SCHOOLS AS NESTED COMMUNITIES
Sergiovanni's Metaphor Extended

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This article discusses Sergiovanni's metaphor, school as community. By proposing this metaphor as an alternative to school as organization, Sergiovanni encourages educators to think in new and different ways about how schools work. However, he discards the notion of organization too quickly and depicts the phenomenon primarily as a unified, cohesive school culture. His metaphor fails to conceptualize the multifaceted nature of schools and to account for the social complexity and inevitable conflicts present within them. An extended metaphor, the concept of schools as nested communities, is proposed and illustrated with a case study conducted in a multiethnic urban high school.

Typically when the words school and community are linked, the emphasis is on the interrelationship of schools within communities. For example, in The Color of Strangers the Color of Friends, Peshkin (1991) examined ethnicity within a high school and the community in which it was situated. In Change and Effectiveness in Schools, authors Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone (1988) looked at high schools in three different communities to probe the structure of school cultures and administrative resistance to change. Similarly, ethnographers Gibson and Ogbu explored schools within their respective communities to gain insight into what occurs in the

AUTHOR'S NOTE: An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1994 University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The author would like to thank Betty Malen and the reviewers from Urban Education for their comments and recommendations.

URBAN EDUCATION, Vol. 32 No. 4, November 1997 512-531
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process of schooling in specific contexts. Gibson (1988) considered Sikh immigrants and the process through which they were assimilated into American high schools. Ogbo (1974, 1981, 1983) examined the convergence of family, community, and societal forces on student achievement and academic success.

An alternative to this view of a school within a community is the concept of school as community, which is proposed by Thomas Sergiovanni and others. This microscopic orientation provides a useful perspective from which to rethink school purpose, function, organization, and social relationships. Moreover, Sergiovanni’s orientation affirms the emphasis placed on an ethic of caring espoused by Beck (1992); Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985); and Noddings (1992). Although this alternative is useful, I suggest extending the metaphor to include the institutional and bureaucratic constraints on school communities. Furthermore, I propose that schools are more complex social relationships than Sergiovanni’s metaphor allows, given the similarity between his metaphor and the notion of school as collective culture. I proffer an extended metaphor, schools as nested communities, which acknowledges the many varied communities that exist within schools and how these entities might be conflicting. To illustrate this extension, I draw from a case study conducted in a multiethnic urban high school. The case highlights the complexity of the high school, how change occurs, and how school members resist change when nested communities are in conflict. Thus, the case supports a more complex conceptualization, captured by the extended metaphor of schools as nested communities.

SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY

During the past few years, Sergiovanni (1992, 1994a, 1994b) and Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993) have been challenging scholars in the field of educational administration to recast their theoretical base and to anchor their work in a different metaphor. He argues against “the metaphor of choice [being] organization” (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 215). His argument is that scholars of educational administration draw primarily from organizational theory and behavior to
frame their thinking about schools. Specifically, they consider issues concerning "how schools should be structured and coordinated, how compliance within them should be achieved, what leadership is, and how it works" (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 215). In so doing, scholars tend to emphasize management concerns of quality, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness, and to maintain an economics orientation.

It is from economics, the parent of organizational theory, that educational administration has borrowed its theories of human nature and human motivation—theories built on the simple premise that as human beings, we are motivated by self-interest and thus seek to maximize our gains and cut our losses. (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 215)

Contrasting the metaphor of school as organization, Sergiovanni proposes that not all groups are organizations motivated by self-interest and profit-loss concerns. For example, families, communities, friendship networks, and social clubs are groups but not necessarily organizations. In these groups, he contends that "the connection of people [is] to purposes and the connections among people are not based on contracts but on commitments" (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 217). When one thinks of these kinds of groups, attention is directed to social relationships that bind individuals together and create a sense of the collective rather than to a set of self-interests that distinguish and separate individuals.

Sergiovanni introduces the metaphor school as community to suggest that schools be thought of as "collections of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals"; "members part of a tightly knit web of meaningful relationships, [sharing] a common place and [who] over time come to share common sentiments and traditions that are sustaining" (p. 218).

