SCHOOL CLOSURE: THROUGH THE EYES OF TEACHERS

A Dissertation by

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DEDICATION

To my wonderful wife, Dana, along with my two children Sheena and Shad, thank you all

for enduring patience and encouragement during this educational challenge in my life.

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ABSTRACT

This Phenomenological study examined eight teachers in Kansas, who experienced school closing within the past three years. The results of this research indicated themes of death and dying, organizational culture, change, and emotion. The research further identified five distinct categories for each of the themes during interviews. The five categories were communication, political, community, transition, and student.

Unlike traditional empirical research design, phenomenological research focused on descriptions of experience as an expression of one's unique meaningful experience rather than a learned response to stimuli (Polkinghorne, 1989). Data were analyzed using the general processes of Moustakas (1994) and van Kaam (1959, 1966). Analysis used an eight step techniques to identify essential characteristics of the experience.

Teachers recommended that district leadership staff conduct clear communication with school staff, implement an organized school closure process, and provide support for physical and emotional needs.

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CHAPTER 1

Overview of Research

School closure and consolidation abound in many rural communities and even take

place in large cities. As buildings age and student populations change the decisions for

school boards becomes evident, close a school. Research is abundant in the connection of

school closure concerning community and student experiences. What about the effect school

closure has on teachers? The research on how teachers experience or accept the closure of a

school is sparse, to say the least. Teachers play a vital role in the education of each child

during the time of closure. If school closure is a part of the future of schooling in America,

then research must take into account the whole school community and culture, including

teachers, when the decision to close a school is made including the affects associated with it

over time. The research followed the Wichita State University Institutional Review (IRB)

(see Appendix A).

Historical Perspective

Many rural schools in North America were built to provide education for the baby

boomers. Today many of those schools operate at much less than their capacity (McLean,

2003). Populations of rural communities flourished for many years until technology changed

the practice of farming. Farms became larger, reducing the number of families and children

being served by rural school districts. Several farm families exited the rural communities

placing pressure on rural economies. This resulted in many rural families moving to the

suburbs to look for employment. The once busy streets of rural communities now lack the

many children who once skipped ropes and rode tricycles (Cotton, 1996; McLean, 2003). As

an example, small rural communities need only to look to the farming communities of today compared to the past.

Consolidation of farms changed rural towns when family members or whole groups of families moved from their agrarian roots. Movement means leaving the farming community, businesses related to the farming industry and the family farm to seek more economically viable means to support their family. This one-directional flow of population and resources from rural communities reduced the production of goods that once supplied and bolstered the community (Nachtigal, 1994). The community's economic drain resulted in continued loss of families and children as more people leave to seek opportunities elsewhere.

The challenge, which faced all communities, centered on the financial basis of the community and the funds available from the federal, state, and local governmental support. The year 2001 and the enactment of No Child Left Behind legislation marked a major change in education as schools were faced with the challenge to educate all students rather than just educating most students (Darling-Hammond, 2005). This required more funding to be levied, and in most states, this levy was in accordance with the number of students enrolled in the district. Funding a school district in Kansas continued to be a complex process. Kansas' school districts received funds through a complex formula based on the number of students in the district. Many school district's funding was not adequate, so members of local school boards saw school closure and consolidation with a neighboring district as the compelling solution to this financial predicament (McLean, 2003).

The belief that consolidating or closing schools produced savings comes from the late 19th century industrial era where increasing the size of a facility was seen as a way to

reduce production costs. Since then, school organizational structures adopted this belief

system of looking only at the economic savings as the end result (Orr, 1992).

Several external forces, including Federal and State Governmental agencies and

reports such as "A Nation at Risk," prescribed goals for education (Fanning, 1995). The

concepts in these reports called for the U.S. to remain economically competitive on a global

scale (Spring, 1990). Fanning (1995) translated the conclusions of these reports into a one

best system for education: the large comprehensive high school within a feeder district.

Many groups were involved in the process of education and determining what was

best for their communities and the education of their children. These groups range from the

school board, students, community members and education staff.

Communities and Boards of Education

Many communities have been faced with declining populations resulting in financial

cutbacks and possible reorganizations, which could lead to schools being closed. When

viewed from the present to the past, school consolidation seemed to be the main way to solve

many of the issues according to political policy makers and some school board officials.

The fear of consolidation in public education had affected students and communities.

Top students were leaving communities right after graduation in order to find jobs in urban

areas. This depleting resource of an educated workforce resulted in deeper isolation for a

community (Henderson & Gomez, 1975). Their research found that during consolidation

proceedings the community as a whole was not involved. The lack of community

involvement produced a feeling of hostility and the schools were no longer contributors to

the community. School consolidation actually created hardships within the community by

forcing families to leave neighborhood schools. It also created a burden of added taxes to

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support the possible remodel or new construction of schools for the increased student population at the new attendance center (DeYoung & Howley, 1992; Howley & Eckman, 1997; Krietlow, 1966; Sher, 1992).

School consolidation had become polarized with one end representing the state policy-makers who pointed out the inefficiencies of small schools and at the other end the community faced the loss of the school they believed could only lead to the demise of the community.

What were the positive effects of school closure or consolidation? There were both curricular and financial advantages. The shared resources provided a more varied curriculum and classes that were dropped because of lack of students have continued to be viable. Facilities costs should have decreased as the need to upgrade or maintain more than one facility no longer exists. The cost for teachers and administrators may be reduced as well when class size increases to a more acceptable level and the need for additional administration would be lessened.

What was the community's response to school consolidation or closure? If a school was the only source of community then the loss would be devastating. That was why it was important to look at all major factors that centered on this issue before decisions were made. All stakeholders needed to be involved in the decisions regarding school consolidation or closure (Kay *et al.*, 1982).

Student Reaction

Research, even though abundant on school consolidation and closure, was limited on how it affected students. The research investigated areas like student achievement in rural small school settings and how achievement changed in larger school settings. Many studies

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looked only at students in current locations and not at what happened after students relocated because of a closed school. Research addressed transition of students from one grade level to another. During these transitions, students moved from an elementary building to another elementary building or from a middle school to a high school. Even though research on school transitions in recent years had been conducted (Alspaugh, 1998; Chung *et al.*, 1998; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000) that research was limited and did not specifically address the issues students had because of school closure. The transition of students may have supported the same perceptions and therefore provided value to research in this area. One example relates to student achievement. According to Alspaugh, students who transitioned between elementary, middle school, and high school experienced a decline in student achievement. Other areas that related to students during transitions included decreased motivation (Anderman & Maehr, 1994), lowered self-esteem (Eccles *et al.*, 1991; Eccles *et al.*, 1993), and an increase in psychological distress (Chung et al., 1998; Crockett *et al.*, 1989). Research on students during school closure needs more support related to these experiences to fully understand the effects.

Teacher Reaction

The transition of teachers from one school district to another or movement within a district was not uncommon. These changes may be the result of the teacher seeking new job opportunities, job relocation of a spouse, or the changes that may occur normally in the district from year to year. The shifts that teachers may encounter when a school was a closing school may result in more challenges for both teachers and the school community. The closing of a building may have resulted in teachers not receiving a teaching appointment in their district for the next year.

Closing a school caused the faculty to feel they had no dignity, as people were sent out by the school administration to inventory the materials of a school that was going through the closure process (Lozada, 1995). Teachers in Lazoda's study commented that if they were teaching in a school that was scheduled for closure, they would either go on unemployment or to jail where the state could support them. Lozada stated that school districts that provided superficial help, like a resume workshop, offer little. Many veteran teachers viewed efforts like this as an insult rather than a solution to their needs. School districts should look at school closure and consolidation from perspectives that included teachers and their concerns. According to Feuerstein (1980), the concept of cultural importance was to help people use their technical and grounded way of knowing; that was, to allow people to use their cultural heritage to help in the change process. Allowing teachers the opportunities to understand changes that occurred during the school closure process can be very important. The results produced a culturally focused experience and way of thinking that provided a good transition for the teaching staff.

Closing or consolidating schools created a unique situation for teachers who were involved in this process. When a school was closed teachers transferred to another district, moved within the same district, or experienced non-renewal. As the building was prepared for closing with such activities as any one of these phenomenon associated with school closing caused faculty to feel their futures were in doubt. The decision making process of the present as well as the past was questioned by people inside and outside of the school and the community. When decisions of this magnitude were made, discussion between all stakeholders is vital. The decision to close a school may have been the only solution but the inclusion of the various groups of people may help in how the closure process was

experienced. People were concerned about the well being of their community and the students in their schools (Fanning, 1995).

Community and School Culture

Fanning (1995) also stated that when the culture was weak (i.e., more spurious than genuine), a child's potential to learn was reduced. Bruner (1990), utilized Edward Sapir's definition that compared genuine culture to a spurious one. A genuine culture was defined as imposing a great deal of control in the roles of relationships and responsibilities of its members. A culture of this nature was highly viable and did rely on its own resources rather than outside sources for social, political, and economic activities. Spurious cultures, on the other hand, had influence from outside cultures. Therefore, spurious cultures suffered internal instability that led to less viability. In the current education model for improvement, NCLB, the driving force was outside the realms of education and without funding necessary to make the changes, the organizational school culture was a spurious one that resulted in the demise of rural communities when school district decided to close a school based solely on the lack of funding.

There was good news for rural towns: the people living and working there still had the qualities needed to either maintain or build a genuine culture (Spindler *et al.*, 1990). Teachers were a part of this genuine culture and were instrumental to the success of students. Studying teachers during school closure produced insights into their attitudes and beliefs during this process and help them prepare for the future.

Problem Statement

Understanding school closure and how teachers cope during the process is vital to education. Extensive research has been done that addresses financial reasons for school

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closure or consolidation (Arnold, 2000; Cotton, 1996; Fanning, 1995; Gibbs, 2000) and the research could even be narrowed to the struggles that communities or students experience as a school building is closed (Howarth, 1996; Lozada, 1995; Lyson, 2002). The research needs to provide a better understanding of the effects that school closures have on teachers as they prepare to instruct students. There is a need to understand that, when a school closes, there are many events that will impact teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify teacher perceptions during the school closing process. The definition for closing process is the events that occur before, during, and after a school building is closed. It is important to understand the closing process as defined and how it affects teachers.

Brief Overview of Methodology

When a good fit between research questions, theoretical framework, and methodology are established, then rigorous research will result (Crotty, 1998). Allowing teacher attitudes to be dissected, the research will provide more discoveries about assumptions teachers make as they construct meaning related to their experience. This study will employed a phenomenological research design that allowed the theoretical perspective to evolve as teachers described how school closure affected their lives. The goal of a phenomenological study is to reveal or disclose the naïve experience as a pure and real phenomenon (Patton, 1990). Patton also stated that the technique phenomenology utilizes is descriptive and reflective, and its goal is to explore phenomena by asking the question "what?" rather than explaining the reasons why or predicting future events. Patton is supported by earlier works of Husserl (1970) in the goal of pure phenomenological research as it describes rather than

explains events from the beginning in a way that is free from a hypotheses or preconceptions. The emphasis of this research was to start at the beginning of the school closure process and describe how teachers experience this transition. The guiding questions addressed in the research are:

1. How do teachers experience school closure?
2. What are the attitudes and beliefs that teachers exhibit during the school closure process?

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations and limitations are important to clarify the proposed research. The literal meaning of delimit is to define the inherent use of a particular construct or population. Limitations on the other hand refer to limiting conditions or restrictive weaknesses (Locke *et al.*, 1987). A delimitation of this research is the applicability. The study was delimited school districts that are experiencing school closure because of the unique culture of each school and community. Another delimitation was related to the use of purposive sampling and how it delimits generalizability of the findings (Erlandson *et al.*, 1993; Patton, 2002). The results of the study are not generalizable since non-probability will be used for participant selection. Purposive sampling, which is non-probability, allows results to be transferable. Determination of transferability is incumbent on the reader.

Time allocated for the study posed a certain limitation on data collection and analysis, and the travel distance between co-researchers created increased limitation concerns during member checks. The delimiting factor was to narrow the focus of inquiry to include participants representing only teachers who have experienced school closure in rural school districts in the state of Kansas.

