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# Democratic Participation in a Community of Learners: Loris Malaguzzi's Philosophy of Education as Relationship

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**Democratic Participation in a Community of Learners:  
Loris Malaguzzi's Philosophy of Education as Relationship**

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Lecture prepared for "Nostalgia del Futuro: Liberare speranze per una nuova cultura dell'infanzia," an international seminar to consider the educational contributions of Loris Malaguzzi. University of Milano, October 16-17, 1995.

*We consider relationships to be the fundamental, organizing strategy of our educational system.*

Loris Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10.

The metaphor of *education as relationship* provided Loris Malaguzzi with the fundamental premise for his philosophy and pedagogy. The child--seen as powerful, rich in resources, competent, and social--seeks from the beginning of life to find out about the self, others, and the world through interaction: knowledge is co-constructed. Education, hence, must focus not on the child considered in isolation from others, but instead on the child seen as interconnected with particular others in nested communities: home, classroom, school, neighborhood, city, region, nation, and eventually extending out to include the whole world.

This principle, that "education is relationship," puts great priority on establishing a learning and caring community composed of educators, families, and children, based on sharing of perspectives and resources, and with expectations of continuity and long-term relationship. Features of the Reggio schools that promote the establishment of meaningful relationships with a long time horizon by and among children and adults include the system of keeping children in a classroom group together for the three years of the infant-toddler or preschool cycle, the system of also assigning two teachers to each classroom group for the full three years of the cycle, and emphasizing collaboration among teachers as the starting point of all learning and development for adults and children, many practices (at the level of physical environment, curriculum, and work with parents) intended to carefully and thoughtfully introduce each new child and family to the school community and to allow relationships among and between adults and children to grow and flourish, many customary curricular activities that bridge children to their near community (neighborhood, city, and surrounding countryside) as well as bringing the community into the schools and fostering the public's interest in and commitment to the schools, the project approach, involving long-term, open-ended investigations, usually conducted by small work groups of children, and many and extensive uses of documentation to create public memories and a sense of belonging within each classroom group and school, and to provoke and enrich learning about project work among children, parents, and teachers.

The principle of an education based on relationship refers to more than simply the process or social context required for education, however. The principle also has to do with the content of education, to what children want to learn and what teachers should be teaching in school. In Reggio, learning is essentially about constructing more and new connections between ideas--making knowledge richer, deeper, broader and more reflective of the complexities in the worlds of reality and imagination available to the children. The premise is that even young children desire contact with big, important ideas, not small, segmented bits of knowledge considered suitable for "young" minds:

*From the very beginning, curiosity and learning refuse simple and isolated things; they love to find the dimensions and relations of complex situations. (Reggio Emilia Department of Education, 1987, p. 19)*

*[Our goal is always] to put everything together, to try to widen the power of our intelligence through the possibilities of relationship... . Children start to understand when they start to put things into relationship. And the joy of children is to put together things which are apparently far away!... And the more difficult is the situation--the more problems the children have put to themselves--then the more relationships they can make, the more their curiosity will grow, and the more questions they will continue to ask. (Malaguzzi, National Learning Center, Wash., D.C., June, 1993).*

I call the idea of education as relationship a metaphor, or vision, rather than a theory because Malaguzzi was not trying to create a full-fledged theory in the rigorous and formal sense--a body of concepts and propositions that explains facts and observations, guides the collection of new facts and observations, and is testable and falsifiable. Malaguzzi's metaphor of education as relationship is too vague and poetic to be used to generate hypotheses and predictions that are testable through research, then to be either confirmed or disconfirmed. Nevertheless, it is more than a small or trivial idea. It represents, let us say, the beginning of a theory. Education as relationship is an idea with sufficient scope to point us toward the theory we want and need. It is capable of addressing and explaining a wide range of observations and processes and has comprehensive application to practical situations and problems. It refers simultaneously to both the social and intellectual dimensions of the teaching and learning process; as well as to both the beginnings (necessary preconditions) and the ends (goals) of education. Relationships among people and ideas are where education starts, what it is about, and what it is for. To quote one of his witty remarks to a seminar group in Reggio Emilia:

*We need to define the role of the adult, not as a transmitter but as a creator of relationships--relationships not only between people but also between things, between thoughts, with the environment. It's like we need to create a typical New York City traffic jam in the school. (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 56).*

To suggest what this metaphor of education as relationship is not saying, it can easily be contrasted with two other powerful metaphors which Malaguzzi rejected but have dominated recent eras of American schooling: *education as socialization or cultural transmission* (the metaphor drawn from the behaviorist and social learning psychologies); and *education as development* (drawn from the cognitive-structuralist psychologies of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and others). The first, education as socialization or cultural transmission (the "blank slate," or "empty vessel" image), was thoroughly despised by Malaguzzi for its mechanistic (social engineering) implications. Malaguzzi's reactions, however, must be understood in

context: "Malaguzzi's behaviorism" was based on the rather doctrinaire writings of B.F. Skinner and other learning psychologists which he read at the time he was forming his own vision of education. Today, socialization is understood in a much more complex and transactional way that is informed by all the developmental theories, including Freud, Piaget, and Vygotsky, and by research on the complex, interactive, biobehavioral processes that underlie development. The American interest in the theme of socialization is still strong and can be seen in the everlasting concern with prediction, outcomes, and effects--for example, in our eternal questions about what might be the long-term effects of quality child care, such as Reggio Emilia and other Italian cities provide, on children's later performance in school, work, or family life.

The second metaphor, education as development, was more respected by Malaguzzi and more influential on his thinking. It is perhaps most eloquently presented in Kohlberg's 1971 classic essay, "Development as the aim of education." In this paper, Kohlberg acknowledged his intellectual debt to the progressive philosophers (especially John Dewey and James Mark Baldwin), to Jean Piaget, and George Herbert Mead, and defined development as the sequential movement through invariant ordered stages, encouraged by a stimulating environment that poses resolvable but genuine problems or conflicts, inclines children to take and to coordinate multiple perspectives, and makes children think in structured ways that organize both cognition and emotion. Kohlberg expected good schooling to accelerate this progression in the domains of cognitive and moral judgement development; while in the domain of ego development, he wanted healthy passage through stages (not acceleration), with successful integration of the concerns of each stage. Although aspects of the cognitive-developmental psychologies of Kohlberg and other neo-Piagetians have been subject to criticism and no longer seem as prepotent as once they did, nevertheless the vision of the active, constructivist child and the role of cognitive conflict and disequilibrium in powering cognitive growth are parts of the assumption structure and belief systems of many or most American early childhood educators; likewise, these principles (though not the linear view of development) were deeply internalized by Malaguzzi.

Today, nevertheless, American educators are looking for fresh thinking. I began this paper asking myself the question: Why do so many of my fellow early childhood educators seem to find Malaguzzi's messages and philosophy important, energizing, persuasive, and inspiring? One answer, certainly, has to do with his poetic, metaphorical, and lyrical language, for example, in describing the nature of the child as strong and powerful, rich in resources and competencies. This language and imagery resonates with many teachers' professional optimism about human potential and their intuitive preference for holistic rather than analytic and reductionist views of the child. Beyond that, however, there is the theme of education as relationship, including notions about the particular forms of democratic participation and community considered desirable for children and adults in the Reggio schools.

These ideas seem to evoke an instant sense of recognition and approval from the American audiences with whom I speak. This may be because of common roots: Malaguzzi's ideas descend from (owe an acknowledged debt to) great ideas in the history of American progressive education (John Dewey and David Hawkins) and are cousins to the contemporary psychologies of Howard Gardner and Urie Bronfenbrenner. But it is not as if these ideas are relics of the dead past; for progressive education is currently enjoying another of its periodic times of ascendancy and influence. Today, because of the problems and sense of "crisis" that face us concerning schooling in America, much that has been accepted in traditional education is being questioned, challenged, and debated; educators who can be classified as "progressives"

are again leading many small and large-scale innovations in classrooms, schools, districts, and states.