Life in school as community differs fundamentally from that in school as organization: "In communities, we create our social lives with others who have intentions similar to ours. In organizations, relationships are constructed for us by others and become codified into a system of hierarchies, roles, and role expectations" (Sergiovanni, 1994a, p. 4).
To further distinguish between community and organization, Sergiovanni uses the terms *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (society) introduced by sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies (as quoted in Sergiovanni, 1994a, 1994b).^2

In *gemeinschaft*, natural will is the motivating force. Individuals relate to each other because doing so has its own intrinsic meaning and significance. There is no tangible goal or benefit in mind for any of the parties to the relationship.

In *gesellschaft*, rational will is the motivating force. Individuals relate to each other to reach some goal, to gain some benefit. Without this benefit the relationship ends. In the first instance, the ties among people are thick and laden with symbolic meaning. They are moral ties. In the second instance, the ties among people are thin and instrumental. They are calculated ties. (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 219)

The two terms, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, frame how we might examine social relationships in schools along a continuum with each term representing one end of the spectrum. For example, as we consider the relationships among students, teachers, and administrators, we might consider those that reinforce shared kinship, locale, membership, and values as *gemeinschaft*. Contrastingly, those relationships and interactions that reinforce rationality, legitimacy, status attainment, goal achievement, and competition would reflect *gesellschaft*.^3 According to Sergiovanni (1994a),

*Gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* represent ideal types that do not exist in the real world in pure forms. They are, instead mental representations that can help us categorize and explain the opposites, on the one hand, and track movement along this continuum on the other. (p. 13)

Sergiovanni acknowledges both terms as characteristic of schools in American society. Although *gemeinschaft* is preferred over *gesellschaft*, "it is important to recognize that the *gesellschaft* perspective is both valuable and inescapable. We live, after all, in a *gesellschaft* world—a society characterized by technical rationality" (Sergiovanni, 1994a, p. 13). However, by preferring the *gemeinschaft* term and advocating school as community, Sergiovanni aims to alter our thinking about schools. Using a new metaphor will
create new realities about how members are bounded together, how a sense of belonging is valued, and how the role of administrator might be viewed differently.

First, the notion of community suggests that school members are bonded together in special ways with shared values and ideas. Accordingly, “relationships within a community of mind are based not on contracts but on understandings about what is shared and on the emerging web of obligations to embody that which is shared” (Sergiovanni, 1994a, p. 7). This relatedness within community has implications for our organization of curriculum and instruction in schools. For example, if sharing and sustaining relationships are valued as a result of school as community, then efforts would be made to keep students and teacher together for longer instruction periods. “Teaching in fifty-minute snippets would have to be replaced with something else. Elementary schools would have to give serious consideration to organizing themselves into smaller and probably multi-aged families” (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 223).

Second, school as community compensates for a loss of a sense of belonging. Sergiovanni argues that today’s children desire belonging and connecting with others; a need not fulfilled by their families, schools, and neighborhoods. This need is particularly high for children from troubled and disadvantaged families. He proposes that “community building in schools could provide an important safety net as an interim strategy” in compensating for the need for belonging and relating with others (p. 13).

Third, changing metaphors from school as organization to school as community affects how we understand leadership and authority in schools. Sergiovanni illustrates this point by recasting the role of administrator in his book, *Supervision: A Redefinition* (1993), coauthored with Starratt. The authors redefine administrative supervision related to school reform and specify five sources of authority. In addition to the three organizational management sources of authority (bureaucratic, human relations, technical-rational), Sergiovanni and Starratt include a professional source, referring to experience, knowledge of craft, personal expertise; and a moral source, referring to one’s obligations and duties derived from widely shared values, ideas, and ideals. A greater emphasis
on professional and moral sources of authority is required when schools are thought of as communities. In a subsequent publication, *Building Communities in Schools*, Sergiovanni (1994a) postulates that principals aspiring to be educational leaders must be skilled builders of community. Teamwork and collaborative efforts are necessary in creating a community-oriented school where all members are guided by common vision and purpose.

Presumably, the recasting of school as community is needed if we are to reform schools successfully. Sergiovanni (1994b) argues for changing the root metaphor to understand “what is true about how schools should be organized and run, about what motivates teachers and students, and about what leadership is, and how it should be practiced” (p. 217). Without such a transformation, we place what might be new and reconstructive into established categories. Accordingly, “as long as the root metaphor for school remains organization, we may not be studying the right thing” (p. 225).

