

Thinking Outside the (Bricks-and-Mortar) Box(es): Using Cyberspace Technology to Reconceptualize Schooling and Community in the Face of Resegregation

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ABSTRACT: As the 50th anniversary of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision arrives, a notably gesellschaftliche (individualist, freedom-oriented, rationalist) paradigm in the education policy agenda prevails. That is to say, in the wake of a series of Supreme Court decisions and the proliferation of publicly funded, ethnocentric charter schools in the past few decades, this country has moved away from *Brown's* celebrated ideals and closer to the old idea of "separate but equal." Furthermore, the disconnect is occurring along racial and cultural lines. Thus, if we are to achieve the benefits of diversity in schooling and create a more gemeinschaftliche (communitarian, help-oriented, democratic) orientation in education, we must think outside of the box; we must think digitally. The Internet as an embodiment of multiple forms of computer-mediated communications is a notably communal space imbued with gemeinschaftliche properties. Thus, to the traditional forms of schooling, we should look to add the community-building nature of computer-mediated communications to create virtual learning communities that bring together young people of different racial, cultural, economic and/or geographic identifications.

The educational policy climate of the early 21st century has been labeled with numerous appropriate descriptors: accountability, standards-based, assessment-driven,

etc. Yet, as state and local education agencies respond to and implement mandates pursuant to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, it is unlikely that anyone has characterized the policy climate as *gesellschaftliche*. It is argued here, however, that particularly with respect to governance arrangements and school attendance patterns by race, *gesellschaftliche* is the perfect descriptor of the dominant educational policy paradigm of the first half-decade of the 21st century. In other words, as will be explained below, in the domain of education generally, we have completely lost our sense of community. With respect to schooling specifically, rapid resegregation brought about by judicial decrees and self-segregation has trumped Horace Mann's ideal of the common school for the common good. The result is a fragmented schooling system characterized by racial and cultural stratification. Further, I argue that traditional remedies are no longer feasible, so we must look to an alternative space within which we can bring together otherwise separate schools, educators, and students—that alternative space being cyberspace.

GEMEINSCHAFT UND GESELLSCHAFT: COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

In 1887 Tönnies (1925) first introduced the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which have since served as meaningful and helpful constructs in our understanding of the concept of community. The terms are often used to describe distinct yet coexisting types of interactions or ways of living. “*Gemeinschaft* describes binding, primary interactional relationships based on sentiment; while *Gesellschaft* describes an interactional system characterized by self-interest, competition, and negotiated accommodation” (Christenson, 1984, p. 160). Or, as Craig (1993) states, “*Gesellschaft* refers to an impersonal, rule-oriented and contract-bound institutional structure or arrangement. *Gemeinschaft* refers to the more personal, caring, purposeful, and sharing type of institutional structure” (p. 305).

Much of the sociological research that incorporates the terms treats them as opposite ends of a spectrum. Typically, that spectrum is geographical in nature with *gemeinschaftliche* (rural) ways of life “dissolving in a linear, unidirectional fashion” into the *gesellschaftliche* mode “because of progressive industrial development” (Christenson, 1984, p. 162). It is not clear, however, that Tönnies envisioned such a linear, zero-sum relationship. Rather, one might read Tönnies as suggesting that *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* are different types of social relations and that contemporary society can and should reflect complex forms of both. “[I]ndividuals will emphasize one type over the other because the ideological basis for the orientations tend to be fundamentally divergent; yet both, in their own way, contribute to social order” (Christenson, 1984, p. 163).

To understand contemporary educational policy as particularly *gesellschaftliche*, Christenson’s (1984) operationalization of the two different ideal types is quite useful. With the stated purpose of moving Tönnies’s concepts “from reasoned philosophical positions to a plan for empirical investigation,” Christenson developed two value indicators to test the relationship of the concepts to spatial (rural–urban) differences and to communal (collectivist–individualist) differences. *Gemeinschaft*, according to Christenson, consists of three subdimensions (mores, commonwealth, and religiosity) and is comprised of eight values (work, honesty, practicality/efficiency, patriotism, democracy, national progress, salvation, and helping others). *Gesellschaft* is a unidimensional orientation consisting of five values (achievement, material comfort, personal freedom, individualism, and leisure). Although there is some overlap between the two (in particular, the values of work and practicality/efficiency load on both factors), factor analysis allowed Christenson to conclude that “the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* factors show two different orientations that highlight distinctive value patterns within American society” (p. 163). *Gemeinschaft* is associated with family and communal bonds, religiosity, and commonwealth; whereas *gesellschaft* is oriented toward individuality, freedom, and rationality.