Significance of the Study

The literature is incomplete as it relates to teachers when it comes to school closure. There is no substitute for a highly skilled and emotionally sound teacher in a classroom. Studying the essence of school closure, using phenomenological methodology, will produce insights into teacher attitudes and beliefs during this process (Lozada, 1995). The students' ability to learn in this environment will be a challenge for teachers as well (Howarth, 1996; Lozada, 1995; Lyson, 2002). The impact of closing a school affects not only teachers, but it is felt by the students and the community. This research will contribute to the profession by informing district and building leaders how teachers experience school closure. The research also describes the impact of closing a school has on students and the community. Leadership awareness is detrimental to the school closing process.

Definitions

The following definitions from Creswell (1998) will be helpful in explaining a phenomenological research, the data collection, and analysis techniques. The definitions are organized alphabetically and not according to the analysis process or sequence. The research design and methodology in chapter three will give meaning as well as purpose to these definitions.

Clusters of meanings. Organizing data in a phenomenological research requires many different steps. In this third step, the researcher clusters statements into meaningful units or themes and removes repetitive statements (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoch or bracketing. This is the first step of the analysis process. In this step it is important for the researcher to set aside preconceived experiences so that the understanding of the phenomenon is in accordance with participant's perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

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Essential, invariant structure (or essence). The goal of a phenomenological researcher is to find textural and structural meanings as it relates to experiences of all the participants in the study. Since all individuals experience the phenomenon according to Moustakas (1994), it is invariant, and the experience is reduced to the "essentials."

Horizonalization. This is the second step in the phenomenological data analysis in which the researcher lists every significant statement relevant to the topic and gives it equal value (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative variation or structural description. A textural description is written first and followed by a structural description of the experience. This description addresses how the phenomenon was experienced by the individual. All possible meanings are explored by varying the frames of reference around the phenomenon. This is also referred to using imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994).

Intentionality of consciousness. A tree analogy used by Moustakas is the best way to define this concept. "My intentional experience is a combination of the outward appearance of the tree and the tree as contained in my consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning" (Moustakas, 1994).

Lived experiences. This term is very important in phenomenological studies as it relates the importance of individual experiences of people as conscious human beings (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological data analysis. The researcher records the significant statements and meanings into descriptions that will arrive at the true essences of the experience (Creswell, 1998).

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Phenomenological study. This type of study has the focus to bring meaning to a phenomenological experience for several individuals. A central meaning or "essence" evolves as the researcher reduces these experiences (Creswell, 1998).

The phenomenon. This is the central concept being studied by the phenomenologist. It is the concept being experienced by subjects in a study, psychological concepts such as grief, anger, or love (Creswell, 1998).

Transcendental phenomenology. In this approach, the researcher sets aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated and relies on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The research questions for this study guided the research process down the path to determine the essence of the experience of teachers as they share what it is like for them during the closing of a school. The *Overview of Research* discussed exploration of only some of the possible theories related to school closure and were expanded in the final stages of the research. In the *Review of Literature*, the literature consulted provided the background of the complexity of a study in phenomenology as well as the basis for using phenomenology as the methodology. *Research Methodology* provided a description of the methodology for examining the research questions.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Constructing a framework to understand experiences of teachers during school closing without any assumptions was difficult. In most cases the literature helps to narrow the outcome related to the focus of the study. The basic research principles and methodology related to this study searched for research literature that supported experiences that were unknown to the researcher at the time of the research. There will be a need to expand this literature research based on findings that may not be contained within this section. It was essential for this research to not provide any set direction or bias as it allowed each teacher the freedom to express ideas and thoughts relative to the school closure phenomenon.

If the research literature led the direction, would the true story unfold or would a prescribed story evolve? The story of school closure through the eyes of teachers will not have true meaning unless each teacher can tell his or her story according to his or her own experience without the researcher providing a prescribe direction. Research methodology related to the study of phenomenology will give the necessary freedom for the expression of knowledge construction. It does not require a particular theoretical framework for making sense of each teacher experience. Instead the teacher experience will provide the story for the emerging theory.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Current research with reference to teachers who were experiencing or had experienced school closures is lacking. When a school was closed it was the administration who had to bring the message as to the fate of the staff. It was a time that no one wished for anyone. The administration usually met with the staff one at a time and informed them if they

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would have a job in the district or would have to look for another job outside of the district. The administration knew that the decision had repercussions, but they were not the ones losing their job. They could not feel what the teachers were feeling.

School Closure and My Experience

School closure was important for me, as an administrator, working in a district where a school was closing at the end of the school year. In all the years I had spent in the field of education; 16 years as a teacher, 1 year as an assistant principal, 6 years as a principal, and 3 years in the central office administration; none of these positions prepared me for this experience. I realized a great need to understand this process, as viewed by teachers.

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Social Constructivism-Epistemology

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Social constructivism provides a perspective where identified assumptions allow for individuals to express their understanding of the world (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Neuman, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). Social constructivism argues that knowledge is gained through the interpretation of personal experiences among groups of people. This can be defined as the practices that people use everyday such as language, values and beliefs (Jonassen & Land, 2000). Social constructivism provides a way of knowing for communities as they work collaboratively to construct meaning.

Many rural areas contain a public square where people come to learn about their communities. The public square is made up of four sectors found in most communities to include: healthcare, education, business, and city government. In a community where these groups work together to help their citizens construct knowledge can produce a thriving community. The ability to work together in several social gatherings can produce a

community wide bonding. The process parallels the asset-based communication process found in the work of John Kretzmann and John McKnight (1993).

When individuals such as teachers, who are part of the education public square, tell their stories of schools closure it can inform the community about their daily experiences as they educate students. Educators as well as many other workers in a community have a tendency to associate in their own niches. Elementary teachers associate with elementary teachers, middle school teachers, and high school teachers are also found to have their own social gatherings where they construct meaning about their community as it relates to the education of youth. The meanings constructed by these various groups become part of their life and can lead to complex views of each individual rather than a narrowing of meanings (Creswell, 2003).

It is important to listen and to allow the teacher to tell the story of school closure and construct the meaning without any predetermined direction. When we set aside our bias about a phenomenon, we allow the ones who are experiencing the phenomenon to describe their story according to their own individual experience. When several teachers share the same experience we may find a different story evolves. That view of an experience is determined by the position the observer takes in relationship to the experience. A phenomenological study of teachers' epistemology as it relates to school closure gives each individual a chance to tell the story that is missing in research.

Phenomenology

A true phenomenological study looks at the foundation related to a cognitive psychology perspective. The cognitive psychology perspective helps explain relationships between culture and an individual's preference of sense making within his or her

environment. An intellectual shift began in the 1940s and early 1950s, and then expanded in the 1970's. The challenge was to expand the prevailing behaviorist model of human functioning out of which emerged cognitive science (Gardner, 1985). Cognitive psychology was defined as a psychological science that studies the underlying behavior of mental processes, including thinking, reasoning, decision making, and to some extent motivation and emotion. Cognitive psychology as defined by Ulric Neisser, involved the processes by which sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used (Neisser, 1967). The focus of this research was to learn how teachers experience school closure. Bruner (1990) claimed the two modes of thought that individuals may experience are search for meaning or narrative mode and the physiology or logico-scientific mode. Bruner described these meanings as a central concept in the discipline of psychology:

> It was, we thought, an all-out effort to establish meaning as the central concept of psychology – not stimuli and responses, not overtly observable behavior, not biological drives and their transformation, but meaning…. Its aim was to discover and to describe formally the meanings that human beings created out of their encounters with the world, and then to propose hypotheses about what meaning-making processes were implicated. It focused upon the symbolic activities that human beings employed in constructing and in making sense not only of the world, but of themselves. Its aim was to prompt psychology to join forces with its sister interpretive disciplines in the humanities and in the social sciences. (p. 2)

Crotty (1998) suggested the main features of a study that emphasizes understanding or meaning can be created by human beings as active constructors of meaning and not just the recipients. The two questions related to the meaning experienced by teachers when

schools are closed leave the theoretical perspective open. Many perspectives could lend

themselves to input and analysis, but one that underpinned this study was phenomenological

sociology presented by Schutz in 1967 and 1970.

Phenomenological sociology concerned a process of analysis where meaning was

constructed. This was sometimes referred to as the construction and operations of the natural

attitude that people may have as they share their interpretation of the world (Schutz, 1970).

During the natural attitude many things are taken for granted. The natural attitude in

phenomenological sociology can be dissected to discover assumptions made by the

participants as they construct their interpretations of the world.

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Competing Theory

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There were other possible useful and closely related theoretical perspectives that

could be considered as it relates to this research. Symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, and

grounded theory were all viable theories. These theories and reasons for exclusions will be

briefly explained.

Symbolic interactionism employs the idea of 'self' and not just stimulus and

response. This allows social interaction with each other but it is only an inner conversation

about what a person may do before acting (Blumer, 1969). It was important to study this

inner conversation as it may be a way for teachers to express their experiences. Blumer

described the biases that researchers can make and that is to analyze the process. They tend

not to call attention to the human interaction. When compared to phenomenological

sociology, it was much easier for one person to understand the feelings of another. Symbolic

interactionism has a tendency to limit the investigation of human action and thus limits its

use as a main approach to this study. Blumer also stated, "Failure to see their objects as they

see them…is the gravest kind of error that the social scientist can commit. It leads to the setting up of a fictional world" (p. 51).

Pragmatism supports a belief where reality and truth are based on what is useful to people and what works for them in a broad sense. This may allow us to take in ideas that may be true but we have little support or evidence (Hammersley, 1989).

Grounded theory introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) gives both a research methodology and method that allows for research to uncover some of the psychological and sociological process that may help to understand how people experience an event in time. However, it is dependent on the timing of theoretical development and is a well–documented process of analysis. The data collection process is such that a developing theory can guide further data collection thus not allowing an open approach to this research. Grounded theory would have provided a narrowing of the information and creating a path that may lead in only one direction that may be determined by the researcher.

Processes

This research used both tradition and electronic research methods to locate publications about the topic. Electronic databases included ERIC, Academic OneFile, Dissertation Abstracts, ArticleFirst, Library Literature, automated library catalogs accessed through the internet and the search engine Google. The terms used varied slightly because of the formats within each research design tool. Terms included teachers, loss, death and dying, change, organization, school closure, communities, students, education, phenomenology, social constructive theory, and caring. The terms were also searched in combinations to help narrow the possible number of results.

Many of the results from the searches were about school closures in general and as the search was narrowed to include teachers the results obtain were few. I did not want to limit my search to just teachers because other groups studied could contain relevant information as it related to the closing of a school. The groups were students, communities and school districts.

The use of the Internet provided journal articles and web pages with additional bibliographies of articles that produced a wealth of additional citations and more references. Utilizing this search method was very productive and produced a wealth of information. The search results are contained in the table below.

Table 2.1

Search Results for Empirical Research

Term	Eric	Academic OneFile	Dissertation Abstracts	ArticleFirst	Google
Teacher	249,297	64,517	134	32,242	154,000,000
Loss	554	2,117	217	62,259	342,000,000
Death and Dying	146	60	17	1835	2410000
Change	29,015	40	40,900	130,592	1,250,000,000
Phenomenology	93	1	16	4,090	3,190,000
School Closure	56	63,517	15	42	407,000
Soc. Constructive Theory	105	2	8	8	314,000
Caring	4,511	8,112	30	8,926	57,400,000
Organization	40,145	589	828	20,916	182,000,000
Communities	23,520	173	465	119,456	214,000,000
Students	409,905	63	704	62,487	407,000,000
Education	909,333	57	34,300	48,074	793,000,000
School Closure and Teachers	16	0	0	1	2310

Several textbooks were also utilized to gain information that could not be found by electronic form. The inter-library loan process was used to gain information from the origins of phenomenology from some of the original text.

Possible Closure Theories

Research is lacking as it relates to teachers' experiences during school closure and with this understanding the question becomes, how could research help individual teachers share their perspective in their own way? Teachers could share information about the way schools are organized which could lead this research to look at organizational theory. Teachers could refer to all the changes they have to make and now the theory of change will play an important role for this research. These same teachers may talk about how they feel and experience loss during the closure process that leads this research into the theory of loss or grief.

Numerous theories may explain teachers' perspectives of school closure. I selected four possible theories that were broad and encompassing as it may relate to this experience. It was inappropriate to focus on any specific theory prior to hearing the teachers' stories. However it was appropriate for me to make an assumption after the data collection to recognize whether or not these four theories were the only theories that may come into focus. Those four were theory of loss, cognitive psychology theory, organization theory, and change theory. The theory of loss encompasses the change and organizational aspects that the teachers had to be aware of during the closure of a school. Phenomenological research allowed participants to travel many paths to tell their stories. There was no specific path identified prior to the research. Teacher responses directed me to explore applicable topics in the literature.