Indeed, the metaphor school as community provides a useful perspective for understanding recent school reforms. Among these changes are a return to local governance (site-based and school-based management), more integrated learning (inclusion for special education students), and alternative teaching and learning environments (school within a school, multiage and multigrade classrooms). For each of these reforms, we might examine the gemeinschaft/gesellschaft spectrum and ask how social relationships are oriented. For instance, we might ask these questions with respect to local governance reforms: To what extent is decision making a collective versus self-oriented process? What mechanisms reify particularism as contrasted with universalism? What interests are prioritized? What social relationships are reinforced and solidified in such reform measures?

The school-as-community metaphor also affirms the emphasis on an ethic of caring espoused by Beck (1992), Bellah et al. (1985), and Noddings (1992). Beck (1992) assesses the importance of caring in developing an ethical perspective to meet administrative challenges. Bellah et al. (1985) argue for the importance of affirming community over individualism, which can “become increasingly instrumental, competitive, insulated, and self seeking” (as
paraphrased by Sergiovanni, 1994a, p. 60). In discussing caring and continuity, Noddings (1992) echoes Sergiovanni's theme of community as present in school purpose, place, relationships, and curriculum (pp. 72-73).

Finally, by suggesting a change in metaphors, Sergiovanni emphasizes the complex nature of school as social organization. He argues that organizational behavioral theories have not adequately described school organizations. He cites the work of behavioral scientists primarily, and Max Weber's bureaucratic theory and human relations approaches particularly, for defining how schools have been guided by theories of organizational behavior. Sergiovanni contends that schools are not merely constructed around organizing principles, where arrangements by logical order define the institution. Organizing schools is not the same as organizing one's bureau drawers. Rather, schools are communities connecting people to purposes and commitments: "Communities are socially organized around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them" (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 217).

CRITIQUE OF SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY

Although Sergiovanni presents a persuasive case for the need to transform schools and to better understand their complexity, he might be discarding the terminology organization too quickly because he relies on too narrow a view of organizational theory. Recent school reforms in the 1980s and 1990s have revived interest in management thinking but with new theoretical framing for understanding how organizations function. In addition to economics and behavioral sciences, such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, and organizational psychology provide theoretical frames for moving organizational theory beyond the technical rationality that Sergiovanni criticizes. These frames have been better at recognizing the multifaceted social relationships present within organizations and unpacking what had been regarded as institutional and bureaucratic relationships in organizations.

Furthermore, theorists have effectively combined theoretical frames. For example, Bolman and Deal (1991) recommend incor-
porating four major theoretical traditions when considering how to improve schools: (a) human resource, (b) structural, (c) political, and (d) symbolic concepts and assumptions. The authors suggest that a better understanding of schools can be obtained by considering all four and by emphasizing the political and symbolic orientations not adequately considered earlier. Rather than dismissing the term organization as Sergiovanni does, we might scrutinize schools with such revised combinations of organizational theory.

A second criticism of Sergiovanni’s metaphor is its similarity to the notion of school culture proposed by Waller and others. Waller (1932) wrote that “schools have a culture that is definitely their own” consisting of “complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of mores, folk ways, and irrational sanctions, a moral code . . . games . . . elaborate set of ceremonies” (p. 103). Other scholars have made similar observations, identifying the routines, rituals, and artifacts that make up a school culture and keep it stable and persistent (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Sarason, 1982; Swidler, 1979). These scholars have argued that school culture retains its form and function across regional, geographic, and even national boundaries enduring over time and space.

In the same way, Sergiovanni views community as a tightly webbed unit, linking members together with shared ideas and ideals. “The culture of a school arises from a network of shared ideologies, coherent sets of beliefs that tie people together and that explain their work to them in terms of cause and effect relationships” (Trice & Beyer, 1984, as paraphrased by Sergiovanni, 1994a, p. 72). He identifies cultural connections with gemeinschaft as different from rational connections and self-interest, which are associated with gesellschaft (Sergiovanni, 1994a, p. 57). One could analogize that culture is to community as what rationality is to organization, where the former (culture/community) is more appropriate than the latter (rationality/organization) in understanding what schools are and how they function.

