

BUILDING COMMUNITY IN SCHOOLS

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BUILDING COMMUNITY

For any educator who cares deeply about teaching, people, and schools, Sergiovanni's work provides plenty of opportunities for reflection and innumerable examples of schools that have built community into their cultures.

Community building must become the heart of any school improvement effort.

OVERVIEW

Chapter 1

Critiques the traditional view of schools as formal organizations, mainly their inability to help students recover the loss of community that too many now experience. Sergiovanni presents a theory of community, according to which schools are the places with a shared code of values and ideas. Community here is understood as a collection of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together bound to a set of shared ideals and ideas and ideals. This bonding and binding is tight enough to transform them from a collection of "I's" into a collective "we".

Chapter 2

Points out that the key aspect in a community is the quality of relationships. Relationships are characterized by the kinds of emotions – personalization, authenticity, caring, and unconditional acceptance – found in families, neighborhood and other social organization.

Chapter 3

Provides examples of community by kinship, community of place, and community of mind by describing **several prominent schools in the USA and Germany.**

Chapter 4

Discusses the need for community and why, once community is offered, we willingly accept it. It also deals with rational and cultural connections between people.

Chapter 5

The theme is becoming a purposeful community. Schools can become caring, learning, professional, collegial, and inclusive communities. But most important, they have to be places where members have developed a community of mind that bonds them together and binds them to a shared ideology.

Chapter 6

Emphasizes how shared purposes and values are translated into decisions about what should be taught in schools and how the curriculum should be organized.

Chapter 7

Shows how the power of community can be used to transform present discipline policies and classroom management practices that emphasize control over what students do into community strategies that help build moral character and teach active citizenship.

Chapter 8

Deals with the meaning of professional community. Professionalism is viewed as a technical activity involving the delivery of expert services to clients. It also discusses professional virtue, which is in the core of what it means to be a professional community.

Chapter 9

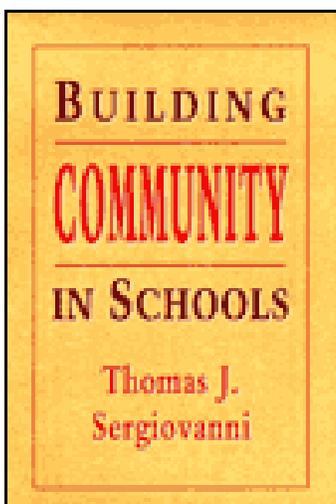
Explores building a community of learners, where principals and teachers create community inquiring together.

Chapter 10

Discusses what is involved when a school becomes a community of leaders. The leadership is not about "power over", but "power to" accomplish shared vision and goals.

Chapter 11

Redefines the notion of leadership. The heart of leadership in community is not about doing, but it is about being, where leaders plant the seed of community, nurture fledgling community, and protect the emerged community. They lead by inviting others to share in the burdens of leadership.



CHANGING OUR THEORY OF SCHOOLING

Much of what passes for school reform is superficial and ultimately fails because the difficulty of the task – institutional change – is underestimated. Real change can only come as a result of the commitments of both the minds and hearts of the total school community – teachers, parents, students, administrators, and school boards. Change should be based on careful identification of deeply and commonly held values, and only then, it can be achieved through people's acceptance to further their goals through their words and actions.

To change we have to challenge existing practices that have always appeared sensible. We need to start by examining the unstated assumptions behind accepted practices, i.e. we need to change the theory, and the right practices will follow. Schools as formal organizations rely on “coherent whole”, contractual relationship of all the constituents and participants. Though organizations are creatures of people, they tend over time to become separated from people and to function independently. That is why, ties have to exist that connect people to their work and the people they work with.

A Community Metaphor

Different from organizational view is the view of schools as communities. When we view schools as communities rather than organiza-

tions, the connection of people to purpose and the connection among people are based on commitments rather than contracts. Communities are defined by their centers of values, sentiments, and belief that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of “we” from “I”. Life in organizations and communities are different. While in the former our lives are codified into a system of hierarchies, roles, and expectations, the latter rely more on norms, purposes, values, collegiality, socialization, and natural interdependence.