Theory of Loss

In her seminal work on death and dying, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) described the stages of grief as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and then acceptance. Kubler-Ross theorized that people who experience death or loss would go through these stages of grief. She believed that if we would look at ourselves as if we were experiencing death or loss, and the anxiety surrounding the concept, it would help us to help others. Many people seemed to be more interested in everything that surrounds them but they do not really look at the person whose facial expression is worth a million words.

In the stages of loss or grief, the person usually experienced denial first. In the denial stage Kubler-Ross stated that a person could not accept that this event (i.e. death) was truly happening to him or her. The stage of denial could be followed by anger. The individual who experienced this stage wanted to place the blame for the event on others to help justify what was happening to them. The bargaining stage could then appear as the individual looked for options to keep what was current in their lives' present. A person would do whatever was necessary to avoid change. When the individual exhausted all of these avenues, then depression might emerge. The individual felt like there was no hope or future. The person in this stage seemed to be beyond help and believed that no one could help them as their end of existence was near. When the individual was able to accept change, the stage of depression would gradually diminish.

Studs Terkel (2002) also shared stories of individuals and their reflections on death and similar experiences of loss. Terkel and Kubler-Ross (1969) both used an interview process that allows the individuals a way to share an experience that many of us will have during our life span.

During the closure of a school, teachers experience loss and therefore might travel along these stages described and move from any one stage to the next depending on their prior experience. It is important that the practitioner or researcher listen to the teachers during this process and strive to understand how the closure process affected each individual.

Organizational Theory

School leaders today have to make some difficult decisions that will impact quality education for the children of their districts. Funding is a major concern in this mixture. Organizational structures like schools were created in part by leaders who had the ability to create, manage, and even destroy a culture (Schein, 1992). Boards of education, who become short of money, seek to destroy a culture by closing a school or consolidating schools (McLean, 2003). Many patrons take an opposing view and argue that each neighborhood school should remain open no matter the cost. McLean described the process of school closure, redistricting, and consolidation as a political minefield that is like getting between a mother bear and her cubs. Teachers who currently work at closing schools may feel lost and alone. It is up to a school district to help teachers through this transitional period in their careers. The process that a school organization uses to help in this transition should consider the culture of the community and the people that make it unique. When different groups of people try to work together, they often find out that communication breaks down. Schein (1992) said that this breakdown could lead to conflicts between groups in the organization and the community.

An organization like a school is based on its founders and their assumptions (Schein, 1992). The culture of an organization, according to Schein, is composed of climate, practices, espoused values, and credos found in that organization. Teachers, staff, students, and

community members are the key groups that make up a school "cultural" community. They provide the historical data that the school needs to serve its children. These groups can have a definite opinion about their schools, as well as how schools should function when opposition starts. When a school in a community is about to be closed or changed in any way, according to Schein's theory of organizational change, people will organize themselves in a survival mode; they want to keep the member identity and do whatever is necessary to hold the organization together. This creates a major challenge for the boards of education as they ponder the possibility of changing the status quo for the community and its schools.

Change Theory

When schools are closed, teachers, who currently work at a building, start to feel lost and alone. They are about to experience a major change in their lives. The experience is the "death" of a physical structure rather than a human life with the ability to reason. Yet, the response of grief will be similar. When the commitment to change has been made, it is not the end, but the start of a long journey (Hutton, 1994).

Members of the existing culture must work together to build effective change. If the community is willing, the change will either be revolutionary or evolutionary (O'Toole, 1995). Change of the revolutionary type can lead the organization on a course to disaster, planned or unplanned. Revolutionary cultural change produces undesirable results that can be shocking as well as painful and disruptive. O'Toole was supported by Sarason (1996) when he stated:

Many people viewed change as an unmitigated disaster, a defeat of their values and hopes however; others viewed it as the dawning of a new world in which their values

and hopes stood a chance of realization. And then there are those who do not know

what to think, how to judge the tomorrows by the todays. (p. 147)

On the other hand evolutionary change takes time. O'Toole (1995) used the American culture

as an example: it evolved from a past represented by European, Protestant values to present

urban heterogeneous, secular culture.

Teachers experience many struggles as they work through this change process. How

does this change affect an individual? According to Hutton (1994), change is stressful and

requires time. There are no shortcuts when solving this problem. Hutton developed a model

after extensively reviewing literature on this subject. He described change as having three

phases: Ending - letting go of the past, Transitions - becoming reoriented and exploring new

possibilities, Beginnings - setting out in a new direction. A typical pattern developed as

Hutton continued to study individual change. A person who was in the transition phase

would be uncomfortable-disoriented, disenchanted, and disengaged losing sight of their

presence for the moment. These individuals were looking for a way forward but seem to be

stuck either in the past or in a limbo state of mind.

People's security according to Phillips (1995) was threatened by anything new like

technology, methods of working, or new structures within the organization. Phillips

synthesized Swedish social psychologist Claes Janssen's research for change process into a

metaphor likened to a four-room apartment. These rooms were contentment, denial,

confusion, and renewal. Individuals start out in the room of contentment until change

occurred at which point they would move to the rooms of denial, confusion, and renewal.

The individual would experience each room before returning to the room of contentment.

These four room experiences according to Phillips (1995) were very similar to the grieving process. The extent of the loss determined the extent of the walk through each of these rooms. In the contentment room the subjects were calm and things remained in perspective. When they moved into the denial room because of some change aspect like job loss, people did not accept this new situation and appear to be oblivious to what was happening. In this room people found it difficult to exit. Most problems associated with change arose in this phase of the change process. When people were ready to move on, and they did when the time had come, they moved to the confusion room. People who finally owned up to what they were experiencing started to feel like they were in a thick fog without a clear path. People learned to accept their confusion so they could move into the fourth and final room, renewal. In this room the individuals tended to see the light of change and began to experience the excitement of a positive change. They had let go of the past and started to build for the future and were ready to move back into the contentment until the next change comes along.

A change process needs to be planned (Joyce, 1999) and cannot occur without leadership to guide people (Lebow & Simon, 1997). Many leaders underestimated the obstacles to change by a factor of ten. This was mainly due to the way the change was communicated (Kotter, 1996). When there was a lack of communication and minimal involvement in the change process, an organization and its members were guaranteed the absence of crucial support. Axelrod (2002) stated that minimal information causes rumors that fill the hallways with unfounded scenarios of change. When few people made decisions for many during a change process, it guaranteed that the process was a difficult one.

Individuals within the organization tended to become more negative towards change because they felt that their voices were not heard.

Axelrod (2002) identified a newly developed engagement paradigm for change to include the whole organization in the change process. Joyce (1999) supported this type of change and referred to it as competitive strategic planning in which the organization would look for strengths and weaknesses. The results produced plans for a desirable course of action. From these two paradigms, it became apparent that change in schools was not always bad if the teachers were included and involved in the process. The inclusive planned process could lead to meeting the needs of teachers and their students.

This chapter provided the basis for the study of school closure and the challenges that are evident during a study using phenomenology. *Research Methodology,* presented next, will provide the methodology for the examination of the questions and how this qualitative research method applies to a study of the phenomenological process. The next section will set the stage for a research process that is much different than what most qualitative researchers are accustomed.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

The researcher's selected design, whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, reflects the nature of the problem addressed and the questions answered. Maykut (1994) and Erlandson et al. (1993) claimed that only qualitative methods use open-ended questions posed in the setting to gain a personal perspective from participants. I chose qualitative research methods to allow me to have meaningful conversations in the settings where teachers experienced school closing. Erlandson and associates described interviews as conversations with a purpose to gain participants' stories.

Schutz (1962, 1964, 1967, 1970) debated approaches to the study of lived experiences and how the scientific observer made meaning of the experience when he looked to Husserl's understanding of the everyday life experience. Creswell (1998) described five different qualitative research designs: biography, grounded theory study, ethnography, case study, and phenomenological study. When looking to the five different research designs, the phenomenological approach was particularly appropriate for explicating the depth and meaning of an individual's experiences. "A phenomenological study described the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). A study in phenomenology attempted to discover and describe the experiences of the actors, the people who were living a particular phenomenon. A phenomenological research of school closings from a teacher's perspective would provide the essence of the experience. Each individual teacher selected had a chance to tell what it was like for them during the closing process. I took their words and relayed their experiences as well as the experiences of other teachers. This was their story.

Sokolowski's (2000) term, classical phenomenologist approach, had its origins in the thinking of German philosopher Husserl and French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty. Valle and King (1978) explained that the major focus of Husserl's attention was the uninterpreted world of everyday experience as a direct and immediate experience. This was the world as lived by the individual and the external entity was not separable from or independent of the individual.

Qualitative research utilized the emphasis of phenomenology through experiences and interpretation. The essence or structure of an experience, according to Patton (1990), could lead to its core meanings. Patton also compared the essences of a phenomenon to the experiences of different people by bracketing [to put aside] and analyzing the data. "The assumption of essence, like the ethnographer's assumption that culture existed and was important, became the defining characteristic of a purely phenomenological study" (p. 70). Understanding the phenomenological approach to research was complex. Moustakas (1994) summarized this approach in the following statement:

> The challenge facing the human science researcher is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection. The process involves a blending of what is really present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings; thus a unity of the real and the ideal. (p. 13)

According to Sokolowski (2000) a phenomenon could exist in many variations as well as situations and had an essential meaning. For instance he offered the following example: going to a baseball game in Camden Yards in Baltimore brought about many different experiences with different manifestations that constituted the same meaningful

experience. A person who purchased tickets or talked about who would win were two examples of the first part of an experience. There was an absence of the actual game but the intended meaning was manifest in the anticipation of it. Next the game started and, as people began to watch, they experienced a new intended meaning that made the game present to them. The empty intentions said and imagined were filled up with the presence of the game. This took some time to unfold or become a part of their understanding. When the game was over, once again the intention was empty but different. The new kind of absence was in the presence of memory. The absences at the beginning were different from the ones at the end. A perceived phenomenon could also be analogous to a cube seen in various sizes and shapes with variety of intensity: it could appear differently depending on the angle and color of the light. To understand the constant and unchanging structure, there was a need to see these different reflections and appearances on repeated occasions.

The purpose of the phenomenological methodology approach, according to Lester (1999), is to illuminate the specific. If the researcher identified a phenomenon through how it was perceived by the actors in a situation, it was translated into gathered information that was full of meaning. Lester used qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions, and participant observation that represented the perspective of the research participants. A phenomenological study provided applicable information and understanding, if participants provided information as it was experienced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Phenomenological research methodology was important because it allowed people to describe the experience as it happened to them.

The phenomenological method of research, as proposed by Spiegelberg (1965), provided an outline for conducting the process. The researcher had an intuitive "grasp" (p.

659) of the phenomenon that was to be studied and then investigated several examples of the phenomenon to gain the necessary essence. The next steps were to understand the relationships and explore "the phenomena not only in the sense of what appears, whether particulars or general essences, but also of the way in which things appear" (p. 684). The beliefs about the phenomena could then be bracketed and finally meaning could be interpreted.

The aim for using phenomenology in human science was to reveal the content and meaning of the experience unique to the individuals rather than measurement and quantifying of their experiences. Giorgi (1971) stated the revealed meaning of the phenomenon for participants was a verbal description. Asking individuals for the qualities of specific experiences was ultimately asking what a specific experience was like for them. During the description of the experiences, participants were disclosing elements of the meaning of the phenomenon for them. Valle and King (1978) stated, "The tasks of the phenomenological study as one of disclosing the nature of the structure in the form of meaning" (p.17). Through the description of the pre-reflective live-world the level of reflective awareness manifests itself as psychological meaning. Participants in this type of research were identified as "co-researchers" because they were not the "subjects" of the study, but they were the ones who provided their personal experiences and the meanings of specific phenomena (Osborne, 1990).

Phenomenological research methodology took a different approach than traditional scientific psychological research. Unlike traditional empirical research design, phenomenological research focused on descriptions of experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). Polkinghorne stated that human behavior was an expression of one's unique meaningful

experience rather than a learned response to stimuli. Thus, the main purpose of the phenomenological research was to extract and produce clear and accurate descriptions of the meaning that constituted the activity of one's consciousness.

