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Online Learning Communities: Connecting with Success

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.01 **Online Learning Communities: Connecting with Success** (return to index)

According to one online learner, "the biggest void in this or any online program is the lack of a sense of community and the social aspect of attending class." Another student put it this way: "is anyone out there? ... sometimes it's hard to connect with other students in a meaningful way... by the time we get to know each other the semester is over." Still another student remarked, "...instead of a number, I'm a screen name...that can be depressing at times...I just don't know how to connect or to be part of the class." Many educators would agree that time and effort expended in the task of building community is time and effort well spent, regardless of whether the students are meeting face-to-face (F2F) or in the virtual environment of cyberspace. It is widely accepted that community-building activities result in cognitive and affective interactions that enhance the learning experience and contribute to lower attrition rates. Perhaps most importantly, community nurtures the kind of relationships that makes learning meaningful and significant. After all, learning divorced from human relationships is at best sterile, and at worst inhumane.

With the growth of online courses and computer-mediated distance education, administrators and faculty are asking tough questions about online students' need for social interaction and belonging. The questions are based on an assumption that an increased sense of interpersonal intimacy and community, facilitated through multiple modes of online and offline communication tools, will result in significant gains in student motivation, performance, personal growth, inclusiveness, and satisfaction with the overall online learning experience. In contrast, failure to address the relational concerns just noted may result in poor student performance, greater feelings of isolation, and subsequent withdrawal from online courses (Rovai, 2002; LaRose & Whitten, 2000; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Wegerif, 1998).

With consideration to the aforementioned issues, I will examine the origin and interaction of the concepts of communication and community from a media determinism and media ecology perspective. I'll also review pertinent literature that suggests how we might create a climate in the online classroom in which community is valued, nourished and sustained. In light of the "sense of community" factors identified by McMillan and Chavis (1986), I'll suggest some practices for community building using computer-mediated communication. This paper will employ a combination of historical research and personal observation of the community building process in an effort to address what I believe are some of the key issues surrounding the challenge of building community in an online educational environment, but will not address the larger issue concerning the overall move towards online education and the substitution of online for F2F interaction.

.02 **Communication and Community** (return to index)

Before we explore the nature of online community, consider with me the relationship between communication and community. The etymology of the words indicates a common ancestry. According to Czitrom (1982), community is derived from the Latin *communis*: "cum," which means "with" or "together with," and "unio," which means unity, or coming together. The word "communication" shares the same Latin root, which suggests common participation or "to make

things common" (p. 10). According to Granfield (1994), "communication" comes from the Latin communicare (a different Latin root than Czitrom uses), which itself is often translated "community" or "communion" (p. 3). *Communicare* has several meanings: "to share, to make common, to transmit, to inform, to unite, to impart" (p. 3). It is no wonder then that the word "community" is used to describe a broad array of relationships, including online relationships, where individuals share information. [1] This confusion has led some to conclude that as long as there is sharing, transmitting, informing, or imparting of some kind, "community" is present. For example, Unsworth (1996) defined community as "a function of shared location, shared interests, and sometimes shared government and shared property: in order to deserve the name, a community needs more than one, though not necessarily all, of those attributes" (n.p.). However, as Jones (1995) argued, connection (or association) alone—as characterized by the imparting, transmitting, and exchanging of information—does not create community (p. 12).

.03 **What Creates a Sense of Community?** (return to index)

To understand the nature of online community we must consider the psychological dimensions that people experience as "community" regardless of the context in which it is experienced. McMillan and Chavis (1986) identified four factors that are essential to a sense of community; membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. According to McMillan, "Sense of Community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (quoted in McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Scholars from other disciplines have offered different terms to describe similar constructs. Rovai (2002) summarized the most essential elements of community to be: "mutual interdependence among members, sense of belonging, connectedness, spirit, trust, interactivity, common expectations, shared values and goals, and overlapping histories among members." Because definitions are context specific, Rovai further defined classroom (real or virtual) community using the following dimensions: "spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals, in this case, learning" (p. 4).

.04 **Defining Online Community** (return to index)

Rather than attempt to arrive at a one-size-fits-all definition of online community, this paper will build on the foundations established by Howard Rheingold, Jenny Preece, Barry Wellman, Rena Paloff & Keith Pratt, and other scholars who have researched and published extensively on the topic. And while much of the research to date has been anecdotal, there does appear to be increasing interest in scholarly research examining both the theoretical foundations of community building as a sociological phenomenon, and the role of communication theory for explanation of online interpersonal interaction.

