

The Community of the School

Sam Redding

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Introduction

“Community” is a term that is much used and little defined. Because of this rhetorical abuse, the concept of community is sometimes given short shrift by educational scholars. But, in addition to its classical roots in Aristotelian discourse, the idea of community is central to the 150-year intellectual history of sociology and has enjoyed a surge of popular and scholarly attention in the past decade. In connection with schools, the concept of community has been bolstered by a merger with research and thought on the family’s role in children’s learning (curriculum of the home). Contemporary writing on “school community” tends to blend the sociologist’s advocacy of community as an antidote to the managerial tendencies of mass society with the psychologist’s proposition that school learning is impacted by factors outside the school, especially those residing in the family and peer group. Thus, a school community is typically portrayed as: a) inclusive of families of students and some elements of the community beyond the school doors, and b) operating on the basis of shared values, trust, expectations, and obligations rather than tasks, rules, and hierarchies.

Tracing the intellectual history of community, we find that value-based,

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intimate associations of one kind or another, larger than a kinship group but sufficiently small to allow for personal contact among members, has been idealized as a counterbalance to: a) excessive individualism, b) the family's limiting strictures on the individual, and c) the remote, impersonal, and inexorable forces of mass society. Problems identified with schooling in America today certainly fall into these same three categories of concern. Children and youth are often described as selfish and uncaring, disadvantaged by family circumstance, and/or alienated and influenced by mass culture. Perhaps then, school community, even if idealized, contains seeds of remedy for problems with school-age children.

Clifford W. Cobb, defining community, wrote:

In a community, people take responsibility for collective activity and are loyal to each other beyond immediate self-interest. They work together on the basis of shared values. They hold each other accountable for commitments. In earlier centuries, a person was born into a community and a set of reciprocal obligations. Now, those who seek an identity as part of a larger whole must invent community by voluntarily committing themselves to institutions or groups (Cobb, 1992, p. 2).

Cobb's definition of community includes the essential aspects of a modern understanding of the term: responsibility, collective activity, loyalty, working together, shared values, accountability, commitment, identity, voluntarism. If we trace sociological thought for the past two centuries, we find that Cobb's components of community are the proffered remedies for a variety of social ills, put forth by thinkers of various ideological inclinations. The community – through the eyes of a diverse set of thinkers over the ages – mediates the numbing intrusion of mass society; checks the barren isolation of the individual cast against a vast, materialistic machinery; engenders sentiments of virtue; and lifts the horizons of the one above the leveling weight of kinship.

Historical Overview

Counterbalance to Industrialism

Edmund Burke, the British statesman, writing from the fount of the industrial revolution in the 18th century, offered that, "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the

series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind” (Burke, 1960, p. 44). His statement was an affirmation of community at a time when larger societal forces seemed to be obliterating traditional social attachments. A hundred years after Burke, the Frenchman Emile Durkheim offered a similar complaint and remedy for the condition of *anomie*, the ambient rootlessness he related to suicide and other symptoms of the individual’s sense of diminution in the face of industrial, bureaucratic, capitalistic society. Durkheim’s remedy was the strengthening of the guild, a medieval invention to be resurrected anew; attachment to the social unit of the guild would provide the individual a shield from the overwhelming, untempered, and unpredictable winds of society, and would offer the context of expectations and obligations necessary to nurture autonomous but morally grounded individuals. Just as Durkheim feared the powerful vagaries of industrial society writ large, he also was suspicious of the limiting influences of the family and clan on the individual (Lasch, 1991, p. 144). The guild, or similar mid-sized social structures, like Burke’s little platoons (the parish, lodge, neighborhood association, local political entity, etc.), would lift the individual from the restrictive web of close kin and, at the same time, buffer him from the larger society.

The Voluntary Association

Alexis de Tocqueville visited America and wrote of his observations in the 1830s, after Burke but before Durkheim. Tocqueville saw in upstart America a chance for a new beginning, a disruption of the path of history; and nothing impressed him more than the abundant voluntary associations. While Tocqueville promoted human liberty, he feared unfettered individualism; the voluntary association was a perfect mediating device – the individual freely chose attachment to a group, and membership in that group called forth necessary virtues of loyalty, altruism, and responsibility. “For only freedom can deliver the members of a community from that isolation which is the lot of the individual left to his own devices and, compelling them to get in touch with each other, promote an active sense of fellowship” (Tocqueville, trans. 1955, p. xiv).

Tradition-Directed, Inner-Directed, Other-Directed

Coming forward to the 1960s, we find in David Riesman’s *Lonely Crowd* (1961) a crystallization of accepted wisdom on the contemporary zeitgeist and its predecessors in Western history. Again, community in its various forms is the centerpiece of the analysis. Riesman’s book, he explains, is about social character, and social character is “that part of ‘character’ which is shared among significant social groups and which, as most contemporary social scientists define it, is the product of the experience of these groups”

(Riesman, 1961, p.4). Social character is, in large part, the imprint of culture on the individual. Riesman's critique of social character traces three epochs of Western history, insisting that while each era was distinct in its prevailing social organization, the influences of all three are present in contemporary American society.