There were several reasons for utilizing phenomenological research methodology to examine teacher experiences during school closures. One consideration for choosing this research design was the research focused on the extraction of the personal experiences of teachers during school closure. As a result, findings of this study enhanced and gave a full and accurate understanding of the experience for participating teachers. Effective change required that administrators, during the decision-making process, listened and understood teachers' experiences and perceptions during the closing of a school. The culture of a school is unique and should include the attitude and beliefs of all the stakeholders when decisions of this magnitude are reached.

Another consideration focused on teachers who were experiencing grief and possible job loss. Experiences of this nature were contextual and unique to each individual. Administrators needed to look deeper into this process and better prepare their teaching staff by evaluating the attitudes and beliefs espoused during the process. Without knowing many details of the role of a teacher, the research went beyond a diagnosis of a condition. Documenting the feelings, emotions, and experiences the teaching staff had during the closure process was a great challenge. Therefore, it was very important to attempt to understand personal experiences as it was lived. The phenomenon of school closure as it related to teachers provided insights and reflections that were necessary for the people who need it the most.

Participants

All participants were selected using purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling helped the researcher discover, understand, and gain insight by selecting a sample where the most could be learned (Merriam, 1998). Purposive sampling also provided the researcher a way to select participants with the knowledge needed in the study (Erlandson et al., 1993). Osborne (1990) and Patton (1990) stressed the nature of cooperativeness in the research by the use of the term "participant" or "co-researcher." Co-researchers were not the subjects of the study, but they are the ones who provided their personal experiences and meanings of specific phenomena. Eight participants for multiple interviews were selected for this study due to the phenomenological nature and time limitation of the study. Eight participants will sign a consent form prior to the interview (see Appendix B).

Participants for the study were eight teachers who were located in small rural schools in Kansas that experienced or recently faced school closure. Participants for the study came from schools that had been closed for no more than three years and schools that were currently in the closing process. During a typical school year, the state of Kansas usually had from one to three school closings and that number had increased to 15 within the last five years. The participants were selected from the schools that were actually closed or in the second stage of the closing process, which was the year of closing. This research was not looking at any specifics concerning any other aspects other than teachers in general. Letters of interest were sent to nine teachers in three different schools who experienced or had experienced school closures within the past three years or were currently in a school that was to be closed at the end of the year. Many teachers were asked at the schools selected to participate in the research, but feared for their jobs and chose not to get involved. Only eight

rather than nine participants were selected because of this fear. The teachers were the units of analysis in this study. Studying teachers in these two different time dimensions of past and present provided insights from one point in time viewed by the participants along the school closing continuum. A longitudinal study design provides observations of the same phenomenon over an extended period of time. Rather than a true longitudinal study, this research employed approximating longitudinal study aspects that explored where teachers were in this three-year process (Babbie, 2004). A thick description of the settings was written to assist the reader in making decisions regarding transferability.

Setting

The three schools were located in small, rural Kansas' towns. Each school was assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. The pseudonym given to the town will be the same as the school. The three towns were Bender, Crow, and Somich. It is relevant for making sense of the data that the reader be informed of teacher school assignments. Three teachers were assigned to Bender High School. Crow Middle School was the educational home for three teachers. Two teachers were educators at Somich Elementary School. As you will discover during the reading of the following pages, Bender, Crow, and Somich were more than towns and schools to the teachers.

The three towns shared some distinctive commonalities. Each town had a population of less than 500 residents. The school districts range in sizes from 2000 students in Somich's school district to less than 200 students in Crow's district. The large, mature trees and older homes depicted a town that had experienced little change or growth during the recent years of its long history.

Bender, Crow, and Somich each had sport fields, such as softball and baseball diamonds, and football fields on the edge of town. Common, significant characteristic of the fields in all three towns were that they were filled with weeds; consumed with tall, unattended grass; and plagued with decaying structures. Two of the three towns had a United States Postal Office, while all three had a functioning grain elevator and gas station. Two of downtown areas showed signs of a long staggering economy, whereas, the third downtown identified itself as never having a significant business area.

The towns of Bender, Crow, and Somich all showed signs of declining population; towns that could eventually meet their demise as young adults relocate to metropolitan areas of towns and cities with greater population and more amenities. The questions frequently posed are: "Was the town's dwindling population and ensuing demise the cause of the school closure?" or "Did the closure of the school, which is often the largest employer, cause the town to die?" The questions linger as the answers are debated around rural gathering places, where people meet to discuss items of interest.

Data Collection Methods

The use of one source to explore a phenomenon left some questions unanswered. Merriam (1998) stated qualitative research employed multiple data collection strategies. Different strategies were utilized and provided a rich description of the studied phenomenon. In order to discover the perceptions of teachers during school closure, data was collected through interviews. Interviews provided the only method to validate the research as it related to crosschecking the findings of the study (Patton, 2002). The inductive data obtained through interviews according to Lincoln & Guba (1985) helped to make sense of and field data that was collected through a process called triangulation.

Interviews

The research design allowed information collection in a natural setting through in-depth interviews. Interviewing in a natural setting approach emphasized understanding actions, words, deeds and patterns in conversations (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Phenomenology employed open-ended interviews as its main data collection tool (Merriam, 1998). Appendix C contains the protocol for face-to-face interviews. Although interviews produced reasonably clear answers to questions, they also provided a special strength: flexibility. The initial answers evoked new questions that were not pre-established (Babbie, 2004). Babbie also suggested that the researcher skills of listening, thinking, and talking almost simultaneously played an important role during the interview process.

Merriam and Simpson (1995) described phenomenological analysis as an experience with feelings and reactions to the content. During school closure it was important to identify the sensory experience, the emotional dimension, and the mental activity of teachers. According to Erlandson and associates (1993), interviews helped to construct interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects related to the environment surrounding the teachers. The interview process was not a one point in time process; it allowed movement from the past to the present and helped to predict the future (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Teachers in this research provided rich information from different perspectives as they talked about their experiences in their own words.

The culture of the school in which a teacher resides produced a situational interview of joint encounters and explorations between the investigator and motivated informants (Schein, 1992). The initial focus was to accurately extract the experience and let the descriptions emerge as the participants described them. Therefore, the use of basic

counseling skills, such as empathy and probing, were necessary to draw out accurate and clear descriptions and meanings of the interviewees' life world.

There was one interview scheduled with each participant. Additional telephone interviews were used as a follow up. The interview allowed the researcher a chance to understand the participant and also allowed the participant to respond to the researcher. The follow-up phone interview occurred approximately two weeks later and allowed both researcher and participant to fill in any missing information that was valuable as it related to the data already collected. The questions directed to each participant allowed a story to be told in three parts. The first allowed each individual to express what it was like before the school was closed. The second part followed by the experience during the year of closing. The last centered on the reflection of the meaning it holds (Seidman, 1991).

Data Analysis

I used a blending of methods to analyze the data collected during the interview process. The first method described was according to the Moustakas Method of Phenomenological Data Analysis and was followed by the traditional methods utilized during the qualitative analysis of data related to phenomenology.

Moustakas Method of Phenomenological Data Analysis

Moustakas utilized the method of analysis of van Kaam (1959, 1966) to develop a modified method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas method included the following ordered steps:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping (Horizonalization). The researcher uses the verbatim transcripts from each interview and separates out each statement which

describes an element, or horizon, of the experience. The researcher names the

horizons based on statements from the participants.

2. Reduction and elimination: to determine the invariant constituents. Each horizon of

the experience is tested for two requirements: a) does it contain an element of the

experience which is necessary to understanding the experience: and b) is it possible to

separate it and label it: If the statement does not meet both these criteria, it is

eliminated. Horizons that remain from this elimination process are the invariant

constituents of the experience.

3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents. The invariant constituents of

the experience are grouped into similar themes, which develop from scrutiny of the

horizons. These are then the core themes of the experience.

4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application;

Validation. The invariant constituents and their themes are checked against interview

transcript to check for discrepancies and inconsistencies. Any horizons or themes

which are inconsistent with the participant's description of the experience are then

deleted.

5. Construct an Individual Textural Description for each research participant. The

Individual Textural Description allows for a description of "what" happened in the

experience and includes verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Construct an Individual Structural Description for each research participant. The

individual Structural Description, written by the researcher, develops an explanation

for what happened in the participant's experience. This document also may include

verbatim examples from the transcript of the interview selected by the researcher. The

Individual Structural Description is developed on the basis of the Individual Textural Description along with the imaginative variation process.

7. Construct a Textural-Structural Description of the meaning and essences of the experience for each of the research participants. This Textural-Structural Description relies on the preceding steps to create an individual description of the essences of the experience.

8. Develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience which represents the group as a whole. The Composite Description, as the final step in the data analysis process, provides the culmination of the data analysis in a description of the shared essences of the experience.

This study followed Moustakas (1994) as the general processes of a phenomenological study. It utilized the proposed eight steps data analysis techniques mentioned above. In doing this type of research it was important to bring out the essential characteristics of the experience as revealed by the participants, and created a close contact with participants to remain faithful to the original intent.

Traditional Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews was analyzed using the phenomenological method that included several techniques such as epoch, bracketing, imaginative variation, and first- and second-order knowledge to analyze experiences (Merriam, 1998). Epoch according to Merriam was where the researcher removed him self, or at least became aware, of prejudices and the way the phenomenon was viewed so no predetermined assumptions were made and judgment came when the evidence became clear. Moustakas (1994) supported this definition as refraining from any type of judgment.

Sokolowski (2000) described bracketing as a process where natural experiences were placed in "parentheses" or "brackets" to help prevent beliefs by the researcher from being a part of the intended phenomenon. Bracketing a question was to set aside any prejudgments. When combining these two concepts, epoch sets the opening boundaries for the study and bracketing helped the researcher to identify any prejudgments about the question.

Once the phenomenon was placed into this suspended state, imaginative variation took place. Merriam (1998) described this as looking at the many different aspects that were contained within the phenomenon or the varying frames of reference that were examined (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). When research was examined this way the researcher was placed into a phenomenological attitude where the subjective and the objective correlates were theorized and described as either first or second order of knowledge (Sokolowski, 2000). These techniques, according to Sokolowski, allowed the researcher to become part of the experience without biasing the information gained during the process. Data collected were organized into categories and themes. In the qualitative paradigm, the researcher seeks out categories and themes that emerged from the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Transcriptions of interviews were broken into units of meaningful data in a process termed unitization. Unitization was "disaggregating data into the smallest pieces of information that stood alone as independent thoughts in the absence of additional information other than the broad understanding of the context" (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Processing the data allowed me to examine it and determine key issues or recurrent patterns that became categories and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In qualitative studies "theory (or some other broad explanation) becomes the end point for a study" (Creswell, 2003). Themes appeared from the categories that helped build a general model or theory. It

was an inductive process of building from the data to broad themes to a general model or theory. "These themes are developed into broad patterns theories or generalizations that are then compared with personal experiences or with existing literature on the topic" (p. 132).

Entering interview data into a database allowed units to be sorted and grouped by categories and then into themes as they appeared. These categories or themes lead to significant findings that were compared to research literature to determine conclusions. The conclusions then brought light to the research questions.

Quality and Trustworthiness

Triangulating data involved comparing data and then contrasting it according to different methodologies, sources, and even theories. This helped to establish credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patton (1990) supported a multi-method approach for the triangulation of data to enhance both validity and reliability. Seeking several different types of sources enhanced the events or relationships and helped support the findings or correct any weaknesses that appeared. This research utilized open-ended interview strategies to develop credibility.

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (to facilitate transferability) were important to the trustworthiness of this study. Credibility referred to constructed realities and dependability defined as the ability to reproduce results (Erlandson et al., 1993). Erlandson continued to describe credibility as a way to establish a connection between individuals and groups who had supplied data that was assessed "by determining whether the description developed through inquiry in a particular setting 'rings true' for those persons who are members of that setting" (p.30). These commonalities provided a link to the credible outcomes they represented. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement,

persistent observation, and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba said

prolonged engagement and persistent observation require both time and focus on the

phenomenon. Peer debriefing method was employed to help build credibility. This allowed a

peer who was a professional to help analyze material and listen to the ideas and concerns

brought up in the research. The peer debriefer asked probing questions and listened to the

researcher's frustrations and emotions that may lead to an unclear picture of the phenomenon

(Erlandson et al., 1993). Reflexive journaling of the interviews allowed me to describe

thoughts, feelings, and experiences about each interview. This made it possible for me to

bring my thoughts, feelings, and experiences in line with each participant (Lincoln & Guba,

1985).

