

Community, Connectedness, ... Related to Teaching, Learning, and Technology?

Introduction to Hallowell's essay on "Connectedness"

How can we re-build our world to enable more people to live their lives under conditions of trust and safety -- conditions where each of us can be part of meaningful communities, where we can be connected in ways that matter? How can our efforts to improve teaching and learning with technology contribute?

Let me offer one short quote and a chapter from a book on related matters.

Robert D. Putnam in the *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 6, Number 1, January, 1995, pages 65-78, says on page 76 of his article "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital":

"What will be the impact, for example, of electronic networks on social capital? My hunch is that meeting in an electronic forum is not the equivalent of meeting in a bowling alley -- or even in a saloon -- but hard empirical research is needed. What about the development of social capital in the workplace? Is it growing in counterpoint to the decline of civic engagement, reflecting some social analogue of the first law of thermodynamics -- social capital is neither created nor destroyed, merely redistributed? Or do the trends described in this essay represent a deadweight loss?"

Edward Hallowell, in the chapter that follows below, looks at 6 kinds of "Connectedness" that may also help our exploration of "Building Community Online and On Campus":

1. Familial connectedness
2. Historical connectedness
3. Social connectedness
4. Institutional/Organizational connectedness
5. Connectedness to information and ideas
6. Religious/Transcendent connectedness

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“Connectedness”¹

by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold.
The best lack all conviction
While the worst are full of passionate intensity.

When William Butler Yeats wrote those lines over a half a century ago, he might have been describing the feelings that many people have in the 1990s as they look around and try to get their bearings. We live in a time of remarkable connectedness on the one hand. Globally, we are joined by fax machines, telephones, computers, supersonic transport, and all manner of electronic communication such that we are only seconds away from the other side of the planet. Yet, paradoxically, locally, at our home base, in our home town, we are in many ways separated, disconnected, even isolated. The connections that sustain and uplift, the connections that make life buoyant have, for many people, come unplugged.

The topic of this essay, human connectedness, is a simple idea, rich in its ramifications. Let me suggest these ramifications through image and anecdote by painting a few scenes at the onset.

I was in the post office the other day in my hometown of Cambridge. It was just before Christmas. Everyone was bustling about under the slate gray skies that so often portend snow at that time of year. There were even a few flakes, I think. A Christmas carol could be heard from a Salvation Army street corner band while worried shoppers tried to balance Christmas generosity with hard economic times. I hit the P. O. Box about 3:30 and, much to my surprise, it was all but empty. A small miracle that wouldn't last but a minute or two. I handed my packages to the elderly postman behind the counter and watched as he weighed my bundles. I didn't say anything except, "First class?" I nodded. He weighed. I waited. He stamped, thump, thump, on each package.

I flashed back for a moment - how brains can reproduce an entire scene from decades ago faster than a fax machine - I flashed back to when I was four, holding onto my grandmother's ink-blue overcoat as she handed packages across the counter at Christmas, and I asked her where

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we were going next. "Over the river and through the woods," she said, taking coins from her purse, "to grandmother's house we go. And when we get there you can help me make eggnog and scrape nutmeg on top."

Now, as I took coins from my own pocket the smell of nutmeg seemed to emanate from the brown paper packages before me, despite the intervening years.

"Christmas at home this year?" the man behind the counter asked. "Yes," I said, somewhat astonished that he had spoken. "And you?" "I'll be with my grandchildren," he said with a smile. "Oh, really?" I said, my grandmother still in my mind. "That's great!" "Seven grandchildren," he said.

And then, since the place was empty, we stopped and talked. I asked about his grandchildren and got a sentence or two on each one. Those extra few minutes we took with each other made all the difference as I went on with my various errands.

A chance moment of connectedness with my past and with a man I'd probably not see again.

Connectedness sustains us invisibly. It can come by in unusual ways. In another Christmas season I was interviewing a man - let's call him Charlie - who had been brought up to a state psychiatric hospital for evaluation because he had been found wandering the Boston Public Gardens muttering to himself. He was admitted to the state hospital because he had no funds. In fact he was homeless.