According to Howard Rheingold, "the existence of computer-linked communities was predicted twenty-five years ago by J. C. R. Licklider and Robert Taylor, research directors for the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA)." Licklider and Taylor are

quoted by Rheingold as having said, "in most fields [communities] will consist of geographically separated members, sometimes grouped in small clusters and sometimes working individually. They will be communities not of common location, but of common interest… " (1993, p. 24). According to Rheingold, "Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (1993, introduction). Later Rheingold wrote, "New communication media means that new social phenomena are going to arise that differ in significant ways from everything we've known. We are going to have to get used to the idea that the word 'community' is going to have to stretch to include groups of people who communicate socially and work together cooperatively and never meet in the real world" (Which Part is Virtual, Which Part is Community, 1995). Preese (2000) defined online community as a group of individuals interacting via computer technology following a set of conventions governed by norms and policies.

We often differentiate between face-to-face (F2F) and online or "computer-mediated" communication by evaluating the quality of the interaction. People meet F2F in "meatspace" and online in "cyberspace." [2] Unfortunately we're often too eager to assume that one or the other is better, richer, and more satisfying than the other. There is a wealth of research that suggests that mediated communication can actually facilitate a deeper level of communication that F2F, especially for certain tasks and specific personality types (e.g., Walther, 1996; Walther, Anderson & Park, 1994; Walther & Burgoon, 1992). Higher bandwidth connections and more sophisticated input/output devices promise to expand the richness of mediated communication and blur the distinction between the F2F and online experience. Video, voice, and data can be used to connect participants in distant locals, and High Definition, 3-D, Virtual Reality (VR) environments promise even more realistic representations of human-to-human interaction. However, despite the advances in audio and video streaming, online learning remains primarily a textual exchange between time-independent/place-independent learners.

.05 **Online community in an educational context** (return to index)

Another important distinction is the context that defines a specific community and the unique way that the community defines goals and objectives. Variously known as online learning communities (OLCs), asynchronous learning networks (ALNs), and computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL), a common thread is the use of asynchronous, text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) to support teaching and learning. [3] In order to fully understand the issues, the specific nature of online educational communities must be understood in light of the properties that make educational communities unique, e.g., what makes online educational communities different from online professional, social, and recreational communities?

Some of the obvious differences of educational communities are; members share a specific purpose, which is to gain knowledge, understanding, enrichment, certification, etc. Depending on the type of institution and program, the online class may be very homogenous in terms of age, income level, and other psychographics. The increase in non-traditional students, especially

in online courses, is mitigating this factor somewhat. Unlike many groups or communities, membership in online educational communities may be less than voluntary. That is, the course may be required for the major and therefore membership in this community is mandated by earlier choices. And while many groups or communities are egalitarian, the leader of this community (the instructor) is clearly in a position of authority and power. And while class members may also be members of a cohort, the relatively short duration of any single course (typically 12-16 weeks) makes community construction problematic. This community has a technological requirement for entry that may be more than simple computer literacy. Course Management Software (e.g., Blackboard or WebCT) is frequently used to facilitate online interaction but requires some level of proficiency by both students and instructors. [4] Other online courses may elect to use standard CMC applications e.g. email, chat, listserv, bulletin board, and IM. And finally, participants in this community usually do not have a choice of whether or not they will contribute. Expectations for quantity and quality of contributions marginalizes lurking and limits opportunity for anonymity

While an educational online community is an artificial construct with many exceptions to other types of online communities, it is worth noting that people bring their personal expectations from their experiences in other types of online communities. For example, if tomorrow's students become familiar with anonymous or pseudonymous communication in their recreational online communities, they may be uncomfortable with expectations requiring transparency and accountability. Likewise, a person who has developed a relaxed personal communication style that eschews formal thinking and writing in favor of brevity, cleverness and/or stream-of-consciousness ramblings may feel restrained by an instructor's stated expectations for organized, thoughtful, contributions that are also graded for language mechanics. So while educational online communities are unique, participants will likely bring with them a wide range of experiences in other types of online communities. These learned behaviors will need to be accounted for in order to maximize participants' experiences.