A Theory of Community

Theories of community exist that can provide us with ideas and serve as a mental and emotional scaffold to help anchor our thoughts and transform them into a framework for community building. Among them, theories of *gemeinschaft* (Germ. “community”) and *gesellschaft* (Germ. “society”) (Tönnies, 1887).

Gemeinschaft. There are three types of *gemeinschaft*: by kinship, of place, and of mind. Though all three are helpful, *gemeinschaft* of mind is essential to building community within schools. In order to change, schools need to begin the process of transformation from an organized collection of individuals to a community of the mind. Relation-

ships within the community of mind are based not on contracts, but on understanding about what is shared, and on the emerging web of obligations to embody that, which is shared.

Gesellschaft. Here, community values are replaced by contractual ones. Life becomes more impersonal, lonely, isolated, and disconnected. In *gesellschaft* everyone strives for that which is to their own advantage, and getting ahead is an individual endeavor. *Gesellschaft* differs from *gemeinschaft* in their perceptions of the basis of relationships between and among people, relying on rational will and natural will respectively.

These two theories represent ideal types that do not exist in the real world in pure forms. Schools are never *gesellschaft* or *gemeinschaft*, but possess characteristics of both. In their extreme forms, they cause problems; that is why, schools need to find a balance of the polar opposites and build *gemeinschaft* within *gesellschaft*, i.e. move from formal organizations to community.

RELATIONSHIPS IN COMMUNITIES

Problems of schooling, such as lower achievements, higher dropout rates and problems in the teaching profession are rather consequences of much deeper and more fundamental problems (Institute for Education and Transformation, 1992):

Relationships. Crisis inside schools is directly linked to human relationships.

Race, culture and class. There are division between these categories between and among teachers and students.

Values. Socio-economic difference in basic values creates conflicts in school and society.

Teaching and learning. Teachers feel pressure to teach what is mandated by the curriculum, which is considered boring and of little relevance by students.

Safety. Teachers, parents, and students do not feel schools are safe places.

Physical environment. Participants want schools that reflect order, beauty, space and contain rich

materials and media.

Despair, hope, and the process of change.

Participants are despaired, anxious for change, and willing to participate in change they perceive relevant.

These problematic relationships described are the kinds of relationships that seem inevitably to evolve whenever schools are viewed as formal organizations. It is not likely that relationships will improve unless this view is abandoned in favor of community.

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“Building community requires the development of a community of mind represented in shared values, conceptions, and ideas about schooling and human nature. This mind structure provides the community and its members with purpose and meanings that are embodied in duties and obligations. Fulfilling these duties and obligations requires selfless behavior, altruistic love”.

Need for Community

Community is the tie that binds students and teachers together in special ways, to something more significant than themselves: shared values and ideals. Community can help teachers and students be transformed from a collection of “I’s” to a collective “we”, thus providing them with a unique and enduring sense of identity, belonging and place.

The need for community is universal. Such needs as a sense of belonging, of continuity, of being connected to others and to ideas and values that make our lives meaningful and significant, are shared by all people. Their loss, however, causes people to search for substitutes for community. Successful community depends on each individual school defining for itself its own life and creating for itself its own practice of schooling.

DEFINING RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS

In schools, principals, teachers, and students have to make decision about how they will perform their respective roles in relationship to others. Their decisions represent a "pattern of variables" (Parson, 1951), consisting of several variables:

Affective versus affective neutrality. The parties that make up the relationships are either always interested in each other, or, at the other extreme, are always disinterested.

Collective orientation versus self-orientation. The parties that make up the relationships are always motivated by common interests – or are always motivated by self-interest.

Particularism versus universalism. Participants always size up situations and make decisions on the basis of specific situation or general protocols and rules.

Ascription versus achievement. The parties always value each other for who and what they are regardless of their achievements, or for what they accomplish.