In a tradition-directed social order, the prevailing mode of social organization in Western history prior to the Renaissance, the individual conformed to the patterns of life associated with his clan or caste; behavior was prescribed by rigid expectations of etiquette; and the individual was valued because he "belonged." "The tradition-directed person," explains Riesman, ". . . hardly thinks of himself as an individual. Still less does it occur to him that he might shape his own destiny in terms of personal, lifelong goals or that the destiny of his children might be separate from that of the family group" (Riesman, 1961, p. 17). The community consists largely of family and kin, and the web of values is tight and strong. Shame is the punishment for violating the community's behavioral expectations.

Beginning with the Renaissance and extending into the twentieth century, population growth slowed in advanced cultures, opportunities expanded, rationalism and science replaced superstition and myth, and people became increasingly mobile – likely to move in circles beyond their immediate clan. Tradition remains strong, but is splintered and differentiated; the division of labor increases; society becomes more stratified; voluntary associations serve as communities. Behavior could not be controlled by rules of etiquette because social situations became increasingly complex, so children were raised to possess inner resources that would guide them beyond the influence of the immediate community. In these inner-directed societies, "the source of direction for the individual is 'inner' in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals" (Riesman, 1961, p. 15). The internal gyroscope of ingrained values guides the individual through the course of life, and the individual is dependent upon parent-like authorities for setting the gyroscope in motion and keeping it spinning. The consequence of straying from the "inner pilot" is to feel guilt.

Riesman saw the inner-directed social character reaching its zenith in the nineteenth century, just as the first glimpses of other-direction began to appear. Tocqueville saw other-directedness in the friendly, shallow, unrooted "new man" in America. The central characteristic of this new man was a demand for approval by others. Beginning first in the urban upper-classes, other-directedness has moved finally into the broad reaches of modern society. Education, leisure, a service economy, smaller families, stable population, and more permissive parenting are emblematic of the other-directed social order. The peer group becomes more important to the child, the family less. Contemporaries are the source of direction. Children

are increasingly influenced by friends and the mass media. Behavior is not patterned by rules and practice (etiquette) or by inner controls, but by close attention to (and sensitivity to) the actions and wishes of others. Modern man has an insatiable need for approval. "The family is no longer a closely knit unit to which [the child] early becomes attentive. In these respects the other-directed person resembles the tradition-directed person: both live in a group milieu and lack the inner-directed person's capacity to go it alone" (Riesman, 1961, p. 25).

Let us agree with Riesman that the three categories of social character—tradition-directed, inner-directed, and outer-directed—exist in varying degrees within each individual and are singularly more prominent among members of various cultures, sub-cultures and communities today. That being the case, it is not surprising that contemporary social critics see evidence of excessive individualism (selfishness), familial and cultural disadvantage, and valueless, rudderless youth.

Communitarianism

In the 1980s, James S. Coleman and his colleagues wrote a series of books and articles based on an extensive study of public and private schools. Coleman demonstrated that Catholic schools were more effective than public schools with children of all socioeconomic backgrounds. The Catholic schools spent less money per student but achieved higher test scores and lower drop-out rates. The fact that Catholic schools obtained these impressive results even in inner-city neighborhoods where students were typically non-Catholic and from low socioeconomic, black and Hispanic backgrounds showed that the Catholic school success was due neither to the religious nor the socioeconomic background of its students. Instead, the success was due to conditions of the schools. Catholic schools nurtured a cohesive sense of community that included adults as well as children. "All these results emphasize the importance of the embeddedness of young persons in the enclaves of adults most proximate to them, first and most prominently the family and second, a surrounding community of adults" (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987, p. 229).

In a 1982 study of 54 inner-city private schools (mostly Catholic), James Cibulka, Timothy O'Brien and Donald Zewe attributed success of poor children (academic and behavioral) to the "sense of community that existed among faculty, students and parents" (p. 13). They found that successful schools placed great emphasis on parent-teacher communication, sought and valued parents' opinions, and supported parental priorities relative to children's intellectual and moral development.

Robert Bellah, a professor of sociology at Berkeley, assembled a research team and commenced to interview Americans of every stripe before

publishing their findings in 1985 in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Interspersed with the case-study vignettes of ordinary Americans, the Bellah team cast a manifesto of communitarianism, deriving its philosophical perspective largely from Tocqueville. It was Tocqueville who used the term “habits of the heart” to describe the mores of family life, religious tradition, and participation in local politics that contributed to a unique American character (Bellah, 1985, p. vii). It was also Tocqueville who wrote with a mixture of awe and anxiety about American individualism, and Bellah captured this Tocquevillian angst to thread through his treatise a fear of rampant individualism. Bellah’s call for community is his proposition of a cure for Riesman’s inner-directed, individualistic, asocial man.

For Amitai Etzioni, the threat of excessive individualism is real, but so is the predominant other-directedness he sees in our society. Etzioni has echoed Bellah’s clarion call for community from the perspective of a student of formal organizations. He has added intellectual muscle to a growing communitarian movement. Etzioni advocates “responsive communities,” characterized by non-coercive affirmation of values, approximating Riesman’s notion of autonomy. A community must be bound by some coherent set of values, but the community must not impose values (as would a tradition-directed culture in Riesman’s analysis); rather, a community must form freely around a set of values and include members persuaded of the validity of those values (Etzioni, 1991).

Thomas Sergiovanni (1994) resurrected the “*gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*” interpretation of the nineteenth-century German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, and applied it to education. Sergiovanni called for a paradigm shift; schools should be thought of as communities rather than organizations. The culture of a school, its *gemeinschaft*, could foster trust, cooperation, intimacy, and responsibility—all necessary in opposition to the societal tendency toward *gesellschaft*, the scientific-managerial model of control through impersonal rules and hierarchies. Sergiovanni’s view of community was organic and collective, in contrast to the emphasis on individually-selected associations advocated by Cobb, Coleman, and others.