.06 **Media determinism** (return to index)

According to proponents of media determinism, media are not merely neutral carriers of information. Media systems and technologies contain inherent biases that profoundly influence their content and rearrange patterns of human association. Because of the interrelationship between community and communication, a brief review of the recent history of interpersonal communication technology may be helpful to understand that this is not a new phenomenon or discussion. And it is interesting to note that nearly every introduction of new communication technology has affected our understanding and practice of "community." [5]

The idea that community can be achieved without face-to-face interaction is at least as old as electronic communication. The telegraph had barely made it appearance before pronouncements were being made of its potential to transform society through the transmission of information and the interconnection of distant communicators. The telegraph ushered in a shift from transportation to transmission model of communication. These "lightening lines" as they

were called summoned the miraculous nature of electronic communication. Czitrom cited the use of scripture by early proponents—specifically Job 38:35, "Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go and say unto thee, Here we are?"—to emphasize their "divine" connection (1982, p. 9). Suddenly the modern world was confronted with the annihilation of time and space and the promise of universal peace and harmony (p. 10). For many, universal communication promised community. But not everyone was so confident that this new technology would deliver on its promise. Thoreau (1854) called the telegraph a distraction from serious things and an, "improved means to an unimproved end." He went on to question whether Maine had anything to say to Texas (p. 67). Thus, despite our reported "Global Village sense of belonging" made possible by electronic interconnection, our collective sense seems to be that community is diminishing rather than increasing. This is consistent with the isolation and psychological/social detachments associated with communities formed by writing and later print.

Media and education critic Neil Postman argues that there have been three traumatic conflicts in western education: 5th century BC Greece in switch from oral or written culture; 16th century Europe when the printing press revolutionized mass production of knowledge; and the end of the 20th century when the electronic revolution (primarily TV) has changed the media landscape. Postman quoted Harold Innis, and his work *A Plea for Time*, who argued, "the speed, range, and impersonality of modern media undermine the oral tradition and therefore weaken the possibility of a nourishing community life" (Postman, 1988, p. xiv). Innis's theory of communication divided media into two "biases": time-binding media and space-binding media. Time-binding media such as manuscripts and oral communication have limited distribution potential. According to Innis, modern western history began with temporal organization and ended with spatial organization. Communication scholar James Carey, writing about Innis' dichotomy of media wrote that time-binding media "favored relatively close communities, metaphysical speculation, and traditional authority" while space-binding media such as print and electronic media are concerned with expansion and control, favoring, "the establishment of commercialism, empire and eventually technocracy" (1992, p. 134). Carey wrote, "It is the history of the evaporation of an oral and manuscript tradition and the concerns of community, morals, and metaphysics and their replacement by print and electronics supporting a bias towards space" (p. 160).

Walter Ong's contribution to the discussion of orality, literacy, and community in 1982 predates the explosion of computer-mediated communication. But that has not stopped communication theorists and pundits from applying Ong's notion of "secondary orality" to CMC. According to Ong, the printing press and the growth of literacy moved us away from orality and the intimacy of oral culture. More recently the electronic media have introduced a revival of sorts of oral culture and tradition. However, the computer and its emphasis of textual communication would appear to stand in contrast to the spoken word featured in the electronic broadcast media. The expanding integration of audio/visual technologies with computer technology may make this a moot point however, as more and more computer-mediated communication moves away from text and towards sound and image.

Another media theorist and contemporary of Ong was Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan believed

that the print revolution begun by Gutenberg was the forerunner of the industrial revolution. One unforeseen consequence of print was the fragmentation of society. McLuhan argued that readers would now read in private, and so be alienated from others. "Printing, a ditto device, confirmed and extended the new visual stress. It created the portable book, which men could read in privacy and in isolation from others" (McLuhan, 1967, p. 50). Interestingly, McLuhan saw electronic media as a return to collective ways of perceiving the world. His "global village" theory posited the ability of electronic media to unify and retribalize the human race. What McLuhan did not live to see was the merging of text and electronic mass media in this new medium called the Internet. While it remains too early to tell, it is likely that the growth of online education and the increase in mediated interpersonal communication will also have far-reaching implications (Ebersole, 2001).

.07 **Community Building in Online Education** (return to index)

Awareness of the inherent biases that media contribute to the communication process should inform our decisions about online community building. Which medium we choose to use, how we use it, and what kinds of content or processes are best served by our choices are vital issues to address when designing an online course and online communications. Given McMillan and Chavis's (1986) four factors essential to a sense of community; membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection, consider how CMC technologies and practices can be employed to create a sense of community for online learners.