Diffuseness versus specificity. The participants always view each other in less defined ways of broad interaction, or in ways defined more narrowly by roles, role expectations, and work requirements.

Substantive versus instrumental. The sides always view means as ends equal to ends, or always make clear distinction between means and ends.

Altruism versus egocentrism. People involve in cooperative, unconditional relationships, or emphasize their personal needs satisfaction.



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EMERGING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Community can begin with anyone in the staff. A single teacher in a single classroom within the most *gesellschaft* of schools can decide to make that classroom a place where community flourishes. One classroom can turn into two, and then the whole school. A single principal can model community in voice, temperament, and behavior. From such modest beginnings community will take hold, then strengthen, and eventually deepen.

Looking at the examples of effective schools in the USA and Germany, communities by kinship, of place, and of mind can

be described. Some of the values that contribute to the development of community are the shared belief that students are "workers", and teachers are "coaches"; commitment to doing a few things well, rather than attempting to cover all the tasks abstractly; treating everybody with respect; and creating a collective "we". In order to create a sense of "we, schools need to start with healthy "I's". This pertains not only to relationships among teachers, but also between teachers and students. Within this community of mind, that students and teach-

ers share, the center is the importance of providing students with intellectually challenging, rigorous academic experiences, that will make them resourceful lifelong learners. Schools as communities need to be committed to personalized relationships among teacher and between teachers and students, to smallness, cooperation, collegiality, respect for the student's personality, and respect for the student's mind. Effective schools provide an environment in which students find support, get direction, and feel safe.

UNDERSTANDING OUR NEED FOR COMMUNITY

Need theories can be sorted into two categories: those that emphasize rational connections between us and our wants, among us, and between us and our work, and those that emphasize cultural connections. Rational and cultural connections parallel the concepts of *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft*. Both rational and cultural connections are part of our reality, but the issue is one of primacy. Johnson (1990) defines cultural connections as shared purposes, values, traditions, and history that promote harmony and provide a sense of

community. Rational connections, by contrast, include roles, role expectations, rules, and functions that are designed to regulate our behaviors.

Rational and cultural connections represent competing motivational pulls. On the one hand we want and need community and on the other hand we are socialized to value individualism. In the ideal, these two views exist in delicate balance. We maintain our sense of privacy and individual freedom while living a cooperative life with others. But individualism has become so powerful

that it threatens the existence of community.

According to Durkheim's theory of needs, people have a basic need to belong. Connectedness is achieved through group mores, values, goals, and norms. When a school's values have a community orientation, individuals develop attachment and commitment to each other and in so doing they are more fulfilled and successful. When a school's values have an organizational orientation, individuals become alienated and are less successful and fulfilled.

...WE CARE TO LEARN, AND THAT SMACK OF GESELLSCHAFT. BUT AT THE HEART OF IT, WE LEARN BECAUSE WE CARE AND THAT IS CLEARLY GEMEINSCHAFT.

BECOMING A PURPOSEFUL

Schools become communities in many different forms. They can take forms of caring, learning, professional, collegial, inclusive, and inquiring entities. Whatever form they assume, they must first become purposeful communities. They must become places where members have developed a community of mind that bonds them together in special ways and binds them to a shared ideology. Arising from a network of shared ideologies and coherent sets of belief that tie people together is the culture of the school. In communities, ideologies shape what principals and teachers believe and how they practice, which in turn influences what students believe and how they behave.

This collective sense of purpose at once nurtures and reflects community values and provides the individuals in the school with a sense of belonging. In this way, there is a need for schools to develop their own cultures through continuous dialogue about mission, vision, values, goals, and group processes - all significant problems and issues for the organizational specialist. The reason for this is that purposeful communities emerge from the individual values and visions of teachers, parents, and principals. Building purposeful communities of mind helps everyone, who is involved, to find both meaning and significance in the school collaborative and change processes.