He looked older than his actual age of fifty-four. He'd had a hard life and had creases and lines in his face to show for it. But his eyes also crinkled when he smiled and his bushy gray and white beard made me think he was jolly inside. Diagnosed with manic depressive illness in his twenties, he'd been in and out of mental hospitals ever since. Medication controlled his illness pretty well, but when he stopped taking it, which he would now and then as if to tempt fate, he would fall apart. Never married, he loved children. Unfortunately, although he had seven nieces and nephews, his sister did not like him visiting because they were afraid of his psychiatric illness.

Of the many odd jobs that Charlie had managed to secure for himself over the past thirty years, by far his favorite was playing Santa Claus. Every Christmas season, when he was not in the hospital, he would find some department store or shopping mall that needed a Santa Claus and sign up for the job.

"They usually have a sleigh or something fancy for me to sit in," Charlie explained. "Then the kids line up. It's such a kick. I really get into the role. When I put on that red suit I feel like I actually become Santa Claus. I believe in him. I am him at those moments. Now don't think I am crazy, Doc. I know I'm not Santa Claus. It's just that when I dress up I feel like I am. And when the kids come up...it's the closest thing I get to being a dad. You know, they sit on my knee and tell me what they want, and I smile and tap my head and tell them I'll do my best to keep it all up here and bring them what they want. I can sit there all day long and never get tired of it. The floor managers are always amazed. "Don't you want your break?" they ask. 'Naw,' I

say, 'Christmas only comes once a year.' Sounds pretty silly, huh? I mean I hear all kinds of stories. It makes me feel like I'm part of their lives, all over the city. I even describe to them my workshops up on the North Pole. It has all the latest stuff, you know. Is that crazy, Doc?"

"No." I said. "I don't think that's crazy at all, Charlie. If you ask me it's pretty goddamn ingenious." We worked together to get him out of the hospital quickly so he could go be Santa Claus for another group of children.

Imagine what it must have felt like for Charlie, unwelcome in the homes of his own family due to an illness he couldn't control, finding makeshift connections with children by playing Santa Claus. For a certain time, under the lights and hubbub of a shopping mall, Charlie would become a special person bringing the gift of Christmas to children he wanted to be with but didn't know.

In another vein, I think of a five-year old girl, whom I shall call Sophie, who connected through imagination to the world she wanted to find. She was brought to see me because she had no friends, and her parents thought she was pathologically shy. In fact, as it turned out, she had a host of friends, friends that emerged as Sophie and I played together on my office floor, friends who were created by Sophie in her mind and transported through the medium of play to the outside world.

Over time, her parents told me of their considerable troubles. Each of them was maintaining a fast-track career with a multitude of social and business obligations that left very little time for Sophie. Additionally, they blew off steam, as they put it, by drinking heavily and often having riotous arguments that included much yelling and breaking of things. "We're both very high-intensity," Sophie's father said.

"We don't mean anything by it," her mother added. "It's like something we do. We always make up."

But Sophie was terrified. So she withdrew. In her own world she found the safe, soothing connections she couldn't find in the world her parents gave her.

The unifying themes in these anecdotes, and in this paper, is the theme connectedness. My thesis is this: We live in a time that conspires to disconnect us, one from another, from institutions, from ideas, and from ideals, so that the individual is precariously alone. I would go on to contend that the implications of this disconnectedness for children are enormous.

I think of the two major tasks of childhood as the development of competence and the development of connectedness, both of which contribute, in different ways, to the overarching goal of developing a sense of confidence and self-esteem. If we do not pay close attention to our children's developing sustaining connections, connections of all sorts, then they will always be at risk of not finding satisfaction and meaning in life, no matter how competent they may become.

What is connectedness? It is a sense of being a part of something larger than oneself. It is a sense of belonging, or a sense of accompaniment. It is that feeling in your bones that you are not alone. It is a sense that no matter how scary things may become, there is a hand for you in the

dark. While ambition drives us to achieve, connectedness is my word for the force that urges us to ally, to affiliate, to enter into mutual relationships, to take strength and to grow through cooperative behavior.

One of my adult patients, a highly accomplished and successful man of thirty-five, said to me in reference to his feeling lonely, "What I really want to do is walk up to people and say, 'Will you be my friend?' But that makes you too vulnerable. It immediately puts you on the bottom of the inherent power differential that is in every relationship."