Included in virtually all of these experiments, reforms, and systematic restructurings are concepts and proposals to dramatically change the social relations in and around schools and make them authentic "communities." For example, one major vision statement recently put forward is called The Basic School: A Community for Learning by Ernest Boyer (1995) of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. For the last several years, Boyer has led a massive collaborative effort to visit elementary schools, talk to parents and teachers, and search the research literature for what works best. He concludes:

*But if all children are to be ready for school, surely all schools must be ready for children.... An effective school connects people, to create community. An effective school connects the curriculum, to create coherence. An effective school connects classrooms and resources, to enrich the learning climate. And an effective school connects learning to life, to build character (pp. xviii, 8).*

Indeed, the words, "community," and to a certain extent, "relationship," seem to be on everyone's lips, and Malaguzzi's conceptualizations bear striking parallels with much of the new theorizing about educational community. Malaguzzi was not actually right when he joked that John Dewey was more alive in the Reggio Emilia schools than in the United States. Rather, Dewey's ideas are carried in the intellectual chromosomes of every American educator and his works continue to be revisited and reinterpreted every generation. And yet, despite all the discussion, creating community is very difficult to achieve in practice in American schools--given that many children, not to mention teachers, are highly mobile and transient, and moreover, many of the organizational elements in schools work toward increased fragmentation and segmentation of knowledge and social relations. This paper will explore some examples of the best current thinking about educational community going on in the United States, and analyze whether and how Malaguzzi's vision anticipates this work and contributes to the discussion.

### **The Four Communities**

This paper will examine, in turn, several discussions about community in early childhood classrooms: (1) the moral community (as put forward by Piagetian educator, Rheta DeVries, with her colleague, Betty Zan, 1994); (2) the community of inquiry (as discussed by analytic educational philosopher, David Kennedy, 1994); and (3) the community of learners (as described by Vygotskian cognitive-anthropologist, Barbara Rogoff, 1994). All three involve notions about young children and adults as co-participants in democratic communities, and indicate many areas of theoretical agreement and overlap with Malaguzzi's concepts.

Yet, they differ in some of their assumptions about the temporal and spatial dimensions of community, and they do involve different notions of what democratic participation is about. Thus, to conclude where these different discussions lead us and where they leave us, a fourth proposal will be presented--not of democratic participation in schools but rather in society--involving a concept of the responsive (or civic) community (put forward by social scientists, Amitai Etzioni (1994), Robert Putnam (1993, 1995a, 1995b), and Francis Fukuyama, 1995). If the moral community, community of inquiry, and community of learners are alternative ways to think about children's participation in democratic communities, then the responsive community

presents a severe critique of what kind of participation our contemporary American democracy needs from its citizens.

It has long been an accepted belief by the American public that the schools must and should prepare students for future citizenship in a participatory democracy. Further, what this preparation consists of has also been widely understood: Students must be prepared to become informed and active voters, who seek and then use their best knowledge to make informed and educated choices and decisions. Education for democracy, then, traditionally has been concerned with preparing individuals to become autonomous, self-regulated, and informed decision-makers. But is this really enough? That is the question raised by Etzioni, Putnam, and Fukuyama.

### **The Moral Community**

The moral classroom, as outlined by DeVries and Zan (1994) (based on their work in schools in the city of Houston, Texas) is a direct application of the cognitive-structural theories of moral judgement development and education of Piaget and Kohlberg. DeVries and Zan go so far as to state that the unifying theme of their work is development as the aim of education. The most desirable school atmosphere is one that optimally promotes all the areas of development--social, moral, affective, and intellectual (p.3). Such a school, they say, is not a "boot camp" (where the teacher takes the role of "drill sergeant"), and not a "factory" (with the teacher as "manager"), but rather a "community" (with the teacher as "mentor"). The key to this community is the establishment of a sociomoral atmosphere based on respect:

*The sociomoral atmosphere is the entire network of interpersonal relations that make up a child's experience of school. This experience includes the child's relationship with the teacher, with other children, with academics, and with rules (DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 7).*

