marginal value. We do note some differences between similar groups in both counties. These differences were to some extent opposite of what we would have expected (i.e., Owen County slightly more traditional/localistic than Johnson County). These differences led us to re-evaluate the importance of other demographic and sociologic factors influencing value transmission. The research also expanded the implication of the question of the appropriateness of school consolidation, especially in rural areas. Historic and descriptive data, too, must be analyzed when considering the effects of school consolidation.

For further research in this area we would suggest: work within counties or school districts which are generally more comparable than the two sites chosen for this study, in order to minimize the number and extent of intervening variables; development of questionnaires which investigate specific questions related to consolidation, school organization, school-community relations, and feelings of community, with all such questions developed only after preliminary investigation of local conditions; and, a more detailed description of any site utilized for such a study, including such topics as developmental history, organizational structure and process, and evaluation of existing school-community linkages.


4. A more detailed presentation of this information is available from KSUCRS Office of Education/Psychology Research, Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky as Technical Bulletin No. 5: "Public School Organization in Rural Areas: An Historical Overview of Consolidation with Reference to Two Kentucky Counties." (unpublished)


9. Ibid., p. 87.

10. Many sources contributed to piecing together information for the overview of consolidation in Kentucky's public school system. All sources are listed in the bibliography. Those considered most helpful in providing clarity and substance to the evolution of consolidation as state policy are: Thomas Clark, *A


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## APPENDIX

### Data Tables

#### Mean Scores on Value Scales

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#### Distance from School

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## Correlation Coefficients

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<th>Group</th>
<th>Social Responsibility</th>
<th>Acceptance of Authority vs Restraint</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Equalitarianism</th>
<th>Cosmopolitan</th>
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## Preference to Live

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<tr>
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<th>Medium Town</th>
<th>City</th>
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<td>Johnson Parents</td>
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<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>