Social Capital

James S. Coleman deserves credit for expanding upon our understanding of social capital through his research and writing, making it a topic of genuine scholarly inquiry. Looking for the determining ingredients of an economically healthy society, economists isolated physical capital and human capital—tools and training—as the engines of economic vitality. Coleman and others added social capital—the network of norms, obligations, expectations, and trust that forms among people who associate with one another and share common values. Applying the concept to

childrearing, Coleman explained: “What I mean by social capital in the raising of children is the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child’s growing up. Social capital exists within the family, but also outside the family, in the community” (Coleman, 1987, p. 36).

Social capital emerged in the 1990s as a philosophical linchpin in communitarian proposals to solve a range of social, educational, and economic problems. Robert Putnam’s 1995 article, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” combined a well-stated treatise with an apt and memorable title, and became a mostly lauded but also highly debated exposition of the detrimental ripple-effects of declining social capital in America. Putnam, a Harvard professor of International Affairs, derived his notions of the efficacy of social capital first from studies of regional differences in government effectiveness in Italy. Putnam found that the effectiveness of government agencies was greater in the north of Italy than in the south, and he posited that a cause of this difference was the unequal distribution of social capital evidenced in the north’s greater propensity for voluntary associations—voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and football clubs. Because people were more inclined to associate with one another, face-to-face, through groups that cut horizontal swaths across social strata, they developed a greater sense of trust in and obligation to people beyond their kinship group. Thus, their civic engagement was more active; their ability to cooperate more advanced.

Applying this analysis to the United States, Putnam found that from 1960 to the mid-1990s (but especially in the first half of that time span), voter turnout declined, church attendance dropped, and membership in voluntary groups such as PTA, Boy Scouts, Red Cross, service organizations, fraternal societies, and labor unions ebbed sharply. Putnam’s most poignant example of this reduction in civic engagement (and the concomitant possibility for developing social capital) was the fact that while the number of individual bowlers increased 10% between 1980 and 1993, the number of bowlers in leagues declined by 40%. Thus, the trend was toward a more individualistic approach to bowling, and “bowling alone” became a synecdoche for a larger social trend. Putnam pointed to a corresponding decline in Americans’ level of trust in each other, in government, and in other institutions as a consequence of (and contributor to) their retreat from social and civic engagement.

While participation in local, face-to-face associations was in decline, Americans were more likely to belong to mass organizations, such as AARP or professional and political-interest groups, that required little personal connection among members. Asking why Americans were withdrawing from secondary group association and moving toward tertiary groups

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that were more remote and less demanding of time, Putnam suggested several causes: 1) the movement of women into the labor force, 2) mobility, 3) fewer marriages, more divorces, fewer children, 4) the replacement of locally-owned and operated business by multinational corporations, and 5) the privatization and individualization of entertainment through technological changes (television replaced the movie theatre which replaced vaudeville). His most convincing argument may have been his linkage of new modes of entertainment, which increasingly allow for solitary experience at the expense of social engagement.

In their report, *Becoming an Adult in a Changing Society* (1987), James S. Coleman and Torsten Husén described three phases of family-school relationships that correspond with three levels of economic development. In Phase I, the family lives at a subsistence level, relying on children for work. Phase I families limit the growth of the child, and the school's role is to free the child from his family and expand the possibilities for his development. In Phase II, the industrial economy, the goals of the family and the school converge, with both institutions seeking the improvement of the child's ultimate economic situation. In Phase III, post-industrial affluence, parents view childrearing as an impediment to the pursuits of their adult lives and invest little time and energy in the development of their children. They expect the school to fill the void. This "hiring of professionals" to provide programmatic and therapeutic surrogates for the nurturing and educative practices of extended families and close communities is a further explanation of how social capital can decline, even among the educated and affluent classes.

Amitai Etzioni (1993) explained how the formation of social capital within families, traditionally the greatest engine for its formation, is in jeopardy because of the reduced amount of time many children spend with parents. Etzioni explained:

The fact is that parenting cannot be carried out over the phone, however well meaning and loving the calls may be. It requires physical presence. The notion of 'quality time' (not to mention 'quality phone calls') is a lame excuse for parental absence; it presupposes that bonding and education can take place in brief time bursts, on the run. *Quality time occurs within quantity time.* As you spend time with one's children – fishing, gardening, camping, or 'just' eating a meal – there are unpredictable moments when an opening occurs and education takes hold (Etzioni, 1993, p. 57).

Dana Mack (1997) provided a cogent analysis of changes in family life that parallel the trends in society, diminishing the social capital even within

the most basic primary group. Mack's critique varied from that of Putnam and others in that it found fault with a cloying insistence on artificial and externally-imposed allegiance to the group. Mack's perspective harkened back to Riesman, showing alarm at the educationist's disregard for inner-directedness. This approach varied from the Coleman-Putnam emphasis on social capital, but it did not contradict it. Coleman wrote of the benefits of social capital as an asset to the individual within the context of rational choice theory. Putnam stressed the voluntary selection of associations rather than the contrived imposition of social bonds as the threshold to the accumulation of social capital.