Triangulation of data according to Erlandson and associates provided a way to

validate data against other sources or methods that were used during the research. "No single

item of information (unless coming from an elite and unimpeachable source) should ever be

given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated" (p. 283). I triangulated data by

comparing data between different respondents and between methodologies of interviews.

Erlandson (1993) described the dependability of data collected "is based on true

generalization where all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they

occur" (p. 32). When the researcher was exploring and gathering data, patterns started to

emerge and the confirmatory process began (Patton, 1990). Patton suggested that auditing

these data were one technique to enhance the confirmability as well as the dependability of

research. The trustworthiness of research depended upon these areas through the use of

triangulation of data and the verifiability of data accuracy during the data collection practice.

Audit trails for readers to follow, like the ones found in the development of conclusions and

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recommendations, enhanced the trustworthiness. Audit trails helped to track data to the source so that data was confirmed. The reader of the research was then the only one who answered the question of transferability as it related to shared characteristics. Research provided the means for readers to respond to the appropriateness of transferring the data from one context to another.

One final means to employ trustworthiness was through the use of member checks. Member checks occurred during this research when participants were asked to review data collected for accuracy, fairness, and validity. Researchers, according to Patton (1990), often "learn a great deal about the accuracy, fairness, and validity of their data analysis by having the people described in that data analysis react to what is described" (p. 468). Erlandson et al. (1993) supported some of the same ideas concerning member checking and credibility. Participants in this research were allowed the opportunity to give feedback during the data collection process.

CHAPTER 4

Story of School Closure

Data from the research reveals communication and empathy were identified by

teachers as key elements to reduce stress during a school closing. Communication needs

to be timely, accurate consistent, and two-way. The teachers further believe that it is

incumbent that the district leadership team understands the culture of change and loss so

that they can appropriately relate to the teachers experiencing the emotional trauma of

closing a school.

Through explication of the themes of death and dying, organizational culture,

change, and emotion, five distinct categories emerged for each of the themes during the

eight interviews. The five categories were communication, political, community,

transition, and student. These results are the subjective description of the experience of

school closure for teachers.

The findings are presented in six tables. Overview of the interview data for

experience of death and dying, organizational culture, change, and emotion are described

in Table 1. Table 2 indicates the death and dying experience. Tables 3 to 5 indicate the

descriptions of the school district as an organizational culture, the experience as it relates

to change, and the emotions expressed by participants. Table 6 shows participants'

suggestions and recommendations, if they were the superintendent in their school district.

The findings from the interviews tell the story of school closure through the eyes

of eight teachers. Stories tell the experience that explains a phenomenon. The primary

purpose is to understand the phenomenon. The understanding provides new knowledge

that not only assists in a better understand of the phenomenon, but a way to improve the

human experience embedded in the phenomenon. In this research I explored the experiences related to teachers' feelings and emotions during the closure of a school. The new knowledge provided implications, when implemented, will enhance teachers' capability to better serve students, community, and peers during future school closings.

The tables help to build on the individual textural structural descriptions of all co-researchers' experiences, then construct a composite textural structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experience. The tables allow integration of textural structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

The participants were all teachers in schools located in Kansas. All levels in the K-12 system were represented in this study as teachers from elementary, middle school and high school were selected. These teachers ranged from non-tenured to tenured with over 30 years of experience. Each of these teachers told their story in their own words about their feelings and emotions during school closure. For many of the teachers it was the first time sharing their feelings and emotions about their school and the closing process.

Participants

The participants were all teachers located at three schools across the state of Kansas. There were three males and five females. They ranged in ages from early twenties to late fifties. All of the participants were still in the teaching profession. Five participants were still in their current school district while the remaining four were teaching in other districts. All participants had experienced school closure within the past three years. The eight participants represented the closure process at all three building

levels; elementary, middle school and high school. The descriptions presented are limited to ensure each teacher's anonymity.

Ms. A.

Ms. A was in her 29th year of teaching as an elementary teacher at Somich Elementary School. She is married and a mother. Her children attended the school that was closing. She continues to teach because of her love for children.

Ms. E.

Ms. E started teaching in 1974 at Crow Middle School. She then took some time off to raise children then went back into teaching. She has been a part of the community and the school through many different changes. She knew that the continuing decline in school enrollment could lead to the closing of her school.

Ms. H.

Ms. H has the least experience of any of the teachers who participated in the interview process. Her perspective of schools was just being formed when school closure occurred. She is single with no children and teaches at Crow Middle School.

Ms. K.

Ms. K was an experienced teacher with over 23 years at Somich Elementary School that was about to close. She was married and her child attended the closed school,

as many other children had done in the past. She had a great passion for the school and what it did for the involved people.

Ms. W.

Ms. W has been a teacher and coach, as well as a member of the community for over 40 years. She was involved in all aspects from church, community events, and the closing of her school, Bender High School.

Mr. C.

Mr. C was in his 31st year of teaching when the decision to close Bender High School was made. He is married and continues to teach after his retirement from the district. He lives in the community where the building was closed and commutes too another district for work.

Mr. G.

Mr. G related that he had been in education many years as a teacher and a coach. His children were attending Bender High School when it was closing. He was very active in a leadership role during the school closing process.

Mr. H.

Mr. H started teaching 21 years ago. Most of his 21 years of experience had been at Crow Middle School. He lived in another community out side of the district and commuted to school to teach for many years. During his tenure at the school, he had experienced many changes in leadership at the building and district level.

Stories of Teachers

Table 4.1, Appendix D, displays data concerning the units of meaning of the four themes of death and dying, organizational culture, change, and emotion in respect to each

of the five categories listed in column one. Column two illustrates the participants'

response to each of the five categories. Column three depicts how the participants

responded to each theme and each category. Column four represents the "meaning units"

recorded in each category. The main object of the table is to emphasize the importance of

each category (see Appendix B for a complete description of this table).

Table 4.1

Participation Rate and Frequency of Units for Themes of Death and Dying,

Organizational Culture, Change, and Emotion

Categories	Co-Researchers 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Participants' Rates	Frequency of Units
1 Transition	Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y	100.0%	131
2 Community	N N Y Y Y Y Y N	92.5%	49
3 Political	Y Y Y Y N N N N	90.0%	67
4 Communication	N N N N N N N N	80.0%	101
5 Student	N N N N N_2 N_2 N_2 N_2	72.5%	48

Tables 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 provide analysis of data according to Moustakas

(1994). The tables explain the construct of Individual Textural Description, which is each

individual remarks about the theme and category. This allows for a description of 'what"

happened in the experience and includes verbatim examples from the transcribed

interviews. The tables are set up to provide the themes within the table. The first column

contains categories that were identified during the data analysis. The second column

contains a definition related to the labeled category. Column three provides participant

verbatim remarks relating what happened in the experience of school closure according to

each specific category and theme.

Table 4.2

Categories of Death and Dying

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Communication	This category referred to the issues and experiences related to the participant's freedom to talk to others about school closure.	"No participants responded" Teachers during the interviews did not make any comments related to this category related to death and dying.
Students	This category referred to the interactions between students and participants.	"No participants responded"
Political	This category referred to the role that administration/board played during the closing of a school.	"We felt betrayed by the 'outsiders' and it was a loss for us." "The day we were told we would close we were still hoping that we could open again next year…" "It just did not seem right…what just happened?"
Community	This category referred to either the school community or the community that contained the school that was closing.	"It's not as bad as losing a family member and death but I think you're right up there with this, every day as far as the community goes it was tough."

Table 4.2 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Community (con't.)		"Going back to the community…what are you going to do now the kid's school closing and the town is dead… this town is the school and without it the town is dead." "Really a lot of worry about what was going to happen…I think there is kind of a loss to what we had there, it is the legacy."
Transition	This category referred to the adjustments that participants had to adapt to after their building was closed.	"It still feels funny the high-school rooms from one room to the next." "I think that it [school closing] has really been hard but I learned to deal with my anger." "I can't think of anything tougher, even the death of my dad…I don't know that it was any less personal than that!"

Table 4.3

Categories of Organization Culture in a school district

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Communication	This category referred the sharing of information from Administration/Board of Education	"They did pay a group of people to come up with options for saving money to operate the schools, and it was a task force." "I feel that way, everybody seemed to have a different agenda or it seemed like that we thought we were hearing one thing from one person as far as administration and it turns out that was not it and it was misunderstood." "In our situation, if they would've done some more public relations to convince the public that it was going to benefit everyone, possibly people would not have been quite as angry."
Students	This category referred to the interactions between students, participants and administration.	"I truly feel as an elementary teacher I got into the room and the other teaches as well they felt like the kid's got a good education because we were able to focus on the kids."

Table 4.3 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Students (con't.)		"One day I was told the superintendent left a pack of enrollment stuff and our kids just threw them in the trash…it was bad, it was a bad day." "High-school was different because of their emotions...I think the education process continued as well as possible."
Political	This category referred to the role that administration/board played during the closing of a school.	"There were a couple of board members…they've really supported us for the most part." "When they can show me the money that was saved…I don't think that we can show that. I still think that we spent more making the move and closing." "Said they would rely on the focus group but they pretty much had their minds made up and it was just wasted time."

Table 4.3 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Community	This category referred to either the school community or the community that contained the school that was closing.	"It was my first job in teaching, and I just completed 31 years with the district before it closed." "I have been involved in teaching here for 28 years, it would have been 31 but I did not teach for three years when I was bringing up my children." "We tried a high-school experience in the 1970s, and then, left that in 1977. I took 11 years off to raise kids and then came back to this community."
Transition	This category referred to the adjustments that participants had to adapt to after their building was closed.	"I'm probably the only teacher left from the original closing [in the district]." "Through the loss of personal I was moved to social studies full-time because of class sizes." "There was no administrator and nobody that was there full time…that was a problem."

Table 4.4

Categories of Change in a closing school

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Communication	This category referred the sharing of information and the affects it has on teachers.	"When we came here we learned two things. One was that our school would either close or we would be getting a new gym. And, so we never got the new gym but we did it. The building closed!" "For the last three or four years we have been talking about closing." "It is getting better because we are all in the same town now."
Students	This category referred to how the students experienced school closure through teacher perceptions.	"The juniors would not be able to graduate from this school so there were a lot tough times." "We had an interview done by a newspaper. A student told them that it did not matter what school he would go to. He would still learn." "We just tried to keep it positive and keep it out of the students' lives. I think we did a good job of that until the very end."

Table 4.4 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Political	This category referred to the role that administration/board played during the closing of a school.	"Was this really necessary or did another community just want a new high school? "The stuff they showed was whatever it takes to get the schools close!" "They chose to keep everybody for the year this year."
Community	This category referred to either the school community or the community that contained the school that was closing.	"I feel like the biggest thing we've seen since the closing is the closeness of the community." "The building was a six through eight until it closed…we lost the concept of a middle school because we are now a 7-12 building in a new community." "It did help a lot when we decided as a community to set goals."

Table 4.4 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Transition	This category referred to the adjustments that participants had to adapt to after their building was closed	"When the kids leave the eighth grade here we just lose track of these kids and I think that's really hard on us because we've always been able to keep track of the students and watch their sports." "This year compared, to last year, I could see we had lost some of things that we had over there [the closing school], but I think they're good things [things we lost], just different." "Between buildings, I think that respect it is better now. Before, the people had a lot of hesitation as it was happening."

Table 4.5

Categories of Emotions from participants in a closing school

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Communication	This category referred the sharing of information and the affects it has on teachers.	"I did feel like the closing was more a rumor until I went to the board meeting when we actually voted to close. That was awful!" "I worried about who was going to be in what room. Then, the staff had to figure it out around October 6th." [The teacher was moved from one grade level during the academic year in the new school.] "We all said that the truth is out there, but we don't know where. Nobody knows what this and that was about."
Students	This category referred to how the students experienced school closure or how students and teachers reacted together.	"I felt like, when I went into the classroom and with the kids, I was able to get away mentally from that particular thing [school closing issues]." "I know that teachers became counselors for kids.

Table 4.5 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Students (con't.)		"With all the things tested now, student achievement seems to be placed just on one teacher's shoulders. It is like having your head on and chopping block…this is one of my biggest fears."
Political	This category referred to the role that administration/board played during the closing of a school.	"It is just like you hear it [school closing] but it never happens. So you just keep going and going and you keep improving your building and keep improving everything." "You are just disappointed because you have no control over it and there was a lot of anger because you do not have any control." "I think the board needed to stop the frolic, but the continual struggle on the board continued because they could not come to a consensus."
Community	This category referred to either the school community or the community that contained the school that was closing.	"I know of a school district that closed a school 30 years ago and the people are still people upset.