My patient lives in disconnection and so can easily feel one down. In order to handle the tension of the power differential he so readily perceives, he works harder and harder for success, feeling that if he achieves enough he can be on top all the time. Having all the power, he will not have to put himself in the vulnerable position of asking, "Will you be my friend?"

"But no matter how good you are," I say, "there will always be someone better. Then what do you do?"

"Work harder," he says wryly.

"But don't you think it's good to have friends where maybe you're helping each other along, on an equal basis?" I ask.

"Nice idea," he says. "But it always comes down to who's on top."

We have always had to deal with the tension between individual achievement and the alienating envy it can spawn. None of us has everything. We all find reasons to envy other people. There is no point in trying to moralize or lecture oneself out of envy; it arises spontaneously and it is not "bad," but rather natural.

However, the best antidote to the corrosive force of envy is not, as my patient suggests, more achievement, the success cure so many seek these days, but rather the best antidote is to have meaningful and sustaining connections to other people, institutions, or ideals. These connections act as internal supports that pick one up from failure, disappointment or rejection. The connected person can never fall very far because there are the life lines of support to break the fall. The disconnected person, on the other hand, dangles precariously held in place by the strength of his own arm.

In developing this idea of connectedness I would like to look at six different kinds of connectedness and consider a few aspects of each. They include:

1. Familial connectedness
2. Historical connectedness
3. Social connectedness

4. Institutional/Organizational connectedness

5. Connectedness to information and ideas

6. Religious/Transcendent connectedness

First there is the connectedness we are born into, familial connectedness. Whoever has been a parent or a child knows of the primal strength of the parent-child bond. In some ways, we might argue that the entire stories of our lives can be written in the terms of this bond, how it affected us, how it shaped us along the way.

We live our lives amidst the voices and memories of mother and father, sibling and kin. From the biological connecting that conceived us in the first place to the graveside where our loved ones bid us farewell, we are, most of us, never long unmindful of one or another of our parents or relatives. That there is much conflict in the family story only indicates how much energy it contains, how much we infuse it with our basic hopes and expectations, while at the same time lashing to the disappointment and destruction that are our birthright as humans.

If you go back and look at families in dramatic literature, you read in the Greek tragedies that sparest of dialogue, the sinews of human experience. The play centers around families, their connections and disconnections.

Murder, revenge, jealousy, incest, self-mutilation abound. Royal families torn by passionate misunderstanding, woeful self-deception, what Aristotle called the tragic flaw. And if you leaf through Shakespeare, and his contemporaries for that matter, you find more of the same: great families warring within, murdering each other, taking revenge, all against a backdrop of passionate familial connectedness. It is as if these characters, instead of taking their fundamental against life up with God or wrestling with an angel, go after each other, pounding out on the anvil of each other's bodies and souls their attempt at retribution and justice.

In modern drama by the likes of Chekhov, Ibsen and O'Neill, there is less murder, but equal intensity of family drama. We see the beginning of the drama of the disconnected man in the plays of Beckett, Brecht, and Sartre. Our peculiar twentieth century, with its wars and bombs and relativity and psychological-mindedness, seems to have done something to have disconnected us, from one another and from larger ideals and sustaining systems of belief, and from the family. If you look at the great plays - and art in general - of the later part of our century, you find shadows of disconnectedness, man alone, with no exit, waiting, listening to music without melody, reading books without plots, reciting prayers without conviction.

Familial disconnectedness is perhaps best represented in the fact of homelessness. Homelessness, which is not a metaphor but a stark fact can be seen as a kind of metaphor for the homelessness within us all. Homelessness has become such a compelling phenomenon, one which even the cynic is hard-pressed to ignore, in part because, I think we, to some extent, identify with the homeless. How far is each of us from homelessness? Only a serious illness or an accident or a bad call by the referee away, perhaps. And we know this. And it scares us half to death. Were we more connected as a society, were the extended family the active, vital force

it once was, the homeless would be taken in by their own. Instead they are disowned, on their own.

The connectedness within families strengthens children - and that disconnectedness weakens them - has been demonstrated time and again. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and sociologist Eugene Rochberg-Halton in a study done in Chicago in the late '70s found that children of warm families, families whose members were connected and attentive to each other, were more sympathetic, helpful, supporting and caring. The children from cool or disconnected families were less loyal, warm, friendly, sociable, and cooperative than the children from warm families. And Judith Wallerstein, in her study of children of divorced families, found that many of those children were set adrift in their twenties, underachieving, failing to make lasting relationships, not finding a secure place for themselves in the world.