USING CURRICULUM TO

Community and culture can be built through conversations about curriculum and teaching. In order to achieve "unified action", which is characteristic to purposeful communities, we should emphasize the importance of an "educational platform" through which schools agree on, among other things, the aims of education, what students will achieve, the social significance of students' learning, and images of the learner, the teacher, and the curriculum. Platforms should be sufficiently detailed to provide guidance, that requires discipline to respect and support, and at the same time open enough to allow individuals to retain a sense of autonomy, requiring discretion to apply.

Learning in the classroom best occurs through the balance of three ways of learning, instructional outcomes, problem solving out-

comes, and expressive outcomes. With instructional outcomes, both questions and answers are set beforehand. With problem solving outcomes, the question is set, but the answer is not definite. Expressive outcomes are what one ends up with, whether intended or not, after being engaged in a learning experience. All these outcomes have important roles to play in curriculum planning. When brought together, they allow teachers to make decisions that reflect the discipline necessary for purposeful community building. This discipline is achieved without compromising the discretion needed to make informed decisions in light of the ambiguities found in the typical searching and learning situations. Schools that build their community of mind from within will find that the curriculum and teaching will be natural outlets for expressing and reproducing their community-oriented values.

THE CLASSROOM AS DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY

Community and culture are built through the everyday interactions in the classroom. Classrooms are microcosms of a democratic society, where community is nurtured through citizenship and helps students become caring adults. The goal of democratic society is not to rely solely on rules, rewards, and consequences, but also emphasize standards, values, and commitments that make up a constitution for living together. Democratic community is aimed not just at improving student behavior, but also at creating the kinds of ties that bond students together, students and teachers together, and that bind them to shared

ideas and ideals.

Classrooms should be places where students have responsibility and freedom. Freedom means having teachers and students together develop a social and moral constitution that spells out what is right and good for the community, what each member of the community can expect from others, and what each member must give in return. Most significantly, classrooms should provide students a place to belong, opportunities to succeed and realize their autonomy, and to learn the nature of generosity. Schools need to link student suc-

cess to personal goals rather than comparing one student with another. When schools and class-



room become democratic communities is the best way for students to understand what is needed for democracy to work.

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL

Schools develop a professional community through the practice of educating based on community values. In teaching, the professional ideal is made up of four dimensions: a commitment to practice in an exemplary way; a commitment to practice toward valued social ends; commitment to not only one's own practice, but to the practice itself; and a commitment to the ethic of care. Taken together, these four dimensions provide the ingredients for creating a powerful norm system within a school, a system that gives direction and meaning on the one hand, and represents a source of authority

for what is done on the other.

This meaning of collegueship implied in the professional ideal requires a new kind of relationship between and among community members. It is about a shared quest to do things differently, to develop new ties, and to make new commitments. According to Barth (1990) and others, such professional community defines itself by its



ability to improve, to develop its culture, and to create an environment that is most conducive to learning for both adults and children. In other words, in a purposeful school community people care about each other enough that they take their mutual obligations seriously, for example to care for each other and to learn from and teach each other.

Classroom Philosophies

Recognize the universal need to belong

Guarantee opportunities for mastering

Encourage the expression of independence

Teach the value of generosity

BECOMING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

As principals and teachers inquire together, they create community. Inquiry helps principals and teachers become a community of learners – a place where everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher. Learning community emerges in school cultures that constantly question who they are, and what they are trying to accomplish. Inquiry and learning do not recognize bureaucratic boundaries of role and hierarchies. Inquiry requires certain openness to new ideas, true reflection, and authentic dialogue. Becoming a community of learners is supported by shared leadership and authentic relationships that lead to per-

sonal development. Transformation to community can be achieved with the emer-



gence of a community of mind as to what is important and what is to be, and a commitment to inquire that would make a school a community of learners. These are the essential ingredients needed to

transform the staff from a collection of individuals, all separately doing the best we could, to a powerful “we” united in common purpose and action. Learning together helps develop special bonds between principal and teachers, among teachers and principals, among students, and between adults and students. *Gemeinschaft* bonds, bonds of caring, bonds of commitment, bonds of altruistic love, and bonds that define the school as a “we” united in common purpose.