Table 4.5 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Community (con't.)		"It was pretty hard as we saw faces at the doors…Educators had been through a lot and everyone was your family…your brothers and sisters and kids." "It was funny to listen to the kids and their parents, who graduated from here. They [kids] were going to go to school in another district. They [kids and parents] were concerned because the ways changed. The receiving school seemed to be against anything that we wanted."
Transition	This category referred to the adjustments that participants had to adapt to after their building was closed.	"There were a lot of tears because you know all the kids, and that it is going to be different." "It was devastating and it was hard to keep your mind on your job."

Table 4.6 contains the remarks made by the participants, as if they were the superintendent of their school district. This table provides a definition of each of the categories related to labeled theme. Column three provides co-researcher remarks in respect to the category.

Table 4.6

Categories related to Superintendents' role in school closure.

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Communication	This category referred the sharing of information during school closure process.	"Well what I would do if I were superintendent…first of all I would be in my schools a whole lot more often." "Talk to your staff and get to know them better. Then just answer questions with information as soon as you get it." "Come to the teachers with one meeting to explain to all in the district what is going to happen. So that everyone can hear the same message."
Students	This category referred to how the students experienced school closure and how the superintendent needed to be involved.	"We did the passing of the torch from the seniors to the next students as they were to be the ones in charge of the school. The superintended needed to be in attendance." "The superintendent needed to know that the students are not going to have the opportunity to start someplace else because high school is about social growing."

Table 4.6 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Students (con't.)		"The superintendent should understand that students think they will be graduating from this school…then it closes, what are they going to do now?"
Political	This category referred to the role that administration/board played during the closing of a school.	"I would like to know some real logical reasons why things happened, and prove to me that it was in the best interest of children." "If I had to go through this, the first thing I would do is to make sure that there was no other possible way other than closing a school." "If the superintendent said we are using focus groups, and then the results need to follow the recommendations… The board should not have their minds made up before the presentation."
Community	This category referred to either the school community or the community that contained the school that was closing.	"The superintendent should realize that, if the people are not part of the process, they will feel like the process was a slap in their face."

Table 4.6 (continued)

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Community (con't.)		"The superintendent needs to look at other options rather than closing a school. He or she needs to look to other building and community resources to see what could be shared to reduce cost, if that is the problem." "The superintendent needs to show that he cares about teachers, students, and the community."
Transition	This category referred to the adjustments that participants had to adapt to after their building was closed.	"If you were the leader or coach of a football team, you don't just call a play without all players understanding play and others are convinced you are doing the right thing. "We didn't have a plan or blueprint that helped to guide us through this process…." "You may want to look at books as it relates to positive cultures, changing culture. You also need to understand that this is like losing a loved one and is like a death."

Summary of the Results

The value of research is apparent as participants share several key feelings about school closure. The feelings coalesce around key points to identify the findings of the research.

Communication, leadership team, the understanding of the culture, and the emotional impact of change and loss during the event deepened the connection between the school and the teachers in the community. Planning processes to include teachers will help allow a transition that promotes a positive environment.

The teachers had a strong connection and commitment to the school and the community. One teacher commented that it was her first job in teaching and it had lasted for 31 years. Another teacher stated that it was hard to watch the faces as the school door closed and the students would be going to another school. Yet, another teacher spoke vividly about the school closing through the shedding of tears. Another teacher talked about her involvement not only in the school, but in the community through church and other organizations.

The teachers stated that they experienced emotions of anger, denial, depression, frustration, crying, and abandonment. One teacher expressed her depression and that she would just start crying for no reason at all. Another teacher explained how frustrated he was because he did not know where or what he would be teaching next year. Several teachers expressed their anger about the whole process. Others had heard that they were going to close the schools for over 20 years, and so when they finally did, they were in denial.

Teachers believed that the leadership team should have been more supportive during the school closing process. Teachers stated the superintendent or board members did not

make visits to their schools on a regular basis. Visits did not occur even before the building was going to close. Several teachers stated that there was also a turnover in leadership either just before or just after the closing of the school. One teacher said she had to ask the superintendent to come and visit with the staff about the closing process.

Teachers stated that communication was inconsistent, infrequent, and not two-way. One teacher stated that the only communication they received was passed from one building to the next. The teacher continued by stating that the communication was not accurate. Another teacher spoke about the lack of communication after the school was closed, which left them in disarray. Several teachers expressed that they wanted the administration to come and share with the whole staff and respond to their concerns.

Teachers believed that there should be a plan that allowed for a structured organized school closing and transition of staff and students to another school. One teacher said that there was very little planning for the process. The same teacher continued that we were expected to do it all. Other teachers shared that the district staff needed to develop and share a blue print with the teachers. They further stated that the implementation of a blue print would provide structure to the process. Mr. H summed up the feelings of many colleagues by stating that, "It was like driving a ship without a rudder."

This chapter presented a synopsis of the eight teachers' professional experience, tables explaining teacher comments by the four themes and five categories, as well as the findings of the research. The next chapter presents the conclusions and implications.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

This chapter will present the four sections of Conclusions, Co-Researcher

Recommendations, Research and Practical implications, and the Limitations, Contributions

of the Study and Further Research. The chapter discusses the conclusions the researcher

made from analysis of the data; the recommendations made by the teachers, also know as co-

researchers; the implications that evolved from the data and supported by literature; and

concludes with the limitations, contributions, and epilogue through the lens of

phenomenology.

Conclusions

This section contains the conclusions of the research, which are derived from the

findings with support of the literature. The first section, Death and Dying, discusses the

teachers' perspective about how the closing of a school relates to the experience of death and

dying. Organizational Culture of a School District, second section, explains how decision

making process affects the teachers, the culture of the existing school, and the overall culture

of the school district. The Change Process and School Closure section describes how the

closure of a school creates a change process that is interpreted and reacted to differently by

each teacher. The change process is a very personal matter for each teacher during the

closing of a school. Emotional Impact of School Closure describes the range of emotions

experienced by teachers during the school closure process.

Death and Dying Experiences

Teachers' perspective about how the closing of a school relates to the experience of

death and dying. Several types of experiences of death and dying emerge from the

interviews. The findings of this study are consistent with the previous research in that death and dying is present, and clearly identified, while evidence of death and dying is more complicated and difficult to identify (Kubler-Ross, 1969). One of the obvious reasons for these findings is that death and dying does not leave traces of visible wounds (Studs Terkel, 2002).

One of the challenges in this study is to distinguish between the severe conflict in death and dying comparing an individual to the affects of closing a school. According to Kubler-Ross (1969) and Studs Terkel (2002), one way to detect death and dying is to have in-depth discussions with the victims because this phenomenon would not show up as a visible injury. Another difficulty in distinguishing death and dying from a loss, such as a school closing, seems to be the lack of consistency in its definition. For instance, Kubler-Ross talks about death and dying as a patient's agonies, expectations, and frustrations. Thus, it seems very possible that teachers who are a part of school closure seem to express some of these same emotions.

Kubler-Ross (1969) indicates that people who experience loss are prone to travel different stages of a grieving process. It is normal to have anxieties, fears, and hopes. These feeling are natural and led to acceptance for some of the dying patients and living participants. If the person, who was experiencing the loss, does not progress through many of the stages described by Kubler-Ross, they may experience conflict and their emotions may cause negative damage on individuals. Kubler-Ross also states that if the stages of loss are not experienced then the stress level will elevate in the individual.

In this study, one way to identify loss is to identify actions that are clearly expressed by the individual. For example, one participant did not accept the news about the closing of

the building and is going to try and keep it open. Various researchers indicate that loss is accompanied by denial, which is the first stage of the grieving process (Kubler-Ross, 1969; Terkel, 2001; Worden, 1981). In addition, Kubler-Ross, states that all individuals will experience loss at some point in their lives and deny that loss.

One of the damaging long term effects of loss is individual isolation. Participants are forced to disconnect their social support and have their self-reliance and self-esteem shattered by the loss or in this case a closing of a school. Ms. K shares her experience of loss and isolation, "The year of closure is hard and I felt alone, then I just started to cry." For Ms. W, she experience feelings of death and dying, "I can't think of anything tougher, even the death of my dad…I don't know that it was any less personal than that." This is consistent with Kubler-Ross (1969) where she mentions that death today is mechanical and dehumanizing, and it becomes lonely and impersonal. Change research presented by Phillips (1995) agrees with this issue by relating change to loss as it occurs in a four room depiction. The first room is described as contentment, where the individual would be calm and things remained in perspective. When the subjects moved into the next room, denial, they found it difficult to exit and most of the change problems arose in this phase of the change process. When individuals were ready to move on from this room, they found themselves in the room of confusion. In this room they finally owned up to the experience and started to feel like they were in a thick fog with no real direction. In the final room the individuals felt renewed. This room of renewal was where they saw the light of change and began to experience the excitement. Terkel (2002) also supports this process as he shares the stories of future death through various life reflections.

For the initial emotional impact of death and dying individuals have experiences of fear, feeling threatened, and feelings of isolation as a result of the conditions that surround the closing of a school. Mr. G states, "We felt betrayed by the 'outsiders' and it was a loss for us." Mr. C shares his fear as, "For me it is hard to just see the rooms empty." He also believes, "That when you take away a small school you are just killing a part of Kansas." Ms. W also states, "I had a fear as it relates to my future. What will I do now?" These results are consistent with the present research.

In her qualitative research, Kubler-Ross (1969) recognizes the initial shock when individuals experience death or loss. She states in the initial encounter of the loss, the individual reacts with denial and isolation, the first stage in the grieving process. The individual may then become angry, signs of the second stage in the process. Then there may be a time for bargaining as the individual will look for ways to undo the situation. When this does not work, depression set in and the individual may respond with sadness or crying. As the individual progresses, acceptance of the problem signals that the person is moving on and learning. If the individual continues to progress, hope, the final stage is now alive as they start to believe that they can be a part of the process. In addition, these individuals learned from their experience that leaving their current life did not take away their experience of loss.

Political exploitation and control that is a part of all school closures enhance the feelings of loss for all participants. There are several ways that political factors enter into the closing of schools in this study. The first occurs when the board of education starts the conversations about the closing of a school. Ms. W shared her experience of the first time, "Then it happened [closing the school]. It was just devastating, not just to the community, it

is just so personal." Mr. H adds, "I was in limbo, I did not know what I was going to be teaching next year."

Other political ramifications of death and dying experiences may enter into the school closing process that center on the choices the administrators make and how they communicate with the community. Thus, this also creates difficulties for the teaching staff. Ms. E describes her experience, "There were certain teachers who were discontent or misled about the closing and their jobs." Mr. H also says, "There was no full time administrator in the building so nobody helped and that was a problem." He continues by adding, "We had to deal with a lot of the issues ourselves."

Community loss expressed through teachers is a reality and the ability for them to share their feelings is an essential element of the grieving process. Many of the participants are members of the community where the school is closing. Mr. C shares his community experience, "It's not as bad as losing a family member and death, but I think you're right up there with this. Every day as far as the community goes it was tough." Though most experiences are similar, Mr. H shares it in a different way, "Going back to the community…what are you going to do now, the school is closing and the town is dead…this town is the school and without it the town is dead."

The transitions that are a part of the death and dying process seem to linger on and that may be due to the difference between a death and the closing of a school. Death usually happens to one member of a family whereas the closing of a school impacts the whole community. Mr. G shares his impact when he says, "I think that it has really been hard but I have learned to deal with my anger." Ms. K shares her anger when she states, "The whole thing is devastating and when we learned about the closing it was hard to keep our minds on

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our jobs." Kubler-Ross affirms that this type of grieving results because of the negative memories that is a part of the death process. She explains how a husband's sense of loss may be great, as he may not be flexible enough to take care of children, meals, and school activities. He may come to resent these changes even though they are rational. Memories like these are shared by a whole community and everyone knows the story of why the school is closed. Mr. C states, "When we came here we learned two things. One was that our school would either close or we would be getting a new gym. And, so we never got the new gym, but we did it. The building closed!" Ms. A comments, "I feel like the biggest thing we've seen since the closing is the closeness if the community."