As we shuffle and reshuffle the family and the roles within it, I think it is critical to keep in mind the primary importance of familial connectedness. We trivialize it at our peril. While one's ability to separate from one's family of origin has received a lot of attention in the psychological literature as a sign of mental health, the ability to preserve meaningful but not engulfing ties to one's original family can sustain one's sense of rootedness, tradition, and security in an increasingly rootless, traditionless, and insecure world.

The mention of rootedness and tradition brings me to the second kind of connectedness, which I call historical connectedness and which our current generation of children is in danger of losing altogether. Without reading books, without having family stories told around a dining room table over and over again, without listening to folklore from Grandma and Grandpa, without participating in various rituals, ceremonies, or repeated outings that include evocations of the past, it is hard for a young person to learn about his or her personal past, to develop a sense of historical connectedness.

In a completely different context, T. S. Eliot wrote a famous essay about originality and tradition in the development of the young poet titled "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The essay lends itself to our consideration of how each new generation finds its place in history. "Tradition," wrote Eliot, "is a matter of [wide] significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves in the first place the historical which we may call indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past but of its presence..."

I would suggest that this historical sense is essential not only for the poet, but for anyone who would like to know who he or she is. We need to understand and feel the presence of the past, as Eliot says, in our own lives - how prior generations turn up in current soup, not only genetically, but through customs, traditions, rituals, even feuds passed down over the years.

Eliot goes on:

What is to be insisted upon is that the...[individual] must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout [his life]. What

happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment something which is more valuable. The progress... is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.

A continual extinction of personality? Can you imagine a statement more antithetical to the message of self-focus and self-promotion our children receive in the media every day?

I hope it is not too much of a reach to relate T. S. Eliot's essay on poetry written in 1917, to the current scene, but to my mind it applies perfectly to the ideal of development of historical connectedness. Each generation is altered by and alters the past. In order to know and feel this way, each generation must connect with the past.

I am not championing the study of history, although I do think that it is a very good thing. Rather, I am stressing, for the sake of mental health and human growth, not to mention good poetry, the importance of knowing what has come before, and how you hook up to that, quarrel with it, change it and renew it.

Let me give you a personal example. My two-and-a-half year old daughter's name is Lucy. Right now she is a bouncy bundle of energy, curiosity, and most everything that is right with life. As she grows older she will learn that her real name isn't Lucy but Lucretia Mott Hallowell. She will know where the Hallowell came from, since Mom and Dad have that name, but she will probably wonder where such strange first and middle names came from: Lucretia Mott. Then I hope her Mom and I will be able to tell her stories about her namesake, her great, great, great, great, great, grandmother, Lucretia Mott, a little Quaker lady with a stout Quaker heart who worked to free slaves and advance women in the second half of the nineteenth century. Lucy will want to know about Lucretia Mott, why she got stuck with her name, what it meant back then to be an abolitionist and a feminist. Lucy will get this bit of history, up close, as part of a family folklore, and she will take it in--and do something with it --
I don't know what -- as she develops a sense of who she is. It is my hope that this bit of historical connectedness will be sustaining her; I know it will be meaningful as I know it will be meaningful as names always are.

Regardless of who your ancestry has in it, it is your ancestry, and it has done much to create you. The family lines sustain us more the better we know them. Seeking a personal definition, it can be just as useful to look back as to look within. Children need to hear the folklore of the family.

When we lack historical connectedness, when we have only the present and only the individual personality, then we lack so very much. We lack the reverberation and the echo of the past, the sense of largeness and sweep that the feeling of the past instills. Without the past, we go through it alone in the great house and listen to the clock tick. But if we know that the very clock ticking now was ticking at our mother's birth, then we are not so alone, and we see in the hallway mirrors of not only our own reflection but the faces of generations past and their stories, conflicts, habits and customs, than we are less alone still. If we pass on those stories to our own children and keep the past alive for them and us, even as the present changes the past as it does in our telling of it, we keep alive much more than old stories; we keep alive the historical connectedness that our children, and we, are so richly warm to.