Mack challenged education's mimicry of corporate models, as had Sergiovanni, but Mack was more concerned with the imposition of other-directedness than with the remoteness of an organizational mentality. Mack wrote:

It is no accident that the way schools manage kids is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from the way corporations manage employees. . . . But there is a far more widespread and spurious connection between educational and industrial psychology today – the tendency of both to rest on the assumption that human productivity is greatest where the needs and interests of individuals are submerged to the needs and interests of groups, and where the individual is manipulated to adapt to the demands of group solidarity. . . . In schools, the increasing preoccupation with group psychodynamics and their ostensible relationship to personal motivation and productivity is troubling" (Mack, 1997, p. 143).

For children, social capital is a mediating variable, a consequence of institutional (family, neighborhood, community, church) structures and arrangements, and an asset banked and withdrawn in varying amounts. In the end, the wealth of social capital available to an individual child, and that child's ability to take advantage of this potential benefit, contribute to that child's success in school and in life.

Families and Schools: The Curriculum of the Home

Herbert J. Walberg (1984) summarized the research on the family's impact on learning. Walberg justified changes in education practices by asserting education's connection to national economic development, and he did more than ask parents for their cooperation; he contended that schools should take the initiative in establishing partnerships with the home. "Research

shows that both home conditions that are conducive to learning and the relationship of the home to the school have deteriorated in recent decades, but school/home partnership programs can bring about dramatic improvements," Walberg stated (1984, p. 400). Walberg claimed not only that the home environment strongly affects a child's learning; he proclaimed that schools could influence the home environment by establishing partnerships with families.

A quarter-century of research has convinced most educators that influences of the home weigh heavily on a child's achievement in school. Dissection of family life has produced various laundry lists of characteristics of an optimal home environment. Schools and other organizations are teaching parents to put into practice the components of family life that we call the "curriculum of the home." This curriculum does not consist of subject matter but of patterns of habit formation and attitude development that prepare a child for academic learning and sustain the child through the years of schooling. The curriculum of the home "predicts academic learning twice as well as the socioeconomic status of families. This curriculum includes informed parent/child conversations about everyday events, encouragement and discussion of leisure reading, monitoring and joint analysis of televiewing, deferral of immediate gratifications to accomplish long-term goals, expressions of affection and interest in children's academic and personal growth . . ." (Walberg, 1984, p. 400).

Joyce L. Epstein (1987) reiterated the idea that schools should take the initiative in procuring parent participation in the child's schooling. Epstein masterfully summarized the research connecting parent involvement to effective education. She then set down specific actions that administrators, particularly principals, could take to enhance parent participation. "Administrators can help teachers successfully involve parents by coordinating, managing, supporting, funding, and recognizing parent involvement" (Epstein, 1987, p. 133).

Programs to "involve" parents proliferated during the 1980s, seeking to improve student learning by bolstering the curriculum of the home, and engaging parents in the educational development of their children. James Comer, Dorothy Rich, and Joyce Epstein were among the education leaders who provided practical transitions from research to implementation. A meta-analysis by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) found home and community influences among the strongest contributors to academic attainment. Especially powerful were the influences of the family—the daily patterns of family life that encouraged learning and schoolwork. Various studies amplified this message by asserting its validity in particular settings and for specific school populations. Yap and Enoki (1995), for example, studied the effects of parental involvement efforts on the

academic achievement of Chapter 1 students in Hawaii and concluded that parent programs that focused on involvement in the instructional process, increased home-based parental activities to reinforce student learning, and raised literacy skills of parents most directly impacted learning outcomes.

The particular family behaviors that contribute to school learning can be neatly summarized; they surround the activities of reading (including parent-child discussion of reading), parent-child discussions of school and learning, homework and other study at home, and expectations, structures and routines regarding work, punctuality, and daily living (Davé, 1963). For some families, these behaviors come naturally; for others, they may be learned and adopted. The school, properly perceived as a community, can take the lead in making clear the kind of home environment that best supports school learning and providing support for parents who wish to align their family life with these behavioral correlates with school success.

Despite a plethora of evidence that the home environment directly and powerfully affects school performance, and substantial, research-based programmatic efforts to improve home environments in ways that will benefit children's learning, results have often been disappointing. Recent studies and hypotheses have pointed to mutations in traditional family structures as a reason for the intractability of home environments. David Blankenhorn (1995), for example, specifically targets the absence of fathers from family life—through higher divorce rates, dramatically increased numbers of out-of-wedlock births, and neglect—as a change in family make-up that has produced a number of social ills, including greater challenges to schools.

Dana Mack draws upon the societal critique to explain pressures on families that make their attention to the advantageous patterns of behavior difficult: "... parents see the decline of social supports and the breakdown of families as symptoms of a larger phenomenon: the sudden and rapid decay of those stable social values that once fostered a protective culture of childhood" (Mack, 1997, p. 17). This unhinging of culture is reminiscent of Reisman's description of the shift away from a tradition-directed context for childrearing.

Thomas Lickona sees the same hamstringing of the family by larger forces at work in society, and singles out the school as the institution most likely to rectify the resulting loss to children. "Escalating moral problems in soci-

ety — ranging from greed and dishonesty to violent crime to self-destructive behaviors such as drug abuse and suicide — are bringing about a new consensus. Now, from all across the country, from private citizens and public organizations, from liberals and conservatives alike, comes a summons to the schools: Take up the role of moral teachers of our children” (Lickona, 1991, p. 4-5). The school, then, is charged not only with the task of improving the home environment by influencing and educating parents, but with supplanting (or at least heavily supplementing) the home as a purveyor of morality and civil behavior.