.08 **Membership** (return to index)

According to McMillan and Chavis, membership includes a number of attributes including; creation of boundaries, safety, belonging, personal investment, and a common symbol system. In an online learning environment, boundaries and safety have both emotional as well as technical implications. For instance, membership in a class is a function of the enrollment procedure and the instructor's acknowledgement of a student's place on the roster gives the student immediate awareness of belonging. However, until classmates extend a welcome and engage that student in dialog he or she may continue to feel like an outsider. Wegerif (1998) found that students who viewed themselves as "outsiders" were less likely to stay engaged or to complete the course. Also, the threshold to move from an "outsider" to an "insider" was difficult to overcome for those who struggled as they navigated the social dimension of the online course.

Still another barrier to entry is the one presented by the technology itself. Imagine for a moment that your community is based on F2F interaction. Every week you meet together in a particular location for a specific purpose. Obviously it is important that the participants in this community are successful in their goal of arriving at the proper place and on time. But any number of problems can pose difficulties. Automobile problems of a technical nature, bad weather, or problems with the directions (navigation) can delay or prevent community from happening. Similarly, technical problems or usability issues can prevent online community, or at the very least make it less than satisfying. Online learners must be adequately prepared for the technical

requirements and must be provided an appropriate level of technical assistance.

Just as barriers must be overcome to gain entrance into a community, once inside those same barriers create a sense of safety. Safety is protection from outsiders (non-members of the group or course) who may have ill intentions. Because of the open nature of some web delivery systems, technical and social concerns such as spam, viruses, and offensive content must be prevented to the degree possible. At the same time the community itself must offer a safe and supportive environment. To this end a sense of safety can be promoted by encouraging practices understood as basic netiquette and discouraging online interaction that "breaks" the rules. The instructor must model this behavior and make extra effort to provide supportive and nurturing comments, especially early on in the semester. Creating small group projects can be most helpful, as is the practice of assigning discussion moderators (Leh, 2001).

Another way to encourage a sense of belonging is to promote "immediacy." Immediacy refers to the extent to which selected verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors enhance intimacy in interpersonal communication (Mehrabian, 1969) and "reduce perceived distance between people" (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1996, p. 198). Several studies demonstrate the power of instructor immediacy in creating a greater sense of classroom community among learners, e.g., McAlister's (2000) research into computer-mediated immediacy. LaRose and Whitten (2000) sought to create a model for web-based learning that incorporated not only teacher and student immediacy, but also computer immediacy. Within this social cognitive framework, they concluded that there are three possible sources of immediacy in web-based classrooms that may create feelings of closeness among participants:

(1) the interactions between teacher and students (teacher immediacy);
(2) interactions between students (student immediacy); and
(3) interactions with the computer system that delivers the course (computer immediacy).

Collectively, these sources constitute instructional immediacy (p. 336). Responding to email or threaded discussion in a timely manner is one way to be immediate. In one study, instructor immediacy in feedback was the strongest predictor of learning—both affective and cognitive learning—among students (Baker, 2000). In another study, "students felt that the lack of immediate feedback in the online portion of the course was discouraging and contributed to their limited participation in the online discussions" (Vrasidas & McIsaac, 1999, p. 33). Note that instructor immediacy in response to student communication may even be experienced "vicariously" as learners observe it while interacting with other students in group discussions.

Another way to reduce transactional distance and increase social presence is to create discussion areas for students to use for initial introductions and later for "non-subject-matter-specific" discussions (Woods & Ebersole, 2003a). One common application of this idea is the creation of a discussion board dedicated to initial introductions of course participants. Introductory postings provide opportunities for students to "present" themselves to their classmates and begin the process of getting to know each other. The instructor may choose to introduce a fun

exercise intended to draw out the less comfortable participants. Course management systems like Blackboard allow students to create a personal web page (no knowledge of HTML or web authoring is required) that is available to the instructor and other students, but only within the Blackboard system. One advantage of this is the opportunity for the student to upload a personal picture and create links to favorite web sites, thus expanding the range of personal information to be shared with the class.