It is the teacher who establishes the sociomoral atmosphere by organizing the room and relating to children in controlling or cooperative ways. In the moral community, an atmosphere of cooperation prevails. The teacher seeks to optimize interaction among and between the teacher and children, and to maximize the group's opportunities to confront problems with constructive activity. Many events of the classroom day can be structured so as to make them moments for cooperation. Particularly fruitful opportunities include group time, guidance and discipline situations, conflict resolution, decision-making, rule-making, voting, and engaging in open-ended discussions of social and moral problems, either hypothetical or actual (Edwards, 1986). The teacher takes as the curriculum the social life of the classroom and aims to make the classroom a democratic, just community (Kohlberg and Lickona, 1987). "The resulting sociomoral atmosphere is one of vitality and energy invested in the experience of being together" (p. 53), where social relationships are characterized by relative equality and by the reciprocity conducive to decentering and perspective-taking.

These notions are surely similar to Malaguzzi's views. What is dissimilar, however, is that DeVries and Zan define the network of cooperative relations as composed of just two major building blocks: the teacher-child relation, and children's peer relations. Although they say they assume that both teacher and child may bring the influence of other relationships into the classroom atmosphere, they consider these other relationships (such as parent-child, teacher-principal, and teacher-teacher) to be subsidiary and unimportant. The classroom (or at most, the school) is expected to achieve its status as a just and moral community separate from all external

relations. There is no understanding of the necessary triangulation of relationships between and among three sets of partners--children, families, and educators, as in gestione sociale,--nor any sense of how the classroom and school are nested inside a graduated series of circles--the communities of neighborhood, city, region, country, and world, that together provide the moral maps, connections, and supports without which what goes on in the classroom and school becomes, precisely, meaning-less.

Moreover, the whole purpose of social relationships in DeVries and Zan's moral community is different from Malaguzzi's vision, because their ultimate function is to help promote morally autonomous individuals--in the Piagetian sense of persons who have the capacity for self-regulated and self-constructed principled reasoning about rules. The vision is profoundly individualistic, in that the community exists to provoke and stimulate growth processes in the individual; and it is constructivist, but it is not social-constructivist.

### **The Community of Inquiry**

Closer to Malaguzzi's vision of education as relationship is David Kennedy's (1994a, 1994b, 1995, in press) discussion of the community of inquiry. The term, "community of inquiry," was first used by the American pragmatic philosopher, Charles Saunders Pierce. Matthew Lipman (1991) is known for defining this concept for our era, in a synthesis of elements of the thought of Pierce, Dewey, Paul Schilder, Josiah Royce, G. H. Mead, Justus Buchler, and Lev Vygotsky (Kennedy, 1995). The community of inquiry is conceptualized as participatory, transactional, and transformative--based on interaction, dialogue, and collaboration among meaning-makers. In Kennedy's writings are many fascinating texts showing the kind of high level philosophic discussions that can take place among teachers and very young children. Such discussions, however, do not fully compose or create the community of inquiry. The discussions cannot exist without a supportive classroom context: They are part of life in a transformed classroom or school community-- conceived to be a total departure from traditional schooling with its rigid hierarchies, one-way environments, lockstep curricula, and insensitivity to individual differences. At the same time, the community of inquiry is not sufficient by itself to create such a transformed community; inquiry is only one dimension of the larger work of community-building which must take place across all domains of school life.

In the inquiring classroom, teachers engage in many forms of co-action with children--observing, modeling, nurturing, interpreting, facilitating, and provoking. The glue that holds this community together and directs it forward is self-critical practice--inquiry with and by children. The children and adults together achieve moments of intersubjectivity based on five kinds of sharing of meanings--what Kennedy calls the communities of gesture, language, mind, emotions, and interests. These kinds of sharing of meaning seem to closely resemble what Malaguzzi was pointing to in his favorite image of the "hundred languages." The sharing of meanings through gesture and language create a community of mind. The sharing of mind is not merely intellectual but involves an emotional dimension; the children experience a joining of feeling, in the sense of a transformation felt by the group members as a sense of wholeness with others, beauty and harmony, and mutual affinity. The individual does not disappear or recede, however, but rather seeks to count and be heard, to make a difference, and to achieve influence and recognition in the group through dialogue and negotiation and a (at least partial) sharing of interests and goals--what Italians call becoming a "protagonist."