Building Community In Schools

We return to Clifford W. Cobb to make the case for community in schools: “An effective school has to be a community in which personal relationships based on trust outweigh impersonal rules. A community based on shared vision and close personal interactions is not a frill; it is a necessity” (Cobb, 1991, p. 23). Cobb’s placement of community in opposition to “impersonal rules” is a slap at the managerial and bureaucratic operation of public schools.

Sergiovanni amplifies Putnam’s condemnation of the corrosive effects of social norms that emphasize individualism at the expense of more altruistic commitments. He also echoes Cobb’s assertion that school must be a place of community (without, however, endorsing Cobb’s insistence that effective associations must be voluntary — an argument that supports school vouchers). Sergiovanni’s school community is bound by shared values, requiring that its constituents engage in processes to articulate, define, and refine their educational values.

A special contribution of a school community from Coleman’s perspective is the possibility of achieving intergenerational closure (1990). When the adults who care about a group of children are themselves not in association with one another, as is typically the occasion in modern society, the children’s influence on one another is heightened and intergenerational transmission of the culture is stymied. As a practical example, it is common for children to sit next to each other in a classroom each day for several hours, week after week, and month after month, and for the parents of those children to have no association with one another apart from the school and little contact with one another in connection with the school. In fact, these adults may not know one another, even though their children are growing up together and strongly impacting each other’s lives. A school community would draw parents into greater contact with each other, achieving an intergenerational closure. The benefits are twofold: 1) children are known by, cared for, and watched out for by a larger number of adults, and 2) parents of a group of children maintain communication among themselves,

sharing standards, norms, and experiences of childrearing.

Paul J. Baker (1991) sees a school community as a microcosm of the community at large, incorporating four familiar institutions: a) the firm (the discipline of a production system with highly-skilled workers), b) the family (a caring and supportive group of adults who care about the children and children who respect the adults), c) the fair (members of the school community coming together to celebrate their best work), and d) the forum (a public meeting place encouraging informed dialogue and intellectual inquiry). Along with this reflection of familiar institutions is a broadening of the context of learning beyond the schoolhouse doors. "Reading should not be limited to individual pursuits of students performing daily assignments according to routine classroom schedules. Reading needs a broader social context offering endless opportunities for shared learning among students, parents, and teachers" (Baker & Moss, 1993, p. 24).

Academic and Social Competence

Research has identified key competencies of resilient children, including social and intellectual competence, realistic goal setting, planning, and resourcefulness. These are not innate traits, nor are they acquired only inferentially. They are abilities that can be taught and learned within the contexts of family, school, and community (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1997). The Alliance for Achievement process for building school communities (Redding, 1990) was developed first in inner-city Chicago schools to provide a larger context for children to acquire academic and social skills. This larger context was described as a school community, where the people intimately attached to a school—teachers, staff, students, and families of students—share goals for the academic and social learning of children, and communicate and associate with one another in furtherance of their shared educational goals (Redding, 1996). The inclusion in Alliance for Achievement of social learning (or character development) alongside a focus on the building blocks of academic learning, such as reading and study habits, relied upon research demonstrating especially the influence of the home on school learning (Davé, 1963; Walberg, 1984; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993) and the necessity of including social learning as a goal of the school-home nexus (Weissberg, et al., 1991, 1997).

To enhance academic and social learning within a "community" context, the school first identifies specific, alterable behaviors by parents, teachers and students that affect learning and then seeks to use the attributes of community—face-to-face association, trust, obligations, and expectations—to encourage members of the community to behave in the desired manner. Etzioni (1991) and Sergiovanni (1994) have written

Common Experience

When we think back to childhood, recalling experiences that best define our family, we most likely conjure up images of dinner-table conversation; the nudging, squirming, laughing, and bickering in a vacation-bound car; Sunday mornings linked together in a church pew; dark hours huddled around a sick-bed; holiday routines; or Friday nights with popcorn and television and dim lights in a warm room. We think of the ritualistic experiences that drew all members of the family together. We think of our common experiences.

Every group of people defines itself in much the same way, through junctures in time and place that are overlaid with special purpose. Groups are defined by what they hold in common and are strengthened by shared memories.

In the one-room, country schoolhouse, the entire educational experience was "common." One teacher taught one curriculum, and students progressed through the curriculum by virtue of mastering its content. Older children tutored younger children in the work they had themselves previously mastered. Everyone paused for lunch at the same time and sledged together at recess on the slope outside the back door. As rooms were added to the school, children were divided by age and moved by lock-step progression through the grade levels. The common experience of the school was replaced by the common experience of the classroom. Unlike the one-room school, the class was segregated by age and sometimes by gender or ability.

To the extent that the teachers of various grade levels remained in touch with one another, the curriculum remained "common," even if students were now divided. When enrollments grew and each grade level required more than one teacher, another level of disconnection resulted. The third-grade teacher now needed to be in communication with the second- and fourth-grade teachers as well as other third-grade teachers. Then some teachers began to specialize in subject areas, so that one teacher now taught science and another taught reading. Further separation. As schools recognized that some children were falling behind the lock-step, they created multi-track systems that lowered standards for slow children. The slowest children were often "pulled out" of the regular classroom for work with a remedial teacher. When schools noticed that brighter students sat bored much of the time, these students were "pulled out" for enrichment courses that often had little to do with a child's progression through the basic curriculum. So, instead of moving the bright third-grader into fourth-grade mathematics, the gifted program taught the child to make papier-maché dinosaurs or solve brain-teasers, adding yet another dimension to the curriculum. Rather than charting individual paths through a common

curriculum, the curriculum and its tests of mastery were fractured.