But the notion of school culture as shared, unified, and collective, proposed by Waller and echoed by Sergiovanni, has been questioned by scholars who hold different perspectives on organizational culture (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1991;
Martin, 1992; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Meyerson and Martin (1987) suggest that there are two other perspectives besides the collective one, which offer equally valid interpretations of cultural symbols. Even with school culture as a more useful way of discussing schools, there are alternative viewpoints within organizational culture from which to understand the phenomenon.

**SERGIOVANNI'S METAPHOR EXTENDED**

In extending Sergiovanni’s metaphor and addressing its critique, a revised metaphor for schools must do the following:

First, it must account for both organizational and cultural aspects of schools. Second, it must acknowledge the complexity of social relationships in schools, including subgroups within the organization as well as those beyond the school boundaries. Third, it should provide a realistic analog for understanding how schools work, not merely describing what schools are.

On the basis of theoretical grounding in organizational culture, I offer as a revision the concept of schools as nested communities. Consider that a school might be viewed as a community of students, age graded in designated classes. It might alternatively be viewed as a teachers’ union local unit, affiliated with the state and national teachers’ organization. Or it could serve as a community facility with swimming pool and gym for area residents as well as students. Or a school could operate as an educational facility serving those under 18 years of age during the day and older adults in the evening. Each of these views of a school suggests its purpose, function, order, and organization that reflect different memberships and social relationships. A metaphor of nested communities acknowledges these varied groupings existing under the rubric called “school.”

In the next section of this article, I apply the metaphor of schools as nested communities to a case study of a multiethnic urban high school, Rivera High, struggling with attendance and truancy problems. For this discussion, I will focus on how school members at Rivera define the rules of attendance and solve problems on the basis of their interpretations of rules, roles, and actions. My aim is
to highlight the varied communities within Rivera where some culture is shared but much is conflicted in dealing with attendance problems at the school.

The discussion will be organized by first considering what Sergiovanni identifies as gemeinschaft (community) aspects that are nurturing and natural ways of relating among members. What are the shared ideas and ideals that Rivera holds about attendance and truancy? How do these sharings bind the school members together? How do shared understandings form a collective, cohesive culture? Next, I suggest how gesellschaft (society) aspects might be useful in understanding what is occurring in Rivera. These aspects represent the more institutional and bureaucratic constraints that conflict with gemeinschaft ways of behaving. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate that both communal and societal relationships need to be considered for a complete view of how the school operates and how school members form and negotiate meanings. Last, I discuss how social relationships are viewed in the extended metaphor and contrast this with Sergiovanni’s metaphor. I argue that schools as nested communities provide a more robust theoretical model for considering what schools are and how they operate.

**SHARED IDEAS AND IDEALS—GEMEINSCHAFT**

Segiovanni’s metaphor emphasizes the school’s “collective culture” where individuals share values and understanding, promote socialization activities, and thus reinforce the school as a whole. “The bonding together of people in special ways and the binding of them to shared values and ideas are characteristics of schools as communities” (Sergiovanni, 1994a, p. 4).

One shared value among the members of Rivera High School was caregiving. In the attendance office, this value was exemplified in the administrator’s title, “Dean of Students,” and her philosophy of placing “kids as priority” over paperwork. The dean believed in maintaining an office where “we listen to youngsters” (AOA1126) and in responding to student needs by creating alternatives for them, by increasing the comfort level in the office, and by building
trust between students and staff. Of less importance were the paperwork and bureaucratic duties of attendance.

Her office staff of mostly parent volunteers functioned as caregivers by attempting to identify and provide for student needs in a timely and appropriate manner (AOB1003-4, AOB1017-1, AO0204-3, AO0310-2). Staff members frequently expressed their concern over why students did not attend certain classes. In some cases, nonattendance related to scheduling problems where a student was enrolled in a class inappropriate to her or his ability or interest. Staff members might remedy the scheduling difficulty by directing the student to a counselor. If students were tardy to school because they lived a considerable distance from Rivera, the staff provided them with free city bus passes. Oriented toward caregiving, the staff considered that those students tardy or truant were to be accommodated, not punished, by the school system.