It is evident that the community of inquiry goes beyond DeVries and Zan's moral

community is in its social constructivism. As Kennedy (1994a) says:

*[T]he individual cannot know reality adequately; therefore inquiry must be a communal venture... the whole has an emergent character that transcends any individual. (p.3).*

The communal question-asking and dialogue, the seeking of always temporary "truths," must be genuinely emergent and open-ended, in a way that involves not only the children but also the adults. What Kennedy finds most important about the Reggio Emilia approach is its collaborative vision of participating adults who jointly co-construct over time a common image of teaching and learning, and who realize that no current construction is ever final. The community of inquiry is certainly a more expansive community than the moral classroom is terms of the relationships that constitute it and in its much more open-ended and spiralling approach to time:

*A growing body of research on teacher planning and teacher thinking suggests that experienced teachers do not proceed in a linear fashion when planning for teaching. Instead, they plan in ways that are significantly more recursive and cyclical, more learner-centered, and structured around larger chunks of content and time than those of the single lesson. (Cochran-Smith, 1995, p. 495).*

The community of inquiry, then, goes beyond the moral community in being something always ongoing, open-ended, greater than the sum of its parts, "a horizon of meaning larger than any of our individual perspectives."

When this happens, the school ceases being simply an agent of reproduction for society and becomes capable of playing a transformative role (Kennedy, 1995). Ideally, the relationship between tradition and change is positive: the school both reproduces and transforms, in an emergent, equilibrative balance. Where reproduction alone predominates, there is stagnation and mediocrity; where innovation alone predominates, there is chaos. Kennedy asks: What balance does Reggio Emilia represent?

### **The Community of Learners**

The term, "community of learners," is a general term widely used today, for instance, by Ernest Boyer, in The Basic School. Barbara Rogoff's (1994) particular contribution departs from the cognitive-structuralist view of development as discovery of knowledge, and instead takes a neo-Vygotskian view of development as transformation of participation, wherein both autonomy and responsibility are desired. Rogoff (1990) believes that learning occurs whenever people participate in shared endeavors with others, with all participants playing active but often asymmetrical roles. In different models of schooling, however, children play different roles in the process of learning and as a result learn different ways to relate to what they have learned as well as to the community in which this learning is important, through their varying participation in the process of learning. Rogoff, as an anthropologist, assumes that each way of organizing learning has its own particular benefits, values, and usefulness; in other words, there is no one right way correct for all times and places, but the choices that communities make do have consequences for the development of their children.

*For example, in instruction based on a transmission theory (adult-run instruction), the students learn the information to be able to demonstrate that it has been encoded and*



*retained, in response to tests evaluating the transmission piece by piece. In instruction based on an acquisition theory (children-run instruction) the students learn the information as they explore in idiosyncratic ways that are not necessarily connected to the uses to which the information is historically or currently put in the adult world. In instruction based on a participation theory (community of learners instruction), students learn the information as they collaborate with other children and with adults in carrying out activities with purposes connected explicitly with the history and current practices of the community. (Rogoff, 1994, p. 2).*

In the community of learners, all participants are active: no one has predominant responsibility. As participants move from being newcomers to becoming experienced members of the community, they take a more and more active role in managing their learning and coordinating with other people (both children and adults), who also contribute to the direction of activities and provide guidance. Rogoff describes these processes in detail in her paper, using as an example a public elementary school in the city of Salt Lake City, Utah, run cooperatively by parents and teachers, with parents spending three hours per week (per child) in the classroom contributing to instruction, curriculum decisions, and classroom management. Rogoff herself was a parent "co-oper" at this school for ten years, and organized a collaborative team of university researchers and teachers to conduct a four-year study of the school as a culture.