Within the framework of historical connectedness I should mention another kind of connectedness which we do not have to work to acquire, but which accrues within us every minute of every day. This is the connectedness of memory, the connectedness to our own personal past which memory automatically wires up. Richer, deeper, more mysterious and complex than any bank of computers or any library archives, the human brain stores details and records events far beyond what we consciously control. Through a complex and personal language of associations, our memories offer up little jewels, constantly matching this place and that, this person's to that, this lyric in a song to that dance we once had, this chance aroma to that breakfast scene, this sprightly cadenza to that original score. Our memories are stitching and knitting all the time the fabulous tapestry of our associative inner lives so that we are, in our present lives, always connected through memory to the vastness of our pasts, in all the details and arresting vividness of the original events. Just as the man in the post office took me back to the nutmeg in my grandmother's eggnog, so we are transported back and forth across the chasm in time that divides the here and now from the past, the then and the there we look back to. As memory's cousin, anticipation, connects us to the future, so does memory keep us in touch with where we have been, ferrying us into the land of what is no more but once was so. Memory and anticipation change our landscape all the time. As we live in the present, anticipation carries us into the future and memory conveys us into the past, so that we are suspended, as if in a hammock, by the poles of the past and the future over the whoosh of the ever-vanishing here and now.

This special connectedness with special parts of time, probably the fullest and richest connectedness we have, gives us the heartache of knowing what has come and gone, the comfort of reminiscing, the knowledge of growth, the fulfillment of taking stock, and the wisdom of perspective. Memory and anticipation keep us connected with ourselves.

From familial and historical connectedness, which define the rugged aspects of one's backbone, one's biologically received self, I take up the social connectedness we establish during a lifetime, the connectedness with other people, mainly of one's own choosing, and with one's community or locale. We live in a time when neighborhoods, villages, and communities have broken down, so that the on-street, built-in ways of making friends and establishing a local support network are not as at-hand as they were, say, two generations ago. Nowadays, one must work and keep friends over time.

For children not having a viable neighborhood is less isolating because they still have the built in village called school. The friendships children make in school, rough and tumble though they be at times, over time draw the child into a world of affiliation and relatedness, in counterbalance to the world of achievement and individualism school also offers up.

If our children are growing up, as I believe they are, in a disconnected world, it is of great importance that we pay attention to helping them forge different kinds of connectedness early on. I think one of the great challenges of the coming decades will be to create and preserve connectedness in the face of the disconnectedness our technology and social structure often encourage.

Of the many points that could be made here, I wish to focus on one thought. It is by way of trying to answer my patient's question, "Why don't we just solve the problem of connectedness by just walking up to one another and asking, 'Will you be my friend?'" I would like to describe the psychological challenge we all contend with as we try to connect with each other.

While there is within us all a kind of drawing force, a powerful magnetic pull that leaves us leaning toward each other, reaching out, there is also a force in the other direction, the opposite pole of the magnet, pushing us apart, pulling back the hand before it reaches out, saying, "Do not connect, keep your bounds, play it close to the vest."

Where does this pulling away originate psychologically? What keeps us from finding greater protection through one another, instead menacing each other, attacking, or finding fault? D. W. Winnicott, the British pediatrician and psychoanalyst, said that the most difficult task in all of human development was coming to terms with our destructive feelings toward others. He said that in any close relationship there appears, in fantasy, sometime unconscious, sometimes not, the wish to destroy the other person.

Destroy may seem too strong a word, but a relationship perforce destroys one's hope of the other person being under one's total control, at one's beck and call, all-giving, all-caring. In this sense, we destroy the other person; we destroy our infantile version of the other person as all-gratifying en route to our being able to tolerate and then enjoy the other as an independent being.

In simple terms, the child -- or adult for that matter -- inevitably gets disappointed in any relationship because he or she does not have complex control over the other person. The other person is at times frustrating, in some way not giving what is wanted. If the relationship can survive this process of repeated destruction, then what results is genuine and useful connectedness. What so often happens, however, is at the moment of frustration the subject pulls away and withdraws. Rather than bearing with the tension, the subject pulls back thus avoiding frustration. However, the subject is now alone and disconnected.