But how can a school maintain the same standards for all children when children vary markedly in their ability to learn? Doesn't the school, in fact, need more individualization, more differentiation of curricula, more tracking of students into homogeneous groups? The answer to these questions is twofold: (1) There is little evidence that tracking results in greater learning (see Oakes, 1985); and (2) Differences in student ability are best addressed, not by varying standards, but by varying levels of support and amounts of time devoted to meeting the standards (see Bloom, 1976).

Restoring Connections in the Modern School

Many schools are now seeking ways to reconnect elements of the school that have grown apart. Instructional alignment and criterion-based tests are two of the tools they are using. Instructional alignment is an effort to align desired outcomes with measures of proficiency, curricular content, and methods of instruction; in aligning instruction, schools weave together webs of connection from class to class and grade level to grade level. Criterion-based tests help by establishing benchmarks for mastery. At their best, criterion-based tests establish a common curriculum—each tested criterion is a learning objective. But tests of mastery are the third step in unifying a curriculum. The first step is to ask the difficult question, “What do we expect children to know and do?” This is the question of value in education. Once we have determined what we value, what we want children to know and do, we order these elements of knowledge and skill into logical sequences. Then we move to the second step—planning various instructional routes to enable children to come to know and do. And finally, we ask the question, “How do we know when the child has mastered the objective?” At this step, a test is created, linking each test item to an original “know” or “do” objective.

By test, we need not think only in terms of pencil and paper exams. Especially, we need not think only in terms of the typical multiple-choice tests that assess a child's ability to recall facts. A criterion-based test could be a portfolio of work that demonstrates a child's mastery. It could be an oral examination or recitation. It could be a project. But it must be explicitly connected to the original element of “knowing” or “doing” that we value.

Studies of productivity in education seek to “identify variables in the learning process that have the highest potential pay-off for improving student achievement” (Parkerson, et al., 1984, p. 638). Productivity is the ratio of cost to outcome, and outcome is usually measured with achievement tests. Productivity analyses presume that knowledge and skill measured

by achievement tests are the most valuable aims of schooling. Questions of productivity address the efficiencies of a system of education. They do not necessarily probe matters of educational value. Questions of educational value seek assurance that we are efficiently teaching children to know and do the right things. Arriving at a consensus on the “right things” for students to know and do is a vital part of reconnecting disparate components of the school experience.

School-Wide Instructional Strategies

In the “stand and deliver” days, the teacher directly taught children to know something, then each child stood before the class to demonstrate that he or she had indeed mastered this bit of learning. The teacher received an immediate understanding of how well each student had mastered the material. Classroom recitation, in its most primitive form, was a brutal way to expose slower students to embarrassment. But modifications of this approach, combined with Socratic inquiry, bring a classroom alive with a think-learn-show cycle. THINK: The teacher asks probing questions or sets up a line of inquiry by piquing the students’ curiosity. LEARN: Then a new set of facts or concepts is introduced or is distilled from the conversation. SHOW: Next children are asked to demonstrate their grasp of these new facts or concepts. Their first demonstration of mastery comes by way of their participation in the dialogue of the classroom, which also gives the teacher immediate feedback on the success of her approach. If children are not grasping the information, a new tack can be taken.

One new tack is to introduce a cooperative learning exercise. Children can be grouped to help one another learn. This form of heterogenous grouping places children of differing learning speeds together, so that the faster students can assist the slower students and have their own learning reinforced in the process. Some children may require additional time with the concept; children learn at different speeds. Ultimately, each child must demonstrate his or her understanding through verbal response, written response, or completion of a project or assignment. This final demonstration is the test of the child’s mastery of the objective (criterion) to which the test was originally linked.

The think-learn-show cycle incorporates the value-based, teacher-directed approach of direct instruction. It allows for cooperative learning experiences. It provides varied paths to understanding and flexible amounts of time that are the key principles of mastery learning. When this instructional process is matched to a coherent, connected curriculum and criterion-referenced tests, the school’s learning experience becomes one giant common experience for its students. Grade level to grade level, classroom to classroom, teacher to teacher, a consistent instructional

strategy, such as think-learn-show, forms a unifying, school-wide common experience. Much that was good about the one-room schoolhouse is reconstructed by adopting a school-wide instructional strategy and training teachers in its application.

Most teachers would read this description of think-learn-show and this rudimentary explication of direct instruction, cooperative learning, and mastery learning and conclude that this is what every teacher does every day. So where's the beef? What more is needed to make everyday instruction an effective common experience? What is needed is coordination, integration, and alignment of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment across grade levels and from classroom to classroom. This requires time for planning and coordination that most school schedules do not allow. It also requires a great deal of organization and information processing that computers only now make feasible.

Computers can reconnect the school in ways that make the one-room schoolhouse an apt analogy. They make instructional alignment and criterion-based testing manageable. They also help individualize learning paths and analyze student-learning data. Placing computers in schools, however, has little effect in unifying the curriculum if more time is not provided for teachers to meet. Placing computers in schools is of little constructive consequence if the computers merely divide students further by sorting them into isolated workstations within classrooms that have already sorted children by age and possibly by ability. The more computers are able to bring coherence to the curriculum, the more teachers will need time together and students will need cooperative experiences. Association of people is the counterbalance to the isolating tendencies that come with computer efficiencies.