Those distinct value patterns can be easily applied to virtually any area of education policy. For example, we might hypothesize that the concepts are associated with governance (centralization–local control) differences. That is, we might say that to favor local control is to value individuality and freedom, a *gesellschaftliche* orientation. On the other hand, advocating for more centralized control in education is to honor Horace Mann’s goal of education for the common good, a *gemeinschaftliche* orientation (Cremin, 1957).

Along similar lines as the *gemeinschaft–gesellschaft* distinction, Fuller (2003) points to contradictions within current educational policy circles. Certain education reform ideas codified by NCLB are noticeably centralized. For example, governors are now required to negotiate rigid teacher quality standards with federal education officials. Yet, federal guidelines for charter schools state that teachers there do not need to be credentialed, and the schools need not accept students seeking exile from schools in need of improvement. Thus, as Fuller states, “[g]arden variety schools become more tightly controlled from Washington; charters remain liberated” (p. 15). Or, in Toennie’s and Christenson’s terms, the federal government’s approach to traditional public schools is *gemeinschaftliche*; whereas its guidelines for charter schools are much more *gesellschaftliche*.

TOWARD A GESELLSCHAFTLICHE ORIENTATION THROUGH RAPID RESEGREGATION

In the area of school attendance patterns and segregation of schools by race, in particular, the policy climate is not so conflicted. In fact, as the 50th anniversary of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision arrives, a notably *gesellschaftliche* paradigm prevails. A series of Supreme Court decisions in the past few decades have pushed the country away from *Brown*’s celebrated ideals and closer to the old idea of “separate but equal.” As many of the major school districts throughout the country have recently ended

or phased out their desegregation plans, even some of the most ardent supporters of desegregation have conceded, preferring to revisit *Plessy* and to fight for equality more than integration—an allusion to the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision that allowed “separate but equal” public facilities.

Before exploring that gesellschaftliche paradigm in more detail, it is worth demonstrating the separation along racial and/or cultural lines that exists within the American educational system today. To that effect, the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University has been documenting the rapid resegregation of public schools in the United States. In a recent analysis, Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield (2003) report that:

- ❖ There has been a substantial slippage toward segregation in most of the states that were highly desegregated in 1991, and there is great variation among states.
- ❖ Although American public schools are now only 60% white nationwide and nearly one fourth of U.S. students are in states with a majority of nonwhite students, most white students have little contact with minority students except in the South and Southwest.
- ❖ Although whites make up two thirds of U.S. students in 2001, the typical white student attends a school where four out of five students (79%) are white.
- ❖ Black and Latina/o students typically attend schools where two thirds of the students are black and Latina/o and most students are from their own group.
- ❖ The vast majority of intensely segregated minority schools face conditions of concentrated poverty, which are powerfully related to unequal educational opportunity. Students in segregated minority schools can expect to face conditions that students in the very large number of segregated white schools seldom experience.
- ❖ Latinos confront very serious levels of segregation by race and poverty and, non-English-speaking Latinos tend to be segregated in schools with each other.

Frankenberg et al. (2003) conclude that these resegregation trends are problematic for a number of reasons. Mostly,

though, they conclude that “[r]acial segregation almost always accompanies segregation by poverty and many forms of related inequality” (p. 67). Those other forms of related inequality (e.g., funding, teacher quality, etc.) are highly and negatively correlated with educational outcomes. Thus, school segregation by race really matters.

There is no single reason why this resegregation is occurring, and the limits of social science research render the possibility of determining causation unlikely. However, there are at least two trends that have emerged as likely contributors to resegregation. First, the federal and state judiciaries have limited remedies and judicial oversight to de jure segregation and not segregation that exists pursuant to de facto residential segregation (Frankenberg et al., 2003; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Further, the courts have not hesitated to declare school districts as having achieved unitary status, thereby pulling formerly segregated districts out from under judicially imposed desegregation plans (Frankenberg et al., 2003; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Second, an increasing number of educators, parents, and culturally oriented community-based organizations (CBO) are drawing on public funds for home schooling or to run small, culturally focused charter schools, a form of culturally based self-segregation (Fuller, 2003).