How common it is, this wish to destroy the other, and how often we back away from a relationship rather than deal with the unpleasant, destructive feelings we encounter. Getting past, or learning to live with, such feelings is a necessary prerequisite of genuine connectedness. There is more to being friends than being nice. One must tolerate very un-nice, aggressive feelings. Once a child can do this in a friendship, then the relationship can be meaningfully reciprocal. We need to get comfortable with our destructive feelings-- not too comfortable, mind you, just comfortable enough not to have to hide them all the time.

The fourth kind of connectedness is connectedness to ideas and information. I include ethical and moral thinking in this domain, although the roots of moral and ethical behavior extend in all domains.

Let's start with information. There is more information now than there has ever been. Only a few centuries ago, it was possible for a person to aspire to know all that is known. Now, with what is

known increasingly exponentially, it is a major task just to keep abreast of even a very small field. The idea of knowing everything is obsolete.

Stores of information have grown so vast that I would contend, our very connectedness to information itself is threatened. It is a paradox that while we know more than we ever have, illiteracy is rising, the ability to use language is declining, and our children are disengaging from study at an alarming rate.

I think this relates to our connectedness to information. By connectedness I do not mean just having the information. I mean the feeling of being comfortable around information, of feeling supported, fed, and informed by it, rather than feeling threatened, starved or smothered by it. How many of us, and how many of our children, react to a new piece of data or a new technique with a sigh, a half-hearted camel's groan of one more straw being piled upon our heavily laden backs?

Similarly, in the world of ideas one can know many thoughts, be able to recite the laws of thermodynamics or the principles in Aristotle's Poetics, but not feel helped or at home or happy with ideas in general. On the other hand, one might know no famous ideas, but still feel drawn to ideas and feel at home and warmed by thought. Curious children are good example of the latter.

I worry that our children are growing up disconnected from both information and ideas. While they are surrounded by information, they do not know what to do with it. While they may pursue ideas, as if browsing in a store, they do not connect with them in a meaningful way; they do not buy them and take them home and make them their own. The subset of the world of ideas we call ethics and morality can seem strangely alien or quaint when the only meaningful morality appears embedded not in ideas but in expediency, luck, class privilege, or force.

With so much information available -- the skies are raining enough new information to drench us daily -- and with new ideas growing up to contain the information, there is a chance for young people to be knowledgeable and thoughtful as people have never had the chance to be before, and with that knowledge and thought to wield the power that naturally accompanies knowledge. But in order for young people to take advantage of this opportunity, they must feel comfortably connected to ideas and information. Ideas and information should be brought into their lives in such a way that they feel at ease with them and confident and eager at the prospect of new ones. Their exposure to ideas and information should not be like taking a sip of water from a fire hose. Rather, it should be in a context that stresses mastery, manageability, and fun.

From ideas and information, I move to institutions and organizations. Much of one's satisfaction day in and day out depends upon the degree of involvement and at-homeness one feels where one works- or in the case of children, where one learns. Our degree of connectedness to institutions and organizations often reflects in a concrete way the degree to which we feel value and appreciated by the society we live in.

The last few decades have seen great changes in the individual's relationship to institutions and organizations, from the work place to local and national governments to clubs and societies. Since Vietnam and Watergate, the cynicism and disconnection many feel toward government has

been growing. On the other hand, philosophies of management have been shifting toward a more democratic, involving style that invites participation by workers on all levels. In education, many universities are trying to become what Zelda Gamson, a sociologist of education, calls "learning communities," with the emphasis not on hierarchy, but on collaboration. Schools, one of our most important social institutions, are stressed by the increasing demands put upon them and are looking for ways to involve parents, community, and whatever other resources can be marshaled to increase the connectedness within the school world.

Robert Bellah and his associates, in their two books Habits of the Heart and The Good Society, point to the need for fostering and developing affiliations and attachments within our institutions and organizations. And futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler in their book Powershift contend that as knowledge is shifting toward universal availability and ownership, so is the power that goes with it shifting toward a broad base, with emphasis on small cottage businesses that can be maximally creative and, if I may stress the word, connected.

The institutions and organizations that do best are the ones that pay attention to the connectedness within them. They nurture their people. They attend to them. They listen to them. They know that they are their people. It makes no business sense to have the people of the organization feeling cut off or left out. It makes much better business -- and psychological -- sense to connect them into a whole.