Individually, many teachers spoke of their role as caregivers where one's personal relationship with a student affected that student's education. A teacher described how he relates one-on-one to his students from his personal background. "I'm a product of the public school system. I grew up here. I know the law of the streets" (ACF1009-5). Sharing his own life experiences, according to the teacher, makes a difference because his life story is similar to those of his students.

Some faculty and staff lived in the neighborhood and knew the students' families, often having taught their parents at Rivera as well. This familiarity meant that teachers would eventually catch up with truants. As one teacher said, "I know you. Why did you run away? I'll catch up with you" (A0312-1).

Those teachers who use their own strategies to tackle attendance problems were viewed as "caring" by the dean of students. They were, in her estimation, "professional teachers" who "kids could identify that they cared" (AOA0610). Teaching strategies employed to deal with attendance problems included offering student incentives (ADE0331, OTF0415), designating the truant by an identifier such as "Hallwalker" or "Skipper" (OTF0511), adding special activities such as pizza days or free time as incentives (CC1211, OTC0312, AO0414-2, ACCG0506).
An ethic of caring highlights the personal nature of relationships at Rivera, between students and teachers, students and administrators, teachers and administrators. Of lesser importance are the rules and regulations that govern the institution. According to the principal, you cannot counter mistreatment by instituting policies and rules; you must create alternatives and act professionally out of a sense of caring (PR0115). Rather than emphasize rules and regulations, the intention to be caring allows for greater accommodation of individual student needs, with the responsibility placed on those faculty and staff more closely in touch with students.

As much as caring is valued at Rivera from the administrators to faculty and staff, school members expressed their confusion and frustration over attendance matters. With the commonly shared value of caring, why was there such frustration within the organization? To answer this question, an examination of the institutional and bureaucratic constraints is useful.

**INSTITUTIONAL AND BUREAUCRATIC CONSTRAINTS—GESellschaft**

The construct of gesellschaft (society) values logic, rationality, and order. It emphasizes the structure of the organization, relating individuals formally by their positions in the hierarchy rather than informally. It fosters competition over cooperation and encourages meritocracy with rewards of status and legitimacy. Sergiovanni contends that these characteristics undergird how we think about schools.

I concur and suggest that it would be useful to consider these aspects as institutional and bureaucratic constraints placed on the organization’s members. To illustrate, I return to the question of how school members deal with truants. Rivera members recognize their specific roles and responsibilities as students, teachers, administrators, and staff. These roles have specific expectations, for example, students to attend class, teachers to ticket violators, attendance staff and administrator to report accordingly and act appropriately. When these expectations are not met, members express frustration with the school and with each other. For exam-
ple, students would frequently comment about those teachers who did not ticket for absence.

When you walk the halls, the teachers never ask you for a pass or anything. (STU0325-3)

One of my classes, I won’t say which, I was tardy three times and [the teacher] didn’t even write me one ticket. (STU0402A-3)

Some teachers are lenient. They just let you go. They don’t really care about it. (STU0402A-3)

Similarly, teachers were frustrated over lack of action on the part of the administration when truants were ticketed.

After writing 4 or 5 tickets with no response, then there’s no point. (OTJ0511)

There’s too much bookkeeping and the teachers are frustrated. Last year there were so many tickets that the Attendance Office was swamped so by November they said that they were and I stopped writing tickets. I don’t feel like I have been filling out tickets for the files. (ACE0926)

In charge of the attendance office and its actions, the dean of students frequently expressed frustration over the handling of student absenteeism, the low morale among the teachers, and the punitive tone expressed by the attendance committee in revising the school policy. Her perspective was that “teachers used attendance as a reason when discipline becomes a problem” (AOA1031-2), suggesting that those who could not manage their classrooms ticketed students more readily.

But strictly speaking, the dean’s charge was to officially implement the district’s attendance policy and ensure consistent action toward truants (Enomoto, 1993, p. 66). Her staff had specific duties, namely, issuing disciplinary actions on students; notifying parents, teachers, counselors, and other administrators of persistent absenteeism and truancy; and maintaining school as well as central office records on student attendance. All of these duties were part of the office’s responsibility to the school and its administrative function within the district system.
To negotiate the dichotomy between these official duties and the ethic of caring, the dean did several things. First, she was frequently absent from the attendance office, leaving the decisions of detention and prosecution unattended. Often staff members acted on her behalf and as they were mostly parent volunteers, they did not suffer ramifications if their actions were deemed inappropriate. Second, the dean acknowledged teachers who were able to handle their own attendance and thereby not bother her office with any truancy detentions or punishments. Third, she frequently criticized the counselors for not being more responsive to student needs. In these ways, the dean reconciled her formal role and function at least to a certain degree.