School-Level Decision-Making

Common experience for a school presupposes school-level decision-making. Two complementary traditions in American education run contrary to school-level decision-making: a political bureaucracy that emanates from the state and projects downward through the school district to the school, and the insular autonomy of each classroom cell within the school. These traditions are complementary because by robbing teachers of a strong voice in the operation of the school, the centralized bureaucracy encourages teachers to hang on to the sole province of their authority – the classroom.

Teachers are not the only ones deprived of school-level power in the centralized system; parents are given little formal function in school-level decision-making and thus demonstrate the behavior of a disenfranchised constituency. They are either completely detached from the school

or frantically agitated in protest. The most optimistic among them cling jealously to the small corner of influence found in parent-teacher organizations and fund-raising committees. Both detachment and agitation are the results of frustration with formal structures that allow parents little significant role in a system dominated by certified experts and bureaucratic regulation.

Lest we assume that the principal holds the reins of authority in the traditional school system, we must consider the drastically proscribed turf of decision-making reserved for the principal. The principal is the bureaucracy's functionary in the school, the rule-keeper, bean-counter, and master of protocol. Without mechanisms for shared, school-level decision-making, a principal can only break from the mundane tasks of mid-management by donning the armor of rogue knight, a position ultimately as futile as that of the bureaucratic headdrone.

With school-level decision-making, everyone in the school gains in power and influence. To achieve this new power, however, everyone in the school must first sacrifice smaller but more secure fiefdoms. The teachers must give up autonomy of their classrooms; the parents must disavow the comfort of detachment and the self-gratifying rancor of complaint unfettered by responsibility; and the principal must relinquish the mantle of bureaucracy's low priest or the silver bullet of education's lone ranger.

Shared decision-making does not mean that everyone shares in every decision. Expertise rightfully carries its privilege, and authority must be assigned in equal proportion to responsibility. The art of shared decision-making is in designing internal structures and procedures that include the right people in the right decisions, provide for representation of significant constituencies, and foster a sense of ownership on the part of administrators, staff, teachers, parents, and students.

Edward B. Fiske, in his book, *Smart Schools, Smart Kids*, says that "decentralization brings a sea change" (1991, p. 51). Old ways, the habits of a lifetime, and manners of thinking are overturned. Filling the void requires training, talking, planning, and patience. "Shared decision-making is clearly no panacea. . . . Its significance for the overhauling of American public education lies not in what it guarantees but in what it makes possible" (Fiske, 1991, p. 61). Among the possibilities created by shared decision-making are common educational experiences, the defining touchstones of effective schooling.

School-Wide Ritual and Tradition

When we think of school tradition, we usually think of team nicknames, mascots, team colors, fight songs, pep rallies, cheerleaders, pom poms, and marching bands. Athletic events come to mind because they are among

the very few experiences that students in a school hold in common. All students, regardless of age, grade level, gender, or academic performance, rise to sing the same fight song, call the same colors their own, and cheer for the same team. Can we say the same for any element of the academic program? Probably not. It would be healthy to infuse the academic program with the enthusiasm that ritual and tradition generate in the athletic sphere. Certain experiences rooted in the educational values of a school community could be common to all students in a school.

Raster Elementary School in Chicago has attempted to wed tradition to the school community's educational value of reading. The school holds an annual "reading pep rally" with cheerleaders firing up the assembled student body with chants attesting to the virtues of reading. Students perform skits from their favorite books. The rally launches a school-wide reading frenzy with awards presented to students for reading certain numbers of books. The halls are decorated with book reports and drawings of themes from books.

At Kingston School in Kingston, Illinois, every student in the school learns the principles of debate. The students then attend an assembly at which members of the Northern Illinois University debate team engage in an intramural contest, explaining the techniques of debating. Finally, the students enter into debates with one another, leading to winning debaters. But the process does not stop there. The winning debaters take on parents before an all-school assembly. The topics of the debate with parents are typical areas of family disagreement, such as bedtime hours. In this debate, the students argue the side that parents would usually take and parents argue the side that students would typically argue. The fervor generated over this school-wide exercise in communication and critical thinking is similar to that found at homecoming football games.

At Peirce Elementary School in Chicago, every student in the school is expected to complete homework, to arrive for school on time, and to attend school regularly. When students meet these high standards, they are awarded Peirce Bucks—play money exchangeable for goodies at the school store. Harris Bank supports the common experience with plenty of goodies.

All students at Northwest Elementary School in LaSalle, Illinois, receive and use assignment notebooks to record their daily assignments. Students at each grade level read a common set of books that are incorporated into the lessons of every teacher. These are traditional, school-wide, value-based common experiences.

Every school has a name, and every school name provides opportunities for common educational experiences. One would expect that the students at Lincoln School would be experts on the life of Abraham Lincoln and that Lincoln themes would run through their every activity. Davis Elementary

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School in Chicago was named for the founder of the American Medical Association, and Davis's school community council has selected "a healthy mind and body" as one of its goals for every student. The school ties this goal to the special identity of its namesake, promoting school-wide activities on health and the medical profession.

Riverton Middle School in Riverton, Illinois, organizes all of its students and teachers and parent volunteers into a community clean-up corps on Responsibility Day. Students comb the town for debris, filling garbage bags and scrubbing the town clean. Townspeople watch in appreciation as young people share this common experience while learning the meaning of environmental responsibility.