Yet the complaint that fills the hearts of so many who work in institutions, and this certainly includes teachers in schools, is one of feeling unappreciated, undervalued, even unknown. Teachers, who work so hard and do so much, are often left paying cheerful lip service to the good will of their schools, while underneath the chipper veneer they feel spent, at loggerheads with an administration that talks a good game but does not deliver the goods, and upset within themselves at the withering of their work ideals. Often they say, "if only once and a while my boss would walk through that door, look me in the eye, and, really meaning it, tell me, 'You're good.'"

What I am talking about here is not complicated psychology. It is really no more than an extension of what we were brought up calling politeness. You say hello when you pass someone. When you are waiting for the person behind the counter to pass you your bundles you might comment on the weather or the handsome new curtains they just installed. When you are paying your toll on the turnpike you make a comment to the person taking your money even if he or she looks the other way. You make a little chit-chat in the waiting room with the other person who looks uncomfortable being there. No matter what you are doing, you put aside everything else to make the other person feel comfortable and at ease first. You allow perhaps for there to be laughter before there is serious work, connectedness before productivity. In a world that is itching at every turn to dehumanize us all, you insist on being human first.

Until the rest of our society restores or recreates its interconnectedness, institutions in general and schools in particular will have to work hard to stay human. I believe, however, that schools have a unique opportunity to lead the way in recreating social connectedness we so disjointedly seek.

It is said that the coming decade will see the cocooning of the American family. Technology will allow most of the family's business to be conducted at home. Everything can be done at a keyboard: Order groceries and shop for other goods, write checks and conduct other banking business, consult a physician, rent a video tape, play games, run a business, even campaign for political office.

If we are to be increasingly cocooned, then, more than ever, schools and other institutions will have to respond to the ever increasing need for the sort of human connectedness that the cocooned family will inevitably -- and already does-- lack.

Finally, I take up my sixth and last category of connectedness, connectedness to what is beyond, call it religious or transcendent connectedness. Whatever it is called it makes sense of being a part of the largest of all things, the cosmic universe, and in that connection a fundamental feeling of being a part of something, rather than feeling alone. Such connectedness, whether it be Buddhist Hindu or Christian or Jewish, whether it be one's personal system of belief or a miraculous sense felt once in a lifetime during a cloudburst, joins the individual with the unknown and unseen, with what happens before and after death, with what is eternal. If there is nothing before and after life, if the universe is a meaningless void, if human life is a biochemical coincidence signifying nothing beyond happenstance and chance, than religious connectedness is nothing more than an ironic joke, a wry smile upon an indifferent universe, a hallucination contrived by humanity to make sense of things.

But if it is the case that there is an energy behind the mystery, a meaning beyond existence then the intimations that we may feel that connect us to our god, whatever they may be, serve to focus our faith and create the connection found in prayer, meditation, or other transient devotion or cogitation.

Though unseen and unprovable, this connection can be felt as the surest connection we have. Take as an example of this, from the tradition that I know best, the extraordinary statement by Paul in his letter to the Romans in the New Testament:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or

famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Nay, in all these things we are more than

conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life,

nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present

nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,

shall be able to separate us from the love of God.

Whether or not we feel the absolute connectedness Paul feels, I think most of us have felt at one time or another a murmuring in our hearts that bespeaks a possible connection to something beyond.

However, we must be careful. As our methods of discourse and discovery change, it is important to know of our capacity for and need of spiritual connectedness. Particularly for our young people, who are at risk of being more a lost generation than the generation Gertrude Stein intended that term for, we need to help them watch out for those who would exploit their spiritual hunger for financial or political gain or for power and control. The list of charlatans and crooks posing as ministers to spiritual need is alarmingly long of late. While we certainly do not want to dictate how or what anyone worships, still we do not want to condone the appalling financial and spiritual rip-off that is the big business of Swaggart and Bakker, these sects take advantage of the power of the need for connectedness and commit the most awful deception in the process.

But if we look past the deceptions that have been committed so often in the name of God and consider spiritual connectedness as the genuine human concern that it is, we see there is an undisputed mystery that surrounds our lives on this planet. We don't know for sure why we're here, where we've been or where we're headed. We don't know why we suffer or why we thrive or why we were born or why we die. But we do wonder about these things.