By using a gesellschaft perspective, one can examine what is formalized and legitimated within the organization, taking into account the rules, roles, and responsibilities of the membership as well as their personal relationships. Considering both formal and informal relationships in the school provides a more complete picture of how the school operates and how school members define and interpret their circumstances.

MULTIPLE CULTURES AND NESTED COMMUNITIES

In searching for a robust model to understand schools, it is necessary to account for the multifaceted complexity of social relationships that exist within the organization. Like traditional models of organizational culture (Louis, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1992), Sergiovanni’s metaphor views the school as a single unit. School members are taken as a collective with “rituals, climate, values and behavior bound together into a coherent whole” (Schein, 1992, p. 10). But this collective culture perspective fails to account for varied subgroupings present within the whole. Scholars like Bates (1987), Frost et al. (1991), and Martin (1992) note that an organization can be viewed as differentiated by subgroupings and that organizational culture means including subcultures that might reify or might oppose the dominant whole.

Consider the school as consisting of many varied members grouped by function (e.g., student as opposed to teacher, adminis-
ordinator differentiated from faculty and staff, teacher within the classroom contrasted with teacher on hall or cafeteria monitoring duty). Members are also grouped by race (e.g., African Americans, European Americans), ethnicity (e.g., Cubans contrasted with Mexicans), gender (female students and staff as opposed to male students and staff), immigrant status (e.g., recent Mexican immigrants contrasted with Mexican Americans from the Southwest), and so on. Concurrently, there are subcultures within the school (e.g., the math department, the girls’ athletics program, and the high school Reserve Officers’ Training Corps [ROTC]) as well as outside the school building (e.g., the local teachers’ union, the Catholic Social Services agency, and the Native American Association).

All of these subcultural groups influence what occurs in the school organization. For example, at Rivera, different departments managed their own attendance monitoring and reporting. The bilingual teachers did not ticket truants and chose to handle their own attendance matters (AO0310-3). The same was true for the science department (AO0411-4). By contrast, the math teachers followed the rules and regularly submitted tickets, phone notification cards, and attendance scan sheets (AO0411-4). In other departments like Social Studies and Business Education, attendance matters were often handled by individual teachers within their respective classrooms.

Even within subcultures, there are contradictions and inconsistencies that occur among group members. One way to explain this is that members in subcultures have different experiences. For instance, a classroom teacher might be a member of one subculture (e.g., the math department) and serve as a hall monitor. As a result of this experience, this teacher might act in a more disciplinary manner to students who are truant. This action may or may not conform to the teacher’s personal preferences. He or she might personally favor a counseling style of remediation for attendance violations but be expected to act differently because of hall monitor duties. Moreover, individuals could be members of one or more overlapping, possibly nested subcultures. Our hall monitor teacher might also be a union representative, an after-school softball coach, and a Latina from Costa Rica. Any one or all of these associated
memberships in organizational subcultures might cause the teacher to respond differently to truants whom he or she encounters.

With overlapping and nested subcultures within an organization, is a collective culture even possible? Meyerson and Martin (1987) suggest that cultural groupings are not fixed. Rather, members of the organization align around certain issues, sharing some viewpoints at times and disagreeing at other times depending on the issues. For instance, the resolution of Rivera's attendance problem by instituting a stricter discipline policy was advocated by an alliance of certain individuals, which included teachers from all departments and especially those who believed that Rivera needed to do something collectively about attendance. Those who were most vocal felt that the administration was not supporting teacher actions to ticket. Another school issue might unify a slightly different group of individuals either supporting or opposing proposed policies and administrative actions.