Once introductions have been made, the instructor may choose to create additional spaces for student-to-student interaction. These discussion "folders," "rooms," or "forums" become gathering places where students can engage each other outside of the regular or required discussion assignments. The focus here is to provide a safe place for students to connect without having to feel like they are being evaluated. Some instructors give these "cyber cafes" fun names that suggest a place to focus on building a social network—not homework. Preliminary research suggests that "non-subject-matter-specific discussion boards" contribute to an online learner's sense of connectedness with other students and contributes to overall level of satisfaction with the course (Woods & Ebersole, 2003a). All communities need both public and private gathering places that enable members to extend their space. While these "gathering places" do not need to look like physical spaces one might encounter in face-to-face communication interaction (although this could surely not hurt), they should mimic "neighborhoods," or discussion areas that focus on a common topic.

.09 **Influence** (return to index)

The concept of influence and its role in community building is not as clear when applied to an online educational context. McMillan and Chavis assert that influence must be bi-directional, that is, the members must be empowered to exert influence over the group and the group must exert influence over individuals in order to maintain cohesion. The power imbalance that exists naturally in a teacher/student relationship suggests that members of this group will have, overall, less influence than the instructor. However, it is possible to design an online course to minimize this imbalance and so empower students to take ownership and responsibility for their online experience. It is well established that online learners desire both relational and personal interaction and a learning environment that welcomes alternative or opposing views (Blum, 1999). Instructors should therefore be careful to observe their "voice," and the "voice" of other students, to make sure that they don't shut down or silence opportunities for debate by eliminating alternative ways of viewing the issues at hand. Along the way, instructors must resist the desire to play "expert" or be perceived as the "final word" on any issue. Faculty must become comfortable with playing the part of "provocateur" instead of "academician" (Parker, 1999, p. 16), concentrating more on leading discussion and promoting collaborative learning and less on lectures and assessment (Young, 1997).

.10 **Integration and Fulfillment of Needs** (return to index)

The concept of perceived needs and the community's role in meeting them raises several

interesting issues for online education. There are certain needs that are intrinsic to the pursuit of education: knowledge, skill development, a passing grade, and, hopefully, a degree or certification to bestow the appropriate indication of mastery. Whenever I have a student who approaches me on the first day of class with an urgent "need" to get into a class that is already full, the explanation is nearly always the same—"I need it to graduate next year." In these cases they need two things: access into the course and a passing grade. Of course there are many other felt needs that may be addressed by the instructor. For example, the need for affirmation and support may be met by as simple a gesture as an encouraging personal email message.

.11 **Emotional Connection** (return to index)

According to McMillan and Chavis, emotional connection, "seems to be the definitive element for true community" (1986, p. 14). Rovai's dimension entitled "spirit" appears to be a good match in that it embodies, "friendship, cohesion, and bonding" (2002, p.4). Building an emotional connection requires the exchange of emotion-laden messages and this implies use of a "rich" communication channel, and conventional wisdom holds that mediated communication is more distant than F2F.

The "richness" of computer-mediated communication has been the subject of research since the mid 1970s. While F2F interaction implies a breadth of communication channels that promote communication intimacy, studies of the impact of CMC on interpersonal communication have revealed the potential for establishing and maintaining relationships with textual communication (Walther & Burgoon, 1992). Such richness in communication was the norm in primary oral culture. Media richness, or the "bandwidth" provided by "multiple communication channels" and a "life-like" interface contributes to perceived intimacy.

A meta-analysis by Walther, et. al. (1994) used social information processing theory to analyze the occurrence of impersonal and antisocial communication when CMC rather than face-to-face communication was employed. The asynchronous nature of CMC has also been considered as a variable affecting the communication process (Walther 1993; Walther & Burgoon 1992). Yet another study considered the power relations that develop between those using CMC (Spears & Lea 1994). To better understand the frequency and quality of online relationships, Parks and Floyd (1996) studied a random sample of contributors to 24 newsgroups. One hundred and seventy six respondents revealed that personal relationships were common.

Parks and Floyd (1996) summarized studies that contrast the media richness of CMC compared to face-to-face communication. The authors argue that reduced-cues may be compensated for by increased time, adapted textual cues, or by employing other means to increase perceived intimacy. Reid (1991) argued that, "without these textual cues to substitute for non-verbal language, the users of IRC would fail to constitute a community—with them, they do" (p. 10). The increased time required to achieve the desired level of understanding and/or intimacy can be perceived as a negative for students with many demands on their time. This problem was noted by Kindred (2000).