BECOMING A COMMUNITY OF

Learning together makes sense, but leading together defies some of the laws of leadership that we have come to accept. Leadership in purposeful, learning communities is diffuse. What matters most is what the community together believes in, and what the community together wants to accomplish. This shared idea structure, this community of mind, becomes the primary source of authority for what people do. Principals and teachers together are followers of the dream, committed to making it real. Thus, leadership is nothing more than a means to make things happen. Since not only the

principals but all the followers have equal obligation to embody community values, principal and teachers together must share equally in the obligations to lead.

In communities, leadership is defined not by the power over people or events, but by the power to accomplish shared goals. When this leadership is exercised by everyone on behalf of what



is shared, the school becomes a community of leaders. In communities, the source of authority for what leaders do gives them a new legitimacy, a new license to lead. Leadership is nothing more than serving ideas and ideals and helping a community to become what it wishes to become.

Collegiality:

Working together-sharing

Peer acceptance

Supporting each other

Cooperative not competitive

Giving/taking equally

Being united

Taking time to listen

No fear of ridicule

Being honest, respecting opinion

Accepting honest criticism

Working toward common goal/vision

THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP

Redefinition of leadership lies in the importance of conceptions, values, and ideas to the practice. In the new process, leaders rely less on their people-handling skills, and more on the power of compelling ideas and the meanings they hold for others. Both meaning and significance are the driving forces behind our quest for connections with others and behind our quest for shared connections with common ideas and ideals. Both meaning and significance are at the heart of community building, and both of the, are found as leadership becomes more idea based.

It is useful for school leaders to view leadership from a “developmental perspective” and see it as comprising four stages:

bartering – a bargain within which principal gives to the teachers something they want in exchange for something the principals wants;

building – principal provides the climate and interpersonal support that enhance the teachers’ opportunities to fulfill individual needs for achievement, responsibility, competence, and esteem;

bonding – principal and teachers develop together a set f shared values about the relationships they want to share and the ties they want to create;

binding – principal and teachers together commit themselves to a set of shared values and ideas that ties them together as a “we”.

Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect mutual purposes.

Leadership flourishes when leaders and followers view each other as being credible. The stronger is this credibility the more likely will people allow themselves to be influenced by leadership acts, no matter what their source.

The credibility “Cs” of leadership

1. character – honesty, trust, integrity
2. courage – willingness to change, stand up for beliefs
3. competence – technical and interpersonal
4. composure – graceful under pressure
5. caring – concerned with welfare of others

Community building asks a great deal from everyone. It asks that principals, teachers and students care for each other, learn together, inquire together, and share together in the obligations of leadership. It requires that the school become a community by kinship, of place, of mind, and of memory.

Sergiovanni, T.J. (1994). *Building community in schools*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

“Sergiovanni documents cases of schools that have successfully reinvented themselves in order to establish a sense of ‘community’ as the foundation for all curriculum and instruction decisions. . . . Teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and communities seeking advice and motivation for restructuring schools for the 21st century would be well advised to consult this work.”

— *Choice*

“Provides the practitioner with both a theoretical blueprint with which to build learning communities and a rich supply of benchmark illustrations to use as prototypes. . . . thought-provoking and challenging.”

— *NASSP Bulletin*

“Sergiovanni is the leading writer in pushing us deeper and deeper toward understanding and creating a ‘community of learners.’”

— *Michael Fullan, Dean of Education, University of Toronto*

“Sergiovanni does not just extol the virtues of educational communities. Through rich and vivid portraits, he conveys what they are like and how we might create them.”

— *Howard Gardner, professor of education and co-director of Project Zero, Harvard University*

Both in and out of schools, people are experiencing a loss of community. In this book, Thomas J. Sergiovanni explains why a sense of community is so vital to the success of any school and shows teachers, parents, and administrators what they can do to rebuild it. Filled with case studies and other school examples, *Building Community in Schools* provides the necessary intellectual framework for understanding the need to create communities that are inclusive, meaningful, and democratic.