What is especially interesting from our point of view is that Rogoff's description of the transformation of participation provides her theory of community with an idea of how relationships can begin, or better yet, continue beginning, at the same time as they are evolving and emerging. Returning to DeVries and Zan's "moral classroom," we now see how it seems outside time--as if it exists in an eternal present moment, with no past, and no future. Kennedy and Lipman's "community of inquiry," in contrast, at least is emergent--it goes forward in time, and provides a process ("the inquiry project") by which the community collectively progresses. But the "community of learners," at last, most fully grapples with the realities of change over time by providing a way to think about the fact that the membership of the community continually rolls over and changes as old members (children and their parents) leave and new members come in, and that this transformation of participation is where education starts and what it is for. "Development as the aim of education" takes on a new meaning that is less individualistic than in Piagetian constructivist theories.

As we know, Malaguzzi never saw the developing child as an ideally autonomous learner, but rather saw education as a necessarily communal activity and symphony of subjectivities involving children and adults. He saw long-term and meaningful relationships between and among children, teachers, and parents as the necessary precondition for the flowering of communication, co-action, and reciprocity. Assuming the benefits of the prevailing Italian practice of keeping together teachers and children for a three-year cycle, he rationalized this practice by saying it makes possible the greatest density, richness, and complexity of communications, negotiations, and collaborative problem-solving. The three years spent together allow the group to construct a history of relationship and a sharing of culture that creates the sense of community and guarantees the quality of life and well-being for children as part of families. The goals of intensifying interaction and enhancing community lead teachers to systematically enact many events and activities that successfully introduce new children and families, provide mentoring for inexperienced teachers, heighten sharing and continuity of memories and expectations by means of documentation, and create drama and climax in times of transition and culmination. In general, all periods of beginning and ending are treated as times

of great delicacy and given special forms of attention which prolong their duration, embed them into rituals and symbolisms, and render them communal rather than individual experiences. Times of beginning, transition, and ending are addressed with care and respect, and subjected to layering, intensification, and multiplication of collective experience.

### **The Responsive, or Civic, Community**

Rogoff's conception of development as transformation of participation, finally, brings us to the fourth version of community and to larger questions about what kind of participation it is that contemporary democratic societies want and need from their people. Today, these questions are being widely discussed in the United States. In my opinion, the discussion of the "civic" or "responsive community" offers an entry point of exceptional promise toward thinking more usefully about democratic participation in schools.

The concept of the civic or responsive community does not actually come from educators, and its discussion and debate is taking place largely outside the professional arena, in the public domain. In a rather unusual and surprising way, several books and academic journal articles have been widely reviewed and their central ideas considered in national media, including newspapers, magazines, and public broadcasting shows. Works most quoted and influential in this public discussion include The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda, by sociologist, Amitai Etzioni (1993); Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (and "Bowling Alone," 1995), by political scientist, Robert Putnam (1993); and Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity by social scientist, Francis Fukuyama (1995).

The thesis of Etzioni is that, in order to restore and revive American society and to protect the moral, social, and political environments, the citizenry needs to find a better balance between claims to rights, on the one hand, and the assumption of responsibilities, on the other. Generally accepted obligations and responsibilities to others and to the common good have tended to recede, as ideas about individual rights and entitlements have tended to expand, to penetrate everyday discourse, and to become the preferred currency of discourse whenever a person or group wishes to justify a claim to resources or privileges. Both the right and left sides of the political spectrum share the blame for this evolutionary trend, insofar as both sides tend to believe that the community is coercive, that government ("Big Brother") should be distrusted, and that the greater good is best served if only individuals are left free to pursue their own choices, rational self-interests, rights, and identities. In 1990, Etzioni called together a group of fifteen ethicists, social philosophers, and social scientists to Washington, D.C., to found a critical group called the Communitarians; in January, 1991, they published their first statement in the form of a quarterly publication called The Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities, which has strongly influenced President Bill Clinton, among others.

Robert Putnam, scholar at Harvard University, has become known for his writings about social capital and the "civic community." Social capital (James Coleman's term) refers to people's ability and dispositions to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations; people with this virtue can associate and cooperate with others outside of their kinship unit and create enduring organized patterns of social solidarity. A strong civic community involves rich horizontal networks of engagement, reciprocity, and cooperation, rather than vertical hierarchies of authority and dependency.