Organizational Culture of a School District

The decision to close a school affects the teachers, the culture of the exiting school, and the overall culture of the school district. Schein (1992) describes an organization like schools, where boards of education are the leaders, who have the ability to create, manage, and even destroy a culture. When school closure becomes a topic, these leaders need to understand the magnitude of their decisions. McLean (2003) makes it clear that closing or consolidating a school can destroy a culture that has been active for many years. Mr. C states, "This was my first job as a teacher and I just completed 31 years." Many teachers also shared, "It is a small town with a family atmosphere where we get to know everybody." These findings show that closing a school can cause a change in not only a school culture but also the community where the school is located. Specifically participants did not feel responsible, but they did not know how to maintain harmony. Participants also felt left out of the process. Mr. G shares, "We had only one faculty meeting the whole year concerning the

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closing of our school." Ms. G also states, "The communication is just a mess and the board should have sent out copies of papers that contained the information discussed."

Communication is a major factor in the closing process. Many participants share that if this would have been a priority of the district, it may have improved the process. Mr. H shares about communication, "If they would just have more meetings and tell us who is going where and what they will be teaching." Ms. A made this comment, "When we did have town meetings, I think that helped." Organizations like schools base their assumptions upon its founders (Schein, 1992). If the culture of the school is understood, then sharing of climate, practices, espoused values and credos could be expressed by teachers, staff, students and community members without fear. Ms. W shows her fear by stating, "One of the reasons for not talking about closing the school is the result from being told at the beginning of the year by the board president that if we liked our jobs we should not get involved." Another teacher shares her opinion, "We are employees of the school district and it was hard to express our concerns about a decision made by the board of education."

Politics also play a big role in the closing of a school. The school district is seen as a political organization made up of an elected board. After answering some questions about the closure experience, Mr. C shares, "We heard so much that we just thought it was not going to happen and it was just talk. Unfortunately four people [board members] in this world could cause a lot of destruction in the family. These four people were voted in to a position and our community fought and fought. There was just no way we were going to win." This seems to be a recurring response as made by Ms. A, "Superintendents and school board members really don't care what the teachers say even when they came up with several options of saving money. Teachers were completely ignored because they [administration] had already

made their decision." Mr. C also has this to add, "I don't think that anybody at the district level cared about anything over here at our school." Boards of education according to McLean (2003) need to understand that if funding is an issue, then is closing a school the only answer to that question.

School culture contains many students' and teachers' interactions and relationships. These interactions and relationships make it necessary to look at the school closing from the teachers' points of view. School culture and organizational culture is similar in every community. In small rural communities, the school provides the community with purpose and activity. The education and concern for students are expressed by Mr. C, "I know that teachers became counselors for the students during the closing year." Ms. G states, "The middle school kids shared how much they were going to miss Mr. H because he was going to be teaching in the elementary school and as all other teachers would be at their 7-12 school next year." Ms. W wants to make sure that students are heard by stating, "In the high school classrooms there were days that we just sat behind closed doors where kids would cry and share their worries."

Each of the communities, where school closure happens, communities, according to the participants, was not going to be the same. When different groups of people want different things according to Schein (1992) communication is lost. Teachers share that they were a part of these communities for many years. Ms. A explains, "I have been teaching here for 28 years, it would have been 31years but I stayed at home with my children for those three years." Ms. K adds, "I have been a teacher here for 23 years. I have attended church and many activities in this small community where my child attended school, it was a great place." Because many of these teachers are in the communities for many years, they are

committed to the community. They believe that if they work hard enough and are diligent enough, then the school board would restore their school. One participant shares her thoughts when she states, "I remember when we started to put together plans for expansion and remodeling for our school, that was about two years before we closed. Some of us started to believe that we may have a chance in the future." Ms. H shares her feelings of belonging and says, "I have only been in teaching two years and I feel like I belong."

When an organization causes these changes to the community and the school the people have to make many transitions. Ms. A shares her concern about teachers leaving the school. "We have lost most of our teachers this past year." Mr. G expresses his challenge, "I coach and so I did not know if I would still be coaching after the school closed." Mr. C states this about administration, "They did not share last summer with the custodial staff where my boxes would go in the accepting school. So I thought that they did not have any plans for the transition."

Change Process and School Closure

The change process is a very personal matter for each teacher during the closing of a school. The theme of change is prevalent from all participants as they explain what it is like for them before, during, and after the closing of their schools. The categories within this theme express how change affects them, as well as teachers, students, and community.

According to research, a framework of meaning and central themes in a change process can be revolutionary or evolutionary and that each person will perceive, interpret, and respond to change experiences in a specific way (O'Toole, 1995). O'Toole was supported by Sarason (1996) when he stated, "Many people viewed change as an unmitigated disaster…and then there are those who do not know what to think" (p.147).Themes and

beliefs about change exist on the ideological level of functioning and this individual ideology shapes the way they respond. The process of change was significant because teachers were re-visiting their past, examining their reactive patterns, and attempting to make sense of the closing of a school.

Ms. A said, "We just lose track of the kids when they leave the 8th grade and I think that's really hard on us because we've always been able to keep track of the students. We would watch their sports and other activities during high school, but now we have them going to at least three different high schools." Ms. E also described her experiences, "We have always been a middle school and now we are going to a part of the high school, that is going to be different." Mr. B describes his experience as, "We lack leadership in this change process. Principals came and left during the year and we really did not know what to do and so we were on our own most of the time." Issues of change are significantly imminent during the closing of a school.

Emotional Impact of School Closure

Teachers experienced a range of emotions during the school closure process. An emotional difficulty experienced by teachers is one of the themes concerning the closing of a school that emerged. This result is consistent with previous research that is linked to loss. The teachers recognize their emotional difficulties such as anger, lack of remorse, emotionally cut off from the district, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulties in there responsibilities at school. During the interview, teachers openly display their emotions while describing their school closure experience.

Although not everyone experiences the closing of a school as a teacher, the teacher's spoke to the emotions that emerge. Ms. A states, "There was a lot of anger in us because we

did not have any control over the closing of the school." Ms. K, while crying makes this comment, "It is very painful and I would go home to have a good cry." Mr. B expresses his anger when he states, "We paid thousands and thousands of dollars for a study that was not even used!" Ms. W feeling depressed says, "It was hurtful…I had to start taking anti-depressants because of it." Mr. G states that the board did not care, "They did not want any dissenting opinions." Ms. G believes her self-esteem is low because, "Others [people from other communities] believed that we were not giving a quality education to our students."

Co-Researchers' Recommendations

The participants provide several important recommendations regarding strategies for school districts to use when school closure becomes an issue. Their recommendations can be grouped into three categories. Communication before, during, and after school closings, organizing a planning process for school closures, and providing support for teachers during the process. Discussions of each of these recommendations are in the following section.

Communication Before, During and After School Closings

One of the main themes is communication. Teachers express a desire for the district to communicate with the staff on a regular basis to better prepare for events in the future. To achieve an acceptable amount of communication, teachers at all buildings suggest that the superintendent be more available and get out to the buildings on a regular basis. The teachers believe a superintendent who cares about the concerns of the staff will be a visible superintendent. The participants, however, found that even with communication, the closing of a school would create an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. Teachers believe that if communication occurs in a timely manner and often that it will help to build and maintain positive relationships between educators and administrators including the boards of

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education. Even though communication and visibility are important, it will not totally resolve the impact of the closing of a school.

Organizational culture according to Schein (1992) may create a positive relationship between employees and employer, if communication occurs to include employees in the process of change. John Kretzmann and John McKnight (1993) agreed and indicated that communication in a community has a tendency to create social gatherings or niches.

Kubler-Ross (1969) and Terkel (2002) stated that when loss occurs, there was a need for communication that allowed individuals a chance to express their thoughts. They said that all individuals who experience loss, needed time for the shared information to become real and then time to share their feelings and emotions.

Organized Process for School Closure

A holistic approach is important to achieve the collaborative intervention necessary in the school closure process. Teachers find that an accurate examination of the closure process will help everyone establish relationships between all parties. Building relationships long before the closure process is very beneficial (Creswell, 2003).

Participants find that it is important to treat each situation, community, and individual unique with carful and holistic examination. It is incumbent that people in leadership positions such as superintendents and school board members consider the ramification and feelings and emotions of affected individuals prior to starting the process of school closing. Historically, school closures are based primarily on financial reasons. The financial reasons may be an area other than shortage of funds, such as the need to construct new or remodel an existing building to better serve district needs, due to a change in population growth or

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redistribution. While this need may be valid, a well planned process must be developed and implemented to recognize and meet the needs of each or involved persons.

Providing Support for Teachers

In order to meet the needs of teachers, superintendents and board of education members must be more knowledgeable about personal emotional needs of teachers involved in a school closing. This includes learning the definition and effects of loss or death and dying according to Kubler-Ross (1969). Learning the definition of loss is important because the words "death" and "dying" have tremendous power, while the terms "school closure" could possibly be used abusively. One example of an abusive comment could be related to the closing of a school and the reason for closing is the performance of the students. This statement may not be true for all students and all grades at a particular building, but it has a negative affect on all individuals at that school.

Various researchers agree that the part of death and dying that makes the research challenging is the lack of understanding the process of loss. Kubler-Ross (1969) and Hutton (1994) described the process of loss in several stages. Hutton described the change process, like the loss process, also occurs in stages or phases. Ending or letting go of the past, transitioning to new possibilities, and the beginnings of a new direction. Phillips (1995) uses psychologist Claes Janssen's research for change in relationship to a four-room apartment. In these rooms contentment, denial, confusion and renewal are a part of an individual's experience. These processes like the stages of death and dying need recognition and nurturing if an individual is expected to endure the closing of a school.

Understanding the proper definition of loss is necessary to provide the proper support when needed. It is very important for everyone involved to be knowledgeable about the loss

process and the individual stages within the process. The understanding of the loss process allows persons, experiencing loss or dealing with those experiencing loss, to help provide possible intervention. For example, in the first stage of loss the individual is in denial. This stage is then replaced by anger. When anger is present, the individual is said to have moved on from the first stage to the second stage of grief. The individual that is supportive of the process will be a sensitive and perceptive listener and that is all that is required (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

In order to live at ease after school closure, teachers must know that they are valued and respected during the process. Therefore, it is important for the superintendent to listen and share concerns with the teachers. Knowing what resources are available in the closing of a school and where to find them is important. The interventions could help when the feeling of being stuck or passively dealing with issues.

Implications

This section addresses implications for leadership of school districts to consider when making and implementing the decision to close a school. The implications deal with communication, cultural issues, counseling, planning process and leadership knowledge of emotional aspects of death and dying and their relationship to the change process.

Although actual experiences of teachers may be similar in many ways, the impact of school closure may be more severe at the high school than at either middle or elementary schools. One of the significant differences is in their experiences is in the interaction with students. High school teachers seem to be much more in the role of counselors for these students. This role of counselor causes stress and challenges for them because they lack training in this area. The barriers between administration and teachers are great and this

distance causes teachers to assume that their role is not important in the closing process. Teachers, who are in buildings that are closing, may feel isolated from other buildings and believe that others do not care about them or their schools. Unfamiliarity with the closing of a school augments their feelings of isolation and acculturation stress. Teachers may see more school closures as budgets become issues in their district.

Second, the reason for feeling isolated may come from the culture that is present at the school or at the district level. Teachers believe that when administration is visible there will be support when needed. Teachers want support during the closing process as it may be a process they have never experienced. When teachers feel supported by the administration then students will also feel that same support from the staff during this challenging transition.

In terms of a teacher strategy to guide them in the closure process, may be one of the unique types of strategies, move to a district where school closure is not an issue. Leaving will produce a sense of security. It may also provide job security.

Communications

The district leadership should develop and implement communication procedures that ensure that teachers who are involved in school closure receive timely and accurate information about each step of the process. It is important to teachers that feedback from the administration be given at the appropriate place and time and in a professional manner. Communication as discussed in the literature review must be honest and open. Communication is essential when establishing and maintaining a positive school culture.

Cultural Issues

The school district leadership should be knowledgeable of the affects that school closure have on the school community and especially its teachers. When the decision is made

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that a school is closing, the leadership team understands that a teacher will be moving from one established school culture to one that is totally different. The district leadership needs to bring teachers together to share expectations, attitudes, and beliefs to lower concerns.

Counseling

The district leadership team needs to establish a counseling program to support teachers during the school closing process. First step is to educate all participants about the issues that surround the closing of a school. This includes learning the definitions of loss and culture. It is also important to learn about the resources available for both teachers and administrators related to school closures. When situations become uncomfortable, the teacher or administrator will seek licensed counselors or counseling services which may be appropriate.