To increase the emotional content of CMC online communicators use emoticons, the graphic accents or textualized icons created by a series of standard keyboard characters combined to produce a picture (e.g., 😃). Thompsen and Foulger (1996) found that the use of emoticons reduced reader perception of anger (i.e., flaming) in email messages. Research has indicated that online communicants compensate for the lack of such nonverbal cues and physical presence by encoding verbal intimacy cues in the textual messages to convey affect (e.g., Gunawardena, 1994; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997).

Another way to connect with students and build social networks is to send personalized email outside of regular class time or required course discussion. Personalized email might be used to encourage a student who made a solid contribution in one of the required discussion forums. As an instructor I use personal email messages often. The messages are usually two to three sentences long and include general words of encouragement, caring or support. Personalized email may even be used to check up on someone who doesn't appear to be as active in discussion as others. One study demonstrated that sending as few as three personal emails throughout the semester can enhance students' sense of online community and overall satisfaction with the online learning experience (Woods, 2002).

Although it doesn't fit neatly into the four categories outlined above, there is yet another factor that should be considered when attempting to build community online. Early research seems to indicate that synchronous communication contributes to a sense of community. Leh (2001) found that students enrolled in hybrid courses expressed a strengthened "sense of belonging" when synchronous communication was used. Similarly Kindred (2000) found that students working on group projects often resorted to, "talking on the phone, using real-time chat, or meeting in person to work on projects" because of the feeling of isolation and the impersonal nature of asynchronous communication (n.p.). This researcher's personal experiences teaching a hybrid course appear to support Kindred's observations. When students were given a group project—with the option of using the group support features in Blackboard—they most often elected to meet F2F, even when busy schedules made these meetings difficult to schedule. Blackboard and other CMSs facilitate live chat and can be used by the instructor to offer "virtual office hours" for online students. Knowing that the instructor is available "on-call" at certain hours of the day can be comforting for students who may be feeling the stress of a looming deadline. From personal experience I know that email can sometimes serve a similar function if the servers and connections are functioning properly. On several occasions I've responded to a series of email messages in a short period of time, approximating the effect of Instant Messaging or chat. While I don't promise that kind of turn-around for student email messages, they are usually quite grateful when it happens.

Although this may seem simplistic or obvious to some, online instructors and students often overlook phone calls as a way to overcome the textual dominance of learning in cyberspace. It is surprising what a personal phone call can do to enhance a sense of connectedness. In one distance education study, off-campus students felt as though they learned more when their instructor used phone calls to express caring and provide specific feedback (Hackman & Walker,

1990).

.12 **Conclusion** (return to index)

As I was concluding my thoughts on this particular topic I received a Thanksgiving Day "presentation" from Steve Gilbert, president of the Teaching & Learning with Technology (TLT) Group and someone who has spent a lot of time thinking about the big ideas surrounding educational technology and, more recently, the role of community and connectedness in an educational setting. In his presentation, which included images and narration, Steve expressed his wish for education. His wish is that the increasing quality of digital simulations will increase the pressure on educators to take advantage of the unique characteristics of F2F interactions. Gilbert's observations, which can easily be applied to the increasing quality of online interactions and their ability to simulate the reality of F2F interactions, helps us to become more aware of how these experiences differ. Once we're aware of the differences, we'll be able to make better choices about when to connect online, and when to connect F2F. According to Gilbert, this should also serve to make us better trustees of F2F time—using it to its fullest potential. Too often we have asked students to come to a lecture hall at a specific time, only to (mis)use the opportunity to deliver content or instructions that could have been more efficiently distributed using a time and place independent channel. Or instead of creating interactive experiences between the instructor and the students, or students with each other, we (mis)used the opportunity by simply creating a one-way flow of information from the front of the room to the back. As more and more classes more towards a hybrid model, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of online and F2F methodologies allows us to gain efficiency while maximizing connectedness.

.13 **Notes** (return to index)

[1] Kirkpatrick (1986) cited a sociological study that found more than 90 definitions of community within the field of sociology alone (p. 1).

[2] For the origin of the word "meatspace," see http://www.wordspy.com/words/meatspace.asp

[3] Although online educational communities exist primarily in cyberspace, there is growing interest in "hybrid" classes that utilize a combination of F2F and online meetings to accomplish the course objectives. The inclusion of even nominal F2F interaction may have a dramatic effect on the dynamics of online communities.