RESEGREGATION AS A RESULT OF JUDICIAL DECREES

When discussing school desegregation policy, it is noteworthy that the *gemeinschaft-*gesellschaft** distinction is typically used to differentiate between urban and exurban ways of life. It is noteworthy because it has been argued that a rapid resegregation of schools began when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to incorporate suburban school systems into remedies for school segregation in urban areas (Frankenberg et al., 2003). In 1974, in the case of *Milliken v. Bradley* (418 U.S. 717), a federal district court determined that the only way to desegregate the schools in the city of Detroit was to integrate the city schools with schools in the suburbs of De-

troit. However, the Supreme Court overturned the district court's metropolitan-area plan by a vote of 5-4, writing:

The controlling principle consistently expounded in our holdings is that the scope of the remedy is determined by the nature and extent of the constitutional violation. Before the boundaries of separate and autonomous school districts may be set aside by consolidating the separate units for remedial purposes or by imposing a cross-district remedy, it must first be shown that there has been a constitutional violation within one district that produces a significant segregative effect in another district. . . . In such circumstances an interdistrict remedy would be appropriate to eliminate the interdistrict segregation directly caused by the constitutional violation. Conversely, without an interdistrict violation and interdistrict effect, there is no constitutional wrong calling for an interdistrict remedy. (418 U.S. 717, 745-746)

Using that logic, the Supreme Court determined that de jure segregated conditions existed only in the Detroit city schools and found no evidence of any violation by the 53 suburban school districts. Therefore, the remedy was to be limited to the confines of the city schools; there was no constitutional basis for the state to include the suburban districts in a desegregation plan for the city of Detroit.

The *Milliken* ruling, and a series of others in its wake, slowed the progress of desegregation considerably and made explicit the notion that segregation was a local matter to be remedied locally. "Once suburbs were put legally out of bounds, the momentum for desegregation slowed considerably" (Cohen, 2004, p. 4).

And, arguably, the momentum was almost completely halted in 1991 with the Supreme Court's 1991 decision in *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* (498 U.S. 237). Orfield and Eaton (1996) refer to this decision as the first in a series of three "resegregation cases" (p. 3). Essentially, the Court held that a district that briefly took any of the steps to eradicate segregation laid out in an earlier Court decision (*Green v. School Board of New Kent County*, 391 U.S. 430 [1968]) could be termed "unitary" (i.e., not a dual system) and therefore free from legal obligations and oversight.

In a 1995 case in Kansas City, Missouri (*Missouri v. Jenkins*, 115 S. Ct. 2038), the Supreme Court dismantled a program designed to attract willing white suburban and private school students to heavily African American city schools. Thus, the judiciary is dismantling even voluntary efforts at bringing otherwise disparate communities together for the sake of desegregation and diversity.

RESEGREGATION AS A RESULT OF "UNMODERN" GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND NONPUBLIC AGENDAS

At the same time that urban school systems that serve populations of mostly African American and Latina/o students are being declared unitary and increasingly left on their own to confront issues of segregation, Fuller (2003) points to "unmodern forms of policy" resulting in a very decentered arrangement of educational governance. At least three cultural forces have waged an attack on the modernist, Weberian system of state-led educational governance. First, "a variety of ethnic communities, having lost faith in urban school leaders and their bureaucracies, are creating their own schools, and government is now legitimating this liberation from the state in unprecedented fashion" (p. 16). The second force is the increasingly acceptable assumption that children learn best within particular cultural milieus. And, finally, "the new policy culture is becoming de-centered, radically pluralist in its sensitivities and wary of a dusty national culture that promised assimilation into an abstracted community" (p. 16).

As a result, an increasing number of educators, parents, and culturally oriented CBOs are drawing on public funds for home schooling or to run small, culturally focused charter schools; decidedly nonpublic agendas. Consider, as one example, the Benjamin Banneker Charter School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Banneker school was started by a group of predominantly African American parents who sought improved educational opportunities for their chil-

dren. The school was originally designed around a math- and science-oriented curriculum infused with African American theme elements (Benjamin Banneker Charter School website, n.d.). Similar schools have popped up around the country. A simple Google search quickly revealed at least the following Afrocentric public schools just in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

- ❖ *Urban League of Pittsburgh Charter School*: Pittsburgh's first-ever charter school (1998) serves approximately 170 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. It offers an Afrocentric social studies program and emphasizes math, science, and Spanish for all students (Urban League of Pittsburgh website, n.d.).
- ❖ *The Wakisha Charter School*: This school serves approximately 400 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students from multiple Philadelphia neighborhoods. Wakisha educators integrate courses with the rich heritage of the African diaspora, which recounts the voices of Africans who were unwillingly moved from their ancestral continent to various sites in the New World. Wakisha Charter School students engage an academically rigorous, all-inclusive, standards-driven, African-centered curriculum (Wakisha Charter School website, n.d.).

Similarly, Buchanan and Fox (2003) document the emergence of ethnocentric charter schools in Hawaii.