At Alcott Elementary School in Chicago, students decorate the hall with their own versions of what Michael Jordan might say about decency. They practice courteous behavior, demonstrating their respect for each other in a week-long celebration of good manners and thoughtfulness. A rousing assembly caps the week.

At Chicago's Darwin Elementary School, one day each year is given to guest readers. Celebrities, parents, and community members come to school to read their favorite books to students. The entire school participates in this traditional celebration of reading.

Every school team can be identified by its colors, its nickname, and its mascot. Every school also holds the seeds of exciting traditions and rituals related to its educational values. A little imagination is all that is required.

Common Experience and Association

A school community, as opposed to a school operating with the traditional structures of administrative hierarchy, teacher autonomy, and parental detachment, is ideally poised to establish a cohesive, unified curriculum and to employ teaching methods that are conducive to common experience. Schools in the Alliance for Achievement Network build school communities through a process that includes six components. Two of these components are "common experience" and "association." Common experience, in the Alliance model, is achieved by connecting the elements of the school program. Common experience is a bias against the tendencies in schools to divide and separate children, to lower standards and expectations for some students, and to tolerate a curriculum that is disjointed – unattached to values of education, practices of instruction, or the measures of outcome. Of course some division and separation is necessary, but a school community is cautious in dividing children, seeking instead to find programs, policies, and activities that are inclusive. Common educational experience is a tendency toward connection rather than separation; it is a predilection for

common standards, common curriculum, and common expectations for all students. It is the glue of school community, the central, unifying core that defines the character of a specific school community.

The concepts of association and common experience are easily confused because both deal with connections. In association, people are connected; in a common experience, elements of school policy or program are connected and made applicable to all students. Association means face-to-face interaction of people for purposes related to the educational values of the school community. Common experience means unity of policies, standards, practices, programs, or activities for all students. Common experience also means explicit connection of the intentions, practices, and outcomes of the school program.

A school may adopt a policy that all students will read aloud each school day. This common educational experience may be achieved in a variety of ways, some of which may lend themselves to associations of otherwise unconnected school community members. Perhaps the students in one class read to each other; in another class students may read to surrogate parents; at another time, older students may read to students in a lower grade. Each of these applications of a common policy is an opportunity for association.

Not all common experiences produce associations. One school in the Alliance for Achievement Network implemented a Homework Honor Roll, a policy whose standards applied to all children in the school. All students, regardless of grade level or ability, received homework assignments. All students who completed all of their homework assignments were recognized on the Homework Honor Roll. Their names were displayed on a bulletin board in the central hallway. This common policy involved no association but it defined a special feature of this particular school—homework was important, everybody received homework assignments, and every student who completed all of his or her assignments for the week was recognized on the Homework Honor Roll.

Another Alliance school, Bell Elementary School in Chicago, serves as an attendance center for deaf children, a magnet school for gifted children, and a neighborhood school for all children who reside within its proximity. The school community council at Bell decided that all children in the school should learn sign language. The teachers of the deaf children developed a curriculum to teach sign language to all children in the school, a common experience that unified a diverse student body and helped define the special character of the school. In learning sign language, new associations were also encouraged. Deaf children now conversed with children from the gifted program and children in the neighborhood school using the common language they had acquired. Teachers of hearing children learned the

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special communication tool of their colleagues who taught hearing-impaired children. At Bell School, a common experience fostered association of children who otherwise were often separated.

Types of Common Experience

A common experience includes or involves all students in a school and is related to one or more educational values of the school community. The common experience may be the result of a policy, a program, an event, an instructional strategy, or a curricular thread. Examples include:

Common Experience as Policy

- ◆ At our school, all students receive homework assignments.
- ◆ At our school, everyone “drops everything” to read a book at 10:00 every Tuesday and Thursday.

Common Experience as Event

- ◆ At our school, all students participate in Courtesy Week.
- ◆ At our school, all students participate in Guest Reader Day.

Common Experience as School-wide Instructional Strategy

- ◆ At our school, all teachers are trained in and use the think-learn-show method.
- ◆ At our school, all teachers assist students with their assignment notebooks.

Common Experience as Curricular Thread

- ◆ At our school, all students read the same body of books and every teacher incorporates these books into their lessons.
- ◆ At our school, all students progress through a common math curriculum, moving at individual paces determined by their mastery.

The common experience component of the Alliance for Achievement model is one way to make connections in a school community. Making connections in schools also includes:

1. Greater school-level decision-making,
2. Mechanisms to arrive at a consensus as to educational values, the specific aims of education – what children should know and do,
3. Time for teachers to meet to articulate curricular and instructional strategies,
4. Replacing the lock-step progression of students through grade levels with progression based on mastery,

5. Integrating students across age and ability levels,
6. Employing cooperative learning and other strategies that bring students together,
7. Adopting school-wide instructional strategies, and
8. Creating school-wide ritual and tradition related to educational values and themes.

School improvement initiatives invariably begin with a process through which the school seeks common ground and a sense of central purpose. Someone adopts a mission statement. Or a vision statement. Then a plan is developed that flows from the statement of central purpose. Promoting common experience in a school is a behavioral extension of the verbal task of adopting mission statements. Common experiences define the meaning, the distinct character, and the central purpose of a school community. They also become the memories that define for adults what it meant to be a student at a particular school.

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