How we engage this mystery defines our spiritual connectedness. Whether we do it alone or in a group, whether we do it under a banner or without formal ties, whether we do it systematically and at a scheduled time or spontaneously when we are so moved, whether we do it out of fear or obligation or love or curiosity or hunger, whether we do it with full faith or full of skepticism, whether or not we know what we're doing when we do it, we all engage somehow at some time, with the mystery of life. It is at times embarrassing in this very scientific century to talk of things like mystery and faith and God, because most of our intellectual tools seem geared up for other things, and yet even as we turn away from them we find ourselves face to face with them once again.

This brings me to the end of my discussion of different kinds of connectedness. The list is meant to be suggestive and is by no means exhaustive. There are as many kinds of connectedness as there are people, places, and ideas to connect with. My categories have sketched in just a few. I have tried to emphasize what I think will be a central problem for children and adults in the coming decades. While we are prepared to attend to children's competence, I think we must equally prepare to address their connectedness in its many spheres.

Let me close by going back with you to where this paper began, in Harvard Square, in the P. O., late on a gray afternoon just before Christmas.

Leaving the P. O., I blew air into my cupped hands to warm them. The lights of the city decorated what otherwise would have been a drab sky. Shoppers hurried in and out of stores while other people just sort of milled about, not quite sure what their next move would be. There was the Salvation Army band, and I wondered why I got so moved at the sound of that humble brass ensemble, but I did. The present was staying just one step ahead of my past as memories weaved around me as if they were other pedestrians, bumping into me, politely excusing themselves, moving along.

Until one grabbed me by the shoulder. A pedestrian, that is. "Aren't you..."

"Yes," I quickly answered. "Amazing just to bump into you like this!" It was Mr. Magruder, my fifth-grade history teacher, one arm full of bundles and all of him full of memories. We gabbed a little bit. I don't remember what I said because I was preoccupied with recollection. He must have thought I was addled. I wanted to take him and walk right back to our schoolhouse or out onto the soccer field where he taught me to kick with my instep instead of my toe. The moment was cut short, of course, by time, and we said goodbye.

The next stops were Reading International, Crate and Barrel, and the Loeb Drama Center to pick up some tickets. This was an area to town I knew well, having gone to school here and lived here for twenty years.

I stopped for a minute and looked above the roofs at the sky. There was just enough contrast to give a difference between the gray sky and the black roofs, all offset by the neon signs and city decorations which glowed, like footlights, below the skyline. Here we all are, I thought to myself. For at least this one minute, we're all here, now, together.

How many people are there around the city who are alone? I wondered. Who's having a fight, who's breaking up, who's making up, who's looking for a way to start off fresh, who needs a friend? What is the glue anymore that holds us all together? Was there ever any?

So much of my glue came from my teachers. I have loved my teachers, so many of them, from grade school on up. Bill Alfred, professor of English at Harvard and my tutor when I was there, used to have me into his house on Athens Street and we read plays, and I felt drawn to him and to the plays and to the words and to the larger world that seemed to grow before me as I lived on into it. Fred Tremallo, my old English teacher at Exeter, was like a father, getting me to look up words in the dictionary when I didn't want to and telling me about his Italian ancestry. And Mrs. Eldredge, my first-grade teacher, who found out I had dyslexia, kept me close to her, right near her side, near here dresses with apples on them and her powder I can still smell, as she did what would now be called tutoring me but which then felt like love. I could never tell them all how much they meant even if I spent a lifetime trying. Would they want to hear? Just the facts. Nothing cheap.

As I heard the Salvation Army band still playing its tromboned carols, I thought of how much pain there was in the city that night, any night, and how much we needed each other to stave it off or take it in and put it behind, again and again. We've all been hurt. We need to know how to find a place to take us in.

I heard the band die out at the end of a chord. Then silence, like the moment after you say goodbye. They must have reached the end of their day. I could imagine them packing up their instruments and pot-bellied donation canister and saying goodbye. They would be back, I imagined, I hoped. People return. People come back to give what they gave before until they can't do it anymore.

"Only connect," E. M. Forster said. That evening, under the chilly skies of Cambridge, I understood what he meant.