Local tailoring of centralized educational standards and divergent, culturally based child-rearing agendas are not new to the fragmented educational system that exists in our federal republic. "But it is the state's legitimization of these communities and the use of public funds to bolster them that is rare in the American context" (Fuller, 2003, p. 18). What is also new is the diversity of the local advocacy groups.

Not only gated communities are extracting public resources to create their own charter schools; economically disadvantaged groups, advancing their own forms of child rearing, are being legitimated and awarded taxpayer support for their own agendas as well. (p. 18)

We may not be seeing the total and “progressive disintegration of common consciousness” that Durkheim feared (Fuller, 2003, p. 18), but we are certainly treading down a (*gesellschaftliche*) path of individualism. The federal and state judiciaries are telling us that the remnants of *de jure* segregation have disappeared and that school segregation is a matter to be resolved locally. Additionally, in culturally focused charter schools, some with Afrocentric curricula, we have unmodern forms of educational policy resulting from decidedly nonpublic agendas. One might say that these educators, parents, and culturally oriented CBOs have, for any number of potentially valid reasons, chosen to segregate themselves.

Thus, it can be said that at least four of the values embedded in Christenson’s construction of *gemeinschaft* (democracy, national progress, salvation, and helping others) have yielded to at least four of the values that make up the *gesellschaftliche* orientation (achievement, material comfort, personal freedom, and individualism). Furthermore, that personal freedom and individualist mind-set across the educational space run along distinct racial and cultural lines.

SCHOOLING ALONE? PROBLEMATIZING THE GESELLSCHAFTLICHE ORIENTATION IN EDUCATION POLICY

The situation with respect to school governance and school attendance patterns is clearly anathema to Mann’s notion of common schooling for the common good, but it is also analogous to the more general sense of the loss of community documented and perhaps “popularized” by Robert Putnam (2000) in his widely acclaimed book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Based on analyses of large datasets and evidence from nearly 500,000 interviews over the past quarter century, Putnam concludes that our stock of social capital—the very fabric of our connections with each other—has dropped dramatically, thus impoverishing our lives and communities. He documents

that we sign fewer petitions, belong to fewer organizations that meet, know our neighbors less, meet with friends less frequently, and even socialize with our families less often. We are even bowling alone. More Americans are bowling more than ever before, but they are not bowling in leagues. In other words, we are increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and our democratic structures.

Putnam (2000) offers a number of reasons for this collapse of community in America. Among those reasons, time pressure, especially on two-career families, is considered one of the primary suspects. Additionally, changes in family structures mean more and more of us are living alone and the conventional means to civic engagement are not designed around single and/or childless people. Also, suburban sprawl is an important contributor to the loss of community as we live farther away from one another and from cultural and civic centers. Altogether, these phenomena have yielded the *gesellschaftliche* mind-set that is predominant today.

In education, as was documented above, we can analogize to Putnam's ideas to say that we are "schooling alone." Partly, this is the logical result of America's eternal love affair with local control and decentralized governance structures. However, the judicial decrees that declared unitary status upon school districts otherwise segregated by residential communities and decidedly nonpublic agendas pursued by culturally based CBOs have resulted in schooling alone along racial and cultural lines.

Why, if at all, is this problematic? Well, Putnam (2000) writes about community through the construct of social capital.

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. (p. 19)

In other words, interaction allows individuals to build communities, to commit themselves to one another, and to weave a social fabric.

Putnam (2000) then builds a data- and evidence-based argument to demonstrate a number of benefits of increased social capital. First, healthy child development is positively correlated with social capital. Through the social networks and norms of reciprocity within a child's family, school, peer group, and larger community, one can expect long-term effects on choices and opportunities for young people and, ultimately, value added to their behavior and development. This idea of a relationship between social capital and child development is not unlike Hillary Rodham Clinton's thesis in her 1996 book, *It Takes a Village*. The second benefit of social capital, according to Putnam (2000), is its relationship to economic prosperity. Putnam cites a growing body of research that shows that where trust and social networks thrive, individuals, organizations, communities, and even nations burgeon economically. Third, there is a significant positive relationship between social capital and better health. "As a rough rule of thumb, if you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying over the next year in half" (Putnam, 2000, p. 331). Putnam goes on to state that civic connections rival marriage and affluence as predictors of life happiness.