Meyerson and Martin posit that there are shared networks within the organization and these are subject to change depending on the problems, issues, and players who choose to be involved. There is greater fluidity and inconsistency in the school's cultural groupings. This proposition contrasts with that of the collective culture assumption that there is schoolwide consensus, consistent actions, and clarity of shared values.7

According to the proposition, a school is not whole or unified but fractured and fragmented in semipermanent groupings. At the school level, Rivera members adhere to an institutional notion of public schools, valuing compulsory attendance and punishing truancy. Members are sincere in seeking to maintain policies, record absences, and dutifully punish truants. Within the organization, subcultural groups may support or negate general school norms of dealing with attendance and truancy. Moreover, although there are identifiable predominant subgroups—namely, that of student, teacher, and administrator within the school—these are confounded by overlapping and nested subgroupings. An example of an overlap among these three subgroups is the attendance office, where there is an administrator in charge, two parent volunteers on regular staff, several teachers on duty, and student monitors serving during
different periods. The office cuts across all three major subgroups, and members must perform the necessary tasks to handle attendance regardless of their major subgroup affiliation. These overlapping and nested subgroupings make for considerable ambiguity and inconsistency within any school.

Schools are as complex and dynamic as the cultures that are produced by them. Although school culture may be construed as collectively shared and enduring over time and space, it can also be construed as perpetually mediated and negotiated by the individual members. Individuals are actively defining and redefining their relationships to each other within schools, thus producing and reproducing multiple, nested, and overlapping cultures. According to Levinson (1992), members—specifically students within schools—are creating meaning for themselves in relating to teachers and parents. Actively engaged, students are “neither passive recipients of cultural transmission nor standard bearers of class, race, or gender ideologies. Importantly, these student cultures do not merely ‘reproduce’ the class, race, or gender dynamics that initially may have informed their production” (Levinson, 1992, p. 215).

SCHOOLS AS NESTED COMMUNITIES

The metaphor of schools as nested communities draws on both gemeinschaft and gesellschaft. Shared ideas and ideals are acknowledged within the organization but so are institutional and bureaucratic constraints that might result in contradictions in policy and practice. The metaphor advances the notion that multiple, overlapping, and nested cultures exist dynamically within a school organization. Ultimately, an organizational culture is individually interpreted and mediated by its members, and perhaps is more fragmented than whole.

The aim of extending Sergiovanni’s school as community is to draw from recent organizational-culture theories as proposed by Meyerson and Martin (1987), to conceptualize the interconnected and mediated relationships present within schools (Levinson, 1992),
and to achieve a caring community while recognizing the limitations present in schools. Ideally, it would be advantageous to consider schools as communities, "socially organized around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them" (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 217). Realistically, not all schools are nurturing and bonding social organizations. Furthermore, the meanings of school, of social network, of relationship, and of commitment are subject to interpretation and redefinition by the membership.

I believe Sergiovanni (1994b) is right to call for building community and "to create a theory and practice of educational administration more in tune with meaning and significance, and the shared values and ideas that connect people differently" (p. 218). However, the process of building community needs to incorporate members' understandings, interpretations, and actions because school values might not be commonly shared. Also, policies and practices might be at odds, and much is subject to negotiation within the nested communities of a school.

NOTES

1. For an elaboration of Sergiovanni's argument on changing the metaphor for school from organization to community, see Sergiovanni (1994a).
2. Tonnies (1887/1957) categorized the shifting values experienced as a society changed from nomadic to agrarian and later to industrial. He described these changes in a shift from gemeinschaft (community values and social relationships) to gesellschaft (contractual values and secular, negotiated relationships). See Sergiovanni (1994a, pp. 5-14) for further discussion.
3. Extending this distinction further, Sergiovanni (1994a) suggests applying Talcott Parsons's pairs of variables to create a school inventory and thereby assess whether a school is oriented toward gemeinschaft or gesellschaft (see chapter 2, pp. 15-33).
4. These are questions that Parsons's pattern of variables would suggest in a school inventory.
5. Rivera High is a pseudonym for a midwestern high school located in a metropolitan area, serving a multietnic student population of approximately one third Hispanic, African American, and White. School size is about 1,200 students in Grades 9 through 12. Refer to Enomoto (1993) for details of the case study and research methodology.
6. This citation designates the individual and/or field notes.
7. See Martin (1992) for a detailed description of this organizational-culture perspective in contrast with that of collective culture.
REFERENCES


