

Engaging under engaged voices

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This paper explores the failure of sub national, state policy in the metro dominated Northeastern US in addressing true root cause issues of small rural educational agencies when the standard narrative has been consolidation(Thomas & Fulkerson, 2015).

The paper specifically looks at the underlying narrative that rural community members have been ignored, and that their needs are viewed as secondary to the urban areas. The paper uses quotes, and dialogue from online discussions, as well as letters and newspaper coverage to examine the impact of metro centered reforms on rural community's internal politics.

The paper will also examine the split between urban and rural areas, and with rural thought ways command greater attention in the international and national dialogue, with researchers concerned about the growing cult of personality in rural areas. Authors have cited the local school as the center of a community, and question if local control is even feasible and viable. This paper adds to what Campbell Scribner called "The fight for local control" in his important book on the subject.

The research use Stake (1995) exemplar case study approach, conducted via a content analysis. The frame of research utilized Scott's 1990 Hidden transcript, indicating subaltern populations code switch and narration switch dependent on the presences of elite. Utilizing two specific case studies, over the period of two years, this paper examines the public, official, elite narration in contrast to the online, anonymous subaltern narration.

Preliminary findings indicate that the official government produced documents and the media narrative tend to harmonize, while online discussion and opposition to the policy of school consolidation are cast as "emotional" and "stubbornly opposed to improvement."

The findings indicate opposition to the policy implementation utilizes historical and contemporary examples which contra indicate official assurances. Further, in almost all instances of successful implementation of consolidation, many of the negative consequences (closure of building, increased tax rates, decreased opportunities) are realized as repeat cycles of economic downturn leads to additional cuts.

Policy and research recommendations reveal the complexity of educational policy reformation, and increased neoliberalism (Cervone, 2017) in the devaluing of place, which inflames urban and rural complexities.