Applying this to the realm of education, child development, economic prosperity, and better health are certainly worthy and oftentimes explicitly stated outcomes of schooling. Hence, it is essential to pursue social capital in and through schools. However, when we see that the disconnect we are experiencing in schools is along racial and cultural lines, there is an additional set of reasons for developing a more gemeinschaftliche mind-set; reasons expounded upon by the U.S. Supreme Court. For one, we can look to the language of the *Brown* decision itself. "[I]n the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (347 U.S. 483, 495). In other words, even if all relevant educational resources are distributed equitably, the provision of education separately by race is inherently unequal.

Second, in the most recent decision on affirmative action, the Court was explicit about the benefits of diversity within

educational institutions. In holding that the state of Michigan had a compelling interest in providing and maintaining student body diversity, the Court ruled that

[i]n addition to the expert studies and reports entered into evidence at trial, numerous studies show that student body diversity promotes learning outcomes, and “better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals.” . . . These benefits are not theoretical but real, as major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today’s increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints. (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 333–334)

Thus, it is incumbent upon educational leaders and policymakers to find a way to bring diverse groups of students together in the educational space. Federal and state judiciaries have made it clear that they will no longer craft and oversee remedies to school segregation that are purely functions of de facto residential segregation. Further, policies such as busing have clearly run their course, while redistricting plans to accomplish student body diversity would take extraordinary acts of political courage and will. To achieve Horace Mann’s ideal of common schooling for the common good and to obtain the benefits of diversity within the educational space, we must, quite literally, think outside the bricks and mortar boxes; we must think digitally.

CYBERSPACE (VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES) AS A GEMEINSCHAFTLICHE REMEDY

Putnam (2000), in his writing about the collapse of community, does address digital communications and argues that electronic entertainment, especially television, has severely privatized our leisure time and, therefore, has become a major contributor to the collapse of community. However, Putnam also admits that the verdict on the Internet is still out. That is, it may be that the primary effect of the Internet

will be to reinforce existing social networks, as the telephone has done, or the Internet might become a virtual substitute for them.

It is argued below, though, that the Internet as computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a much more multifaceted technology than the telephone and offers new and additional venues for social networking, particularly within the educational sphere. That is to say, the Internet as an embodiment of multiple forms of computer-mediated communications is a notably communal space imbued with *gemeinschaftliche* properties that correlate with necessary attributes of the very notion of “community.” Thus, where a particularly *gesellschaftliche* mind-set has either yielded or been typified by school segregation across racial lines, we should look to add computer-mediated communications to create virtual learning communities that bring together young people of different racial, cultural, economic and/or geographic identifications.

The logic of the argument for cyberspace as a *gemeinschaftliche* remedy is constructed around answers to the following three questions:

1. What is community?
2. Can computer-mediated communications help form and sustain communities?
3. How might computer-mediated communications help form and sustain virtual learning communities?

What Is Community?

At first blush, it might seem that to argue that the Internet is a notably communal, *gemeinschaftliche* space would require a redefinition of the concept of “community.” However, somewhat surprisingly, “community” is not a particularly well-defined concept, and across multiple disciplines, there is little agreement on a definition. Even the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* states that “the ambiguities of the term community make any wholly coherent sociological definition

of communities, and hence the scope and limits for their empirical study, impossible to achieve" (Marshall, 1998, p. 75).

In 1955 Hillery reviewed academic studies of community and found 94 different definitions. However, he determined that many of the definitions had at least one of three elements in common. He believed that communities are based on geographic areas, they must include social interaction among people, and the people in the community must have some common tie such as common social life, a consciousness of their homogeneity, or some common norms, means, or ends.

Etzioni and Etzioni (1999) defined the term "community" as having two attributes:

First, it is a web of affect-laden relationships that encompasses a group of individuals—relationships that crisscross and reinforce one another, rather than simply a chain of one-on-one relationships. . . . Second, a community requires a measure of commitment to a set of shared values, mores, meanings, and a shared historical identity. (p. 241)

In short, they refer to these attributes respectively as *bonding* and *culture*. Further, the attributes are to be considered continuous rather than dichotomous; communities may have bonds ranging from very weak to very strong, and a culture that can be characterized as anywhere between "less elaborate" and "extensively shared" (p. 242).

Finally, and notably different from Hillery's (1955) conception, Etzioni and Etzioni (1999) assert that community is nonresidential. In other words, their definition is much like Hillery's only they specifically exclude Hillery's first part of the definition. Etzioni and Etzioni point to the example of Jewish communities whose members meet at a synagogue even though they do not live in the same residential areas. Another contemporary example may be industry groups or professional organizations that meet on a regular basis at conventions or conferences.