[4] According to Preece, the "usability" of the software applications employed is an important contributor to the users' experience and greatly affects the quality of the online interaction.

[5] For a fascinating look at the Amish community and their resistance to the telephone see Diane Zimmerman Umble's, The Amish and the Telephone: Resistance and Reconstruction, (1992). Umble wrote, "Faith permeates every aspect of social practice and provides the context

in which social relationships are managed" (p. 185). It is in this context that telephone service, introduced to the Lancaster County area of Pennsylvania in 1879, was officially banned within the Amish community in 1909. "Contrary to the spirit of Gelassenheit", the telephone was seen as contributing to "individualism and pride" and was banned as something that conflicted with the harmonious and separatist traditions of the sect" (p. 189).

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15 THOUGHTS ON "ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES: CONNECTING WITH SUCCESS"

Renay Mcneme
on **February 2, 2014 at 10:15 AM** said:

Niet een moeilijk onderwerp als zodanig, maar dit is vrij complex en verwarrend. Ik ben blij dat je het hebt afgeschilderd zo mooi in je werk hier.

Modesto Maloon
on **February 2, 2014 at 1:39 PM** said:

Ich bin sehr gespannt auf Teil 2 dieses Blog

best carry on luggage
on **February 3, 2014 at 4:50 AM** said:

There's definately a great deal to find out about this topic.
I love all of the points you've made.

best table saw
on **February 3, 2014 at 7:25 PM** said:

Hi there, just became alert to your blog through Google, and found that it's really informative.
I am going to watch out for brussels. I will appreciate if you continue this in future.
A lot of people will be benefited from your writing.

Cheers!

infrared grill reviews
on **February 3, 2014 at 9:05 PM** said:

Great post. I was checking continuously this blog and
I'm impressed! Very useful info particularly
the last part 😃 I care for such information much.
I was seeking this certain info for a very long time. Thank you and good luck.

Libby Navaretta
on **February 3, 2014 at 9:52 PM** said:

Je suis sûr que beaucoup de gens seront d'accord avec cette pièce de travail. Je dirais
que c'est un très bon travail sur ce sujet.

best espresso machine
on **February 3, 2014 at 10:21 PM** said:

Remarkable! Its in fact amazing post, I have got much clear idea
regarding from this piece of writing.

Marybelle Suleiman
on **February 3, 2014 at 10:40 PM** said:

Ho avuto difficoltà a scegliere cosa dovrei mettere come commento a questo hub, non
ho potuto scegliere tra questo:

best vacuum for hardwood floors
on **February 4, 2014 at 12:55 AM** said:

Do you mind if I quote a couple of your posts as long as I provide credit
and sources back to your webpage? My website is in the exact same
niche as yours and my users would certainly benefit from a lot of the information you
present here.
Please let me know if this okay with you. Thanks a lot!

best garment steamer
on **February 4, 2014 at 2:12 AM** said:

This post is priceless. How can I find out more?

best induction cooktop
on **February 4, 2014 at 2:17 AM** said:

I all the time used to read paragraph in news papers but now as I
am a user of net so from now I am using net for content, thanks
to web.

best home gym
on **February 4, 2014 at 2:34 AM** said:

I constantly spent my half an hour to read this weblog's articles all the time along with a
mug of
coffee.

best crossfit shoes
on **February 4, 2014 at 5:30 AM** said:

Today, I went to the beach front with my kids. I found a sea shell and gave

it to my 4 year old daughter and said "You can hear the ocean if you put this to your

ear." She put the shell to her ear and

screamed. There was a hermit crab inside and it pinched her

ear. She never wants to go back! LoL I know this is totally off topic but

I had to tell someone!

best recumbent exercise bike
on **February 4, 2014 at 9:58 AM** said:

It's very trouble-free to find out any topic on net as compared to

textbooks, as I found this article at this site.

best garbage disposal
on **February 4, 2014 at 9:56 PM** said:

Unquestionably believe that which you said.

Your favorite justification appeared to be on the web the easiest

thing to be aware of. I say to you, I definitely get annoyed while people think about worries that they

plainly do not know about. You managed to hit the nail upon the

top and also defined out the whole thing

without having side-effects , people can take a signal.

Will likely be back to get more. Thanks