Planning for School Closure

The district leadership team needs to involve teachers from the school experiencing closure and the school(s) receiving teachers from the closed school. Start with trying to understand teacher concerns as expressed in their own language. Listen with an open mind and use surveys or focus groups to help gather information. Plans need to be constructed related to packing, inventory, assignments, mentors and contacts for teachers. Finally, a visible superintendent during the planning process is one who is available during the time of need.

Emotional Aspects

The leadership team awareness of the emotional and psychological aspects of Death and Dying and its relationship to the change process is important. Teachers in a closing

school require support to deal with loss. The leadership team must be acutely aware of the

symptoms and ensure that support is provided for the teachers.

Limitations, Contributions of the Study, and Further Research

This section informs the reader about the limitations associated to a phenomenology research. With the understanding of these limitations, the reader will be informed how the results can be applied to practice and ideas for future research.

Limitations

One of the limitations is the sampling method and size. Because it is a convenient, purposive sampling, the focus of the sampling was to seek individuals who have experienced school closure and can articulate their experiences. Also, regarding sample size, for phenomenological research, the focus of the determination of the sample size is not to achieve the higher generalization, but to achieve as full illumination of the specific phenomenon as possible. Thus, if a larger and more random sample of teacher were drawn from different background, the result would be able to illuminate more of the school closure experience in schools located in Kansas

Another limitation is that the study is retrospective rather than prospective. Participant's accounts of their experience may have been distorted by memories. For instance, research conducted regarding the perceptions of experiences indicated that individual accounts may be reduced overtime, especially if those have gone through some support during the closing process.

As Osborne (1994) explained, the procedure of interpretation in phenomenological research is multi-layered. The participants interpret their experiences and describe their experiences in vertical terms. These descriptions are rephrased by the researcher in terms of the meaning structure. If the participant's experiences are explained retrospectively, it increases the potential distortion of the perception of experiences from their memories.

Throughout the time from the experience to the interview, people tend to reflect and analyze them in order to make sense of the experiences. This processes, with or without awareness, may create interpretations and opinions about their experiences. The result is interpretations may not reflect their authentic experience. Thus, the data analysis requires extreme precaution.

Contributions

In spite of several limitations in the study, this phenomenological research on school closure provides valuable contribution to the study of how teachers' experiences may vary. The main contribution of the study is that it gives voice to teachers who have been left out of the process. Second, the researchers' knowledge is the only psychological and phenomenological research of school closures experienced by teachers in Kansas. Third, because all interviews were conducted in Kansas, the information provided is more accurate and authentic to those teachers' experiences.

Epilogue

For the closure of this research, one of the most striking discoveries is to observe how deeply the participants are committed to schools. People tend to ask the teachers: "Why don't you just leave?" or "You should leave this school district" or "I don't know how you can teach day after day knowing that it will end!" In today's society, people are more assertive and claim individual rights. Through this interview process, I realize teachers are fighting desperately for what they deeply care about, such as children, community, and their school.

Follow-up conversations with the participants after the interviews revealed each of them have moved on in their lives. Unfortunately, one of the participants shared that she had

developed a serious illness. Even though she lost her school and community and has failing

health, she lives happily in Kansas with neighboring relatives.

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APPENDICES

Wichita State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Principal Investigator(s): <u>Dr. Randal L. Turk</u>

(For a student project, Principal Investigator **must** be a WSU faculty member; student is listed as Co-Investigator.)

Departmental/Program

Affiliation: <u>Department of Administration, Counseling, Educational, and School Psychology</u>

Campus Box: <u>142</u>   Phone <u>(316) 978-3325</u>

Name(s) of Co-Investigator(s):

Robert J. Morton

Co-Investigator(s) is/are: Faculty Member   X <u>Graduate Students</u>

Undergraduate Student

Type of Project: Class Project   Capstone Project   X <u>Thesis or Dissertation</u>

                    Funded Research   X   Unfunded Research

If student project, address of student: Not applicable

Title of Project/Proposal: <u>A Proposal to Study Teachers Perceptions of school closure in Kansas</u>

Expected Completion Date: <u>July, 2009</u>

Funding Agency (if applicable): <u>Not applicable</u>

APPENDIX A (continued)

Please attach additional sheets, if necessary, with numbers of responses corresponding to those listed below.

1.   Describe the research in non-technical language:

I will explore the perceptions of teachers who are experiencing or have experienced school closure in Kansas. Nine teachers will be selected teachers from three Kansas schools which has experienced school closure to participate in this qualitative research. Three teachers will be selected from each of the schools. There are no anticipated risks to the participants. As a teacher who has or is experiencing school closure, you are invited to participate in two personal interviews lasting approximately one hour. Interviews will be scheduled at a time and location selected by the participant. The research is designed to provide information about teacher attitudes and beliefs during the school closure process. Findings of this information may be presented at regional, national or international conferees and may result in scholarly publications.

2.   Describe the benefits of the research to the human subjects, if any, and of the benefits to human or scientific knowledge:

Understanding school closure and how teachers cope during the process is vital to education. Extensive research has been accomplished that addresses financial reasons for school closure or consolidation. Research needed to be conducted that provides an understanding of the effects that school closures have on teachers. The unknowns appear to be the effects of instruction, as well as consequences of other professional

and personal aspect of teachers' lives. The teachers in this study will receive results

through oral reviews and written results.

3.   Describe the subjects, how the subjects are to be selected, how many are to be used,

and indicate explicitly whether any are minors (under age 18 per Kansas law) or otherwise

members of "vulnerable" populations, including, but not limited to, pregnant women,

prisoners, psychiatric patients, etc.

> The subjects of the proposed study will be teachers who have experienced or are
>
> experiencing school closure in Kansas. Purposive sampling will be used to choose the
>
> participants in this qualitative study. The will be nine participants selected for
>
> interviews. Prior to any data collection activity, all individuals wishing to voluntarily
>
> participate in this study will be asked to sign an informed consent letter. All
>
> participants in this study will be over the age of 18 years old.

4.   Describe each procedure step-by-step, including the frequency, duration, and location

of each procedure.

> For purposes of this study, nine participants will be selected for personal interviews
>
> planned with selected teachers in Kansas. These interviews will be conducted at the
>
> participant's convenience and will last no longer than 60 minutes. There will be two
>
> interviews scheduled with each individual teacher. The first interview will be to
>
> collect first thought and reactions to school closure and then a follow up interview
>
> that will take place approximately two weeks later to discuss any information that
>
> was not shared in the first interview. Interview location and time will be selected the
>
> convenience of the participants

5.   Describe any risks or discomforts (physical, psychological, or social) and how they will be minimized:

> This research will be utilizing the framework of Phenomenology. Participants during data collection will be encouraged to be open in their response with the researcher. Their comments will be confidential. Focus of the research leads to a non-threatening study for the participants. We do not anticipate any risk to the participants. All participation will be voluntary and participants will be apprised of the research purpose.

6.   Describe how the subject's personal privacy is to be protected and confidentiality of information guaranteed (e.g. disposition of questionnaires, interview notes, recorded audio or videotapes, etc.).

> Participation and interview will be voluntary. Participants will be advised of consent and confidentiality through opening statements as well as in letters of consent (see attached). Field note and transcription interviews will not contain participant's names. Codings and transcripts will allow for identification. List of codes will be maintained in a location separate from note and transcripts. All interviews with consent of responders will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

7.   Describe the informed consent process and attach a copy of all consent and/or assent documents. These documents **must** be retained for three years beyond completion of the study. Any waiver of written informed consent must be justified.

> All participants will be required to sign a consent form prior to collecting data. The consent form will outline the purpose of the research, state that participation is

voluntary, and confidentially is assured. Consent form will guarantee the option to withdraw.

8.   Attach all supporting material, including, but not limited to, questionnaire or survey forms and letters of approval from cooperating institutions.

Copies of consent forms and protocol are attached.

The Principal Investigator agrees to abide by the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects and to retain consent forms for a minimum of three (3) years beyond the completion of the study. If the data collection or testing of subjects is to be performed by student assistants, the Principal Investigator will assume full responsibility for supervising the students to ensure that human subjects are adequately protected.

_____   _____

Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Co-investigator   (for student project)   Date

APPENDIX B

Letter of Consent for Participants

Dear _____,

I am conducting research through Wichita State University to examine various
teacher perceptions of school closure. Nine teachers will be selected teachers from three
Kansas schools which has experienced school closure to participate in this qualitative
research. Three teachers will be selected from each of the schools. There are no anticipated
risks to the participants. As a teacher who has or is experiencing school closure, you are
invited to participate in two personal interviews lasting approximately one hour. Interviews
will be scheduled at a time and location selected by the participant. The research is designed
to provide information about teacher attitudes and beliefs during the school closure process.
Findings of this information may be presented at regional, national or international conferees
and may result in scholarly publications.

All interview information will remain confidential, and you will not be personally
identified in any way in the written report. You school and school district will not be
mentioned in the report. With your agreement your interviews will be audio recorded to
assist researcher in accurately describing your responses. Audio tapes will be secured in a
cabinet in my school district office, in a separate location from transcripts. Recording will be

erased following the data analysis process. The interview will terminate in process to allow members to validate the meaning and responses.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will <u>not</u> affect your future relations with your current or past school district or Wichita State University. If you elect to participate and decide later to withdraw, you may do so at any time without penalty. If you have questions, please contact Dr. Randy Turk at WSU at (316) 978-3325. If you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285. You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You may keep a copy of this letter if you desire. Thank you for assisting us in this important study.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Morton

I agree to participate in a personal interview on DATE.

_____

Participant Signature

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Robert Morton; I am conducting research to determine teachers' perceptions during the school closure process. Dr. Randy Turk, Faculty at Wichita State University is acting as my chair. I appreciate your willingness to participate in an interview.

You were selected because of your knowledge concerning school closure in Kansas. I would like you to share your thoughts and feelings concerning school closure. I am interested in all comments and you can be assured of complete confidentiality.

With your permission, I would like to tape record our interview so that I will be able to carefully review your ideas later. Once my notes have been transcribed and the research is completed, these recordings will be erased. Is it okay to record? If they responded yes, then state, "I will ask you this question again with the recorder running."

At the end of the interview I will summarize your thoughts, and you are welcome to correct any errors that I have made. This session should last approximately 60 minutes.

Remember, your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation and data at any time. Question below are constructs and the wording will be more conversational.

Share personal information about the both of us.

1. Would you please share with me your history with this school?

    a. How long have you been teaching at this school?

    b. How long have you been in education?

2. Please share your feelings about school closure. (Before, during and after)

    a. What do you think are the benefits of school closure?

    b. What are your concerns regarding school closure?

    c. Issues that surround school closure

3. Would you share with me the communication do you receive concerning school closure?

    a. What type of communication do you receive from the district and school?

    b. What communication was lacking?

4. If you could put yourself in the role of Superintendent of Schools, what would you do to prepare for the closing of a school?

APPENDIX D

Table 4.1 Participation Rate and Frequency of Meaning Units for Themes

The table depicts five categories contained in each of the four different themes. The categories are transition, community, political, communication, and student. Column represents the five categories. The themes are not depicted in the table but are understood to be under each of the categories. In column two, the numbers 1 through 8 represents each participant or co-researcher. Some participants did not share remarks in some of the categories. The term (N) indicates that the participant did not respond to one of the four themes. The (N2) indicates that two of the themes were not responded to by the participant. No participants responded to more that three or four themes. If they did not respond to more than one category, the recorded response in the table is represented by (N$_2$). An example to illustrate this process would be to select co-researcher 1 from column two. Looking down this person's column from transition to student, for transition a Y is recorded. The Y represents a yes to information recorded in all themes and all categories for transition. However; an N is recorded in the category representing community. This N represents a non response to one theme. If an N$_2$ is recorded it would mean that there were two themes within that selected category with no responses from that particular participant.

The participants' percentage rates represent the total number of Y in all themes and the represented categories. An example as it relates to transitions at 100% would signify that all participants made a response to this category in all themes. The 92.5% is a representation that all participants did not respond to all themes under this category. The last example under the category of student represents on a 72.5% response as many

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participants did not have any information to share about students in two different themes represented by the N and the N_2.

The last column represents the frequency of units recorded in each of the five different categories. The frequency is a culmination of the number of units recorded. A participant could have more than one unit in each of the different categories. Transition and communication categories contained the greatest amount of information about school closure according to teachers.