The elimination of geographical boundaries from the definition of community is important and almost certainly a concession to advances in technologies since Hillery conducted

his synthesis in 1955. Transportation technologies render us significantly more mobile than we were then, and advanced communications technologies make it easier to bond and share values. In fact, Rheingold (1993), in comparing CMC to “new” media that have come about in the past such as the television, wrote that CMC “will be in some way a conduit for and reflector of our cultural codes, our social subconscious, our images of who ‘we’ might be, just as previous media have been” (p. 11). The major difference between CMC and previous media (and even face-to-face communications) is that communications by the traditional mass media go from one (or a few individuals) to many people, while CMC enables communication from many to many. Rheingold called the modem, a primary tool needed to facilitate CMC, a “potent political and educational tool as well as a new medium for community-building” (p. 11).

Can CMC Help Form and Sustain Communities?

To develop and maintain communities characterized by bonding and a culture, according to Etzioni and Etzioni (1999), at least the following six conditions must be met:

1. *Access*: A prerequisite to communication, it is defined as the ability to reach others. “All other things being equal, people who have a higher amount of access, as well as modes of access that encompass more of the people in a given aggregate, are more likely to form communities than those who have a lower level of access” (p. 242).
2. *Encompassing Interpersonal Knowledge*: Bonding requires a high level of encompassing or interpersonal knowledge of those with whom one bonds. To gain encompassing knowledge requires specific identities, trust via authentication of messages, and a sense of accountability to and from others.
3. *Interactive Broadcasting*: In order to sustain shared bonds and values, communities need to be able to send

messages to many people simultaneously and to provide for feedback from those who receive the communally broadcasted message.

4. *Breakout and Reassemble*: Because communities usually include large numbers of individuals, the only way to maintain a high level of dialogue is to provide structured opportunities for individuals to meet in subgroups that then report back to the larger aggregate.
5. *Cooling-Off Mechanisms and Civility*: “[C]onstructive community dialogues . . . are believed to require cooling-off mechanisms. Effective cooling-off mechanisms provide delay loops, time intervals between receiving a message and sending a response, and use this lapsed time for dialogues that cross (and mute) previous divisions” (p. 246).
6. *Memory*: The sharing of values is a process that pulls from a shared history, communal identity, experiences, and rituals. Thus, a communal memory is necessary for community building and maintenance.

Working across these six specifications, it is possible to compare face-to-face (F2F) communication and CMC with respect to their abilities to help form and sustain communities. Table 1 is drawn primarily from the comparisons made by Etzioni and Etzioni (1999).

Etzioni and Etzioni (1999) ultimately conclude that F2F communications are not necessarily better at satisfying the communications needs of communities, and that it would not be difficult to form and sustain communities online. “[W]hile f2f systems are better at providing encompassing knowledge and B&R [breakout & retrieval] systems than CMC systems, the opposite is true for the retrieval of cognitive information that has been generated earlier” (p. 246). Thus, while their comparison is not based on any sort of empirical data, they advocate taking advantage of the merits of F2F and CMC systems by creating communities that combine both. Communities that utilize hybrid systems “would be able to bond better and share values more effectively than communities that rely upon only one or the other mode of communication” (p. 247).

Table 1. Forming and Sustaining Communities: A Comparison

	<i>F2F Communications</i>	<i>CMC Systems</i>
Access	<p>Being in the same space does not necessarily bring about communication or community building.</p> <p>Built into certain social occasions (e.g., meetings, parties, etc.), but otherwise requires special arrangements and significant coordination.</p>	<p>"[E]nable people to communicate regularly without significant economic or other costs" (p. 242).</p> <p>Access is time and space independent (anywhere, anytime).</p> <p>No necessity of consideration for physical safety of members.</p>
Encompassing knowledge	<p>Necessarily relies on personal identification markers (e.g., names, addresses, etc.).</p> <p>Membership, therefore, is rarely acquired without disclosure of specific identities.</p>	<p>Use of "handles" or log-in IDs allows for presentation of false selves, role playing, gender swapping, etc.</p> <p>Cybersecurity fears limit disclosure of specific identities.</p> <p>Can include features that allow members to authenticate identities of others.</p>
Interactive broadcasting	<p>Limited where membership is large or geographically dispersed.</p> <p>"Meetings" can be arranged and structured for interactive broadcasting, but feedback to messages is usually limited to the small number of those who are even present to begin with.</p>	<p>Readily enable broadcasting of messages to all members simultaneously.</p> <p>Do not typically allow transmitters of messages to readily gauge real-time reaction of recipients.</p> <p>However, as the ability to record and transmit audio and video across the Internet improves, much richer feedback can be transmitted (see e.g., video conferences).</p>
Breakout and reassemble	<p>Typical format for large-scale F2F meetings (e.g., conferences, conventions, etc.).</p> <p>Also occurs informally as ad hoc, unarranged meetings within geographically bound communities.</p>	<p>Can be readily provided for in systems such as chat rooms or newsgroups, but might amount to relationship building rather than community building.</p> <p>Might exist in the form of subject-specific</p>

