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Synthesis Chapter 5: Purposeful Community
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P-u-r-p-o-s-e-ful - *Full of Purpose*. In defining this word, Merriam-Webster dictionary lists synonyms like *resolute, hell-bent and intent* as primary descriptors. A best-selling book by Rick Warren had this word as the central theme: [The Purposeful Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?](#) The word itself strikes a chord of resounding meaning, and even its origins that date to mid-1500, describe root derivations in a Latin law term that pertains to “putting forward for consideration”.

Sergiovanni suggests in chapter 5 of his book, *Building Community in Schools*, that in order for a school to become any kind of community, *gemeinschaft*, professional, learning or otherwise, it must first become a *purposeful* one. So then, to synthesize word-definitions and Sergiovanni’s assertions, one might say a school must become “hell-bent on a shared ideology” in order to become a purposeful community. Those are strong words, but Sergiovanni’s point is clear: a purposeful community is one “that bonds them together in special ways and binds them to a shared ideology.” (p. 72). Easier said than done, I would propose, in world where double-edged swords perpetuate the “policy paradox” (Stone, 2002).

In this chapter, Sergiovanni cites Newton Public Schools as place in which this ideology is embraced through the establishment of core values. The core values helped to create the school’s structure, the policies, goals, and helped guide decision making. Apparently it was very successful, however upon a little digging; I discovered that this was also at a time when there was sustained leadership. I would assert that having a superintendent steering the ship for 10 years also had an impact.

Sergiovanni discussed the resemblance of designing out from values with outcomes-based education (OBE) in which the outcomes are a student's exit competencies. The caution though is preventing a "funnel" model in which discretion is narrowed as the process is implemented. With OBE the approach may be viewed as entirely achieving the outcomes, no matter how it is done.

The Coalition of Essential Schools is presented by Sergiovanni as another approach to establishing the community through core values, with only a "hint" of exit outcomes. In this case, "clustering" is a means to begin the process of determining a design out from the established values of the community. The Coalition had a deep commitment to professional autonomy and Sergiovanni outlined examples of Central Park East Secondary School of what was necessary to change the school's structure.

Sergiovanni also presents a worthy approach to developing a purposeful community as expeditionary learning, an outgrowth of a call for designing "New American Schools." This is another "out from core values" approach. This metaphor, "expeditionary learning" includes the range of intelligences and relationships that are important to making learning important and relevant. In this approach students go out on a learning trip and return with an ability to demonstrate what they have learned.

Purpose-ful. Full of purpose...like the way our lives should be. Do I need an "approach" to adopt for that? Sergiovanni and theorists in his *camp* are certainly on-point with core values being central to purposeful communities. Now how to agree upon core values... there's the rub!

References

Sergiovanni, Thomas. *Building Community in Schools*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1994.

Stone, Deborah. *Policy Paradox; The Art of Political Decision-Making*. Revised Edition. W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 2002.