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	<i>F2F Communications</i>	<i>CMC Systems</i>
Cooling-off mechanisms and civility	<p>Delay loops built in to the nature of informal communication; F2F meetings often result in delayed decision making.</p> <p>Weak communal bonds and/or inappropriately structured F2F communications might cause passions of the moment to trump cooling-off structures and, hence, civility.</p>	<p>newsgroups or listservs within larger community (e.g., special interest groups of professional organizations).</p> <p>Text-based messages (e-mail, discussion board postings, etc.) typically take time to compose, read, and comprehend, therefore, allowing for at least a brief moment of reflection.</p> <p>Design components such as predefined periods of time within which responses are not accepted can engender greater civility.</p>
Memory	<p>Oral histories, archives, and records are typical, but often unreliable.</p> <p>Reliability of memories of F2F communications is subject to necessary aspects of human nature such as hearing inconsistencies.</p>	<p>"Always provide for very powerful memory and retrieval systems" (p. 246).</p> <p>Most systems can automatically and unobtrusively record and archive communications.</p>

Source: Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999

How Might Computer-Mediated Communications Help Form and Sustain Virtual Learning Communities?

In the education space, hybrid communication systems can be used to build virtual learning communities between groups of students otherwise separated by geographic or district boundaries. The Cyberspace Regionalization Project was an attempt to use advanced audiovisual telecommunications to bridge gaps of geography (70 miles) and socio-economics between two New Jersey high schools, one white and affluent and the other black and low income. Using audiovisual links provided by Intel ProShare software and

equipment and other forms of CMCs, students and teachers from the two high schools worked together on a variety of web-based curricular and cocurricular activities such as an online science experiment and an electronic literary magazine. Teachers, trained under a grant from corporate partners, designed the interactions and supervised the students throughout the project. Finally, on a couple of occasions, the students visited one another at their respective schools and engaged in face-to-face activities.

The Cyberspace Regionalization Project, which began in 1998, was an idea ahead of its time, and web-based technologies have evolved dramatically even in the 5 or 6 years since its inception. Distance learning, in many shapes and forms, has been greatly aided by a number of advanced technologies including enterprise-wide course management systems such as Blackboard® or WebCT®. These web-based systems enable a number of forms of CMCs between students separated in space and in time. Functions such as Blackboard's digital drop box allow students to exchange electronic documents seamlessly. Also, chat rooms or virtual classrooms allow for real-time, synchronous dialogue between groups of students. In the terminology of Etzioni and Etzioni (1999), these course management systems, at the very least, allow for access and interactive broadcasting to other community members.

Other web-based distance learning technologies add audio and video components that could aid in the development of encompassing knowledge between virtual community members. Web- or computer-conferencing systems allow multiple parties to see and talk to each other using simple, inexpensive PC cameras and microphones. Full-fledged video-conferencing rooms and systems allow individuals or groups to see and hear one another in real time as they might if they were together physically.

In fact, modern video-conferencing technologies elicit examples of the sorts of virtual learning communities that might make cyberspace a remedy to cultural- or race-based school segregation. Consider just the following two examples

that have been documented in *Education Week* in the past year. In the first example, about 20 students from Iraq's Baghdad College and 17 sophomores from the Metropolitan Learning Center, a public magnet school in Bloomfield, Connecticut, participated in a 90-minute video conference called "Project Voice" (Borja, 2003). Prior to the onset of the war in Iraq, the students participated in a moderated teleconference and discussed topics ranging from life plans to world peace. Although the two groups of students interacted, students from up to 50 other schools throughout the United States, as well as one in Costa Rica, watched. The video conference was organized by the Global Nomads Group, a New York City-based nonprofit organization that tries to raise children's understanding of diverse cultures (Borja, 2003).

The May 7, 2003, edition of *Education Week* contains a story about how video conferencing allowed a high school student to make an easier transfer from a school in North Carolina to one in Colorado; a transfer necessitated by his father's military transfer (Davis, 2003). Using a sophisticated video-conferencing system donated by the nonprofit organization Military Child Education Coalition, the schools established "interactive counseling centers" wherein the high school student was able to "meet" two students in his soon-to-be new school. Over the web-based connection, the students were able to talk about weather, athletics, and academics at the Colorado high school. Then, when the transfer student arrived at his new school, he recognized the two students he had met in cyberspace and transitioned into a natural, face-to-face relationship with them. Speaking of the initial video conference, the counselor at the Colorado school is quoted as saying, "It was fun to watch them. They were really bonding" (Davis, 2003, p. 3).

Bonding is one of the two core attributes of community according to Etzioni and Etzioni (1999), so the quote from the school counselor points out how web-based technologies can help build virtual learning communities. As these technologies continue to evolve, we will surely see more programs like "Project Voice" and "interactive counseling

centers,” and by combining e-mail, enterprise-wide course management systems, web conferencing, and video conferencing, the possibilities of building virtual learning communities seem endless.

CONCLUSION: ARE VIRTUAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES VIABLE REMEDIES TO RACIAL SEGREGATION?

Rheingold (1993) stated that when people begin to communicate by CMC, it is inevitable that they will build virtual communities, social relationships that cut across space and time on computer networks. Furthermore, he posits “whenever computer mediated communications technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build communities with it” (p. 11).

Thus, if we are interested in remedying the *gesellschaftliche* paradigm that prevails in educational policy circles today and in bringing together students of different racial, cultural, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds in a learning community, infusing cyberspace technologies into the standard package of policy options makes great sense. The challenge then becomes one of figuring out just how to get that done.

The various deficiencies of CMC and f2f systems stand as challenges to designers to create the kind of system that has the highest potential for bonding and evolving a shared culture, that best catalyzes the building of genuine communities. . . . [W]e suggest that both f2f and CMC systems have strengths and weaknesses of their own, and that their proper combination promises to meet more of the prerequisites of community than either of them could separately. (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999, p. 247)

We should not forget, though, that the real problem with the prevailing individualist, impersonal, achievement-oriented (i.e., *gesellschaftliche*) mind-set is that the disparate schooling exists, for the most part, along racial lines. So, it is worth asking whether the development of virtual learning communities is a viable remedy to school segregation by race.

The answer to that question, however, is not so straightforward, and, in part, depends on what the goals are for desegregation. Here again, though, the language of the Supreme Court may be instructive. The Court held that separate educational facilities are inherently unfair, so one might ask whether interactive schooling in cyberspace should be considered “separate” or not. However, such a discussion is likely to end up in a complicated debate about metaphysics. So, instead, it should be noted that, in its justification, the Court specifically pointed to the intangible benefits of interracial contact or integrated classrooms. Thus, if we accept for now that resegregation is a present reality, and that Caucasian students are going to be in different schools than minority students, the question becomes whether virtual learning communities can generate the kind of interracial contact that creates the sort of intangible benefits the Supreme Court believed would emanate from desegregation.

In the same year of the *Brown* decision (1954), Gordon Allport published his book, *The Nature of Prejudice*. In that book, Allport developed the “contact hypothesis.” In its most basic form, this hypothesis holds that, under ideal conditions, contact with members of different cultural groups promotes positive, tolerant attitudes. These ideal conditions include:

- ❖ contact involving persons of equal status;
- ❖ contact taking place under cooperative conditions;
- ❖ contact that is actively supported by powerful authorities.

Virtual learning communities developed through CMCs with the intention of bringing together students from racially segregated schools would appear to meet all of these conditions since equal status people (students) of different races would be working and learning together on projects designed and supervised by teachers and authorized by school district administrators. In speaking about the Project Voice video conference between the students in Iraq and Connecticut, Jonathan Giesen, the educational director and cofounder of the Global Nomads Group, said, “The most important thing

[the students] learned was seeing the other's humanity" (Borja, 2003, p. 3).

Ultimately, answers are likely to lie somewhere between the enthusiasms of technophiles and the cynicism of technophobes. They are also likely to be continuous (a matter of degree) rather than binary (yes or no). What is clear, though, is that while school attendance patterns by race look virtually identical to what they were 50 years ago, technology has advanced exponentially since then. So, if we are to honor the spirit of the *Brown* decision and create a more communitarian agenda in education, we can and should harness those technologies.

Even the greatest thinkers of their time such as Thurgood Marshall and Gordon Allport could not have imagined the impact of the Internet when legal pronouncements about "separate" educational facilities and theories such as the "contact hypothesis" were advanced. Thus, today, when we think about what it means to be "separate" and what constitutes interpersonal "contact," we need to think outside the box; quite literally, we need to think outside the bricks and mortar boxes. JSFR

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