*For a variety of reasons, life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. In the first place, networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved. When economic and political negotiation is embedded in dense networks of social interaction, incentives for opportunism are reduced. At the same time, networks of civic engagement embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration. Finally, dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the "I" into a "we," or (in the language of rational-choice theorists) enhancing the participants' "taste" for collective benefits. (Putnam, 1995b, p. 20).*

Putnam has measured the institutional performance of the various Italian regional governments since 1970, and finds certain regions (for instance, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna--generally those of La Terza Italia), to be the strongest. These regions, it is shown, have the most effective and honest regional and local officials, the most efficient services, and the most civic engagement, as indexed by high voter turnouts, newspaper readership, membership in clubs and associations, and expectations of honesty by local government officials. People revere their traditions of collective organization whether in political unions or the many kinds of economic cooperatives (agricultural, marketing, credit, labor, producer, and consumer unions and cooperatives). They see these cooperative tendencies as not of recent origin but rather trace them to the communal republics and such associations as the craft guilds of medieval times.

Indeed, words frequently heard from Malaguzzi and Reggio teachers are "civic" and "civil" (e.g. the child has rights to civility, to civilization, and to civic life). The first catalog of the Reggio Emilia Exhibit, L'occhio se salta il muro, opens with a statement drawing connections between the economic cooperatives and the principles underlying the municipal schools:

*Cooperating means working together, collaborating, helping each other. It was precisely to help one another and defend themselves from exploitation and speculation that the Emilia farmers created the first cooperatives... The experience of the United Cooperative Dairies may be traced back to the same principles which have made possible the encouraging and useful experience undertaken and directed by the municipal primary and nursery schools in Reggio Emilia. (Reggio Emilia Dept. of Education, 1984, p. 8).*

One reason that Putnam's work has received so much attention in America is that he has also compiled data that point to a striking decline in civic community in the United States. Since the 1950's, social forces such as the increase in women's employment and captivating home entertainment (television) have caused Americans to retreat from their historic pattern of high civic association (extolled by Alexis de Tocqueville in Democracy in America). Involvement has dramatically declined in all sorts of voluntary associations, including church-related groups, school-service groups (parent-teacher associations), labor and political unions, professional societies, fraternal organizations and service clubs (Elks, Lions, Scouts, American Red Cross), veterans clubs, and sports clubs. This decline of participations results in weakening communities of shared values, and people become less able and willing to extend themselves in face-to-face encounters to thrash out problems and find ways to compromise private interests for the sake of larger and common goals.

Francis Fukuyama of the Rand Corporation has continued these themes in his book,

Trust, in which he compares the economic success of countries, and claims that prosperity in democracies is generated by the strength of civil society, as seen in the intermediate institutions and private groups that thrive between the realm of the state and the family. Civil institutions create a culture of trust in others outside the kinship unit--trust which is able to be mobilized in ways unique to each national context:

*If the institutions of democracy and capitalism are to work properly, they must coexist with certain premodern cultural habits that ensure their proper functioning. Law, contract, and economic rationality provide a necessary but not sufficient basis for both the stability and prosperity of postindustrial societies; they must as well be leavened with reciprocity, moral obligation, duty towards community, and trust, which are based in habit rather than rational calculation. (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 11).*

Fukuyama agrees with Putnam that American society is finally becoming as individualistic as Americans (heretofore falsely) always believed it was: "the inherent trend of rights-based liberalism to expand and multiply those rights against the authority of virtually all existing communities has been pushed toward its logical conclusion" (p. 10); this snow-balling individualism is implicated in the increases in violent crime, litigiousness, and government distrust, breakdown of family structures, decline of civic participation, and the general national malaise and pessimism.

## **Conclusion**

If the social scientists' analysis of changing patterns of civic participation is correct, and weakening community engagement undermines democratic participation in modern America, then the implications for supporting community in schools are clear. First, given all of the social and technological forces that tend to worsen the amounts of fragmentation, segmentation, and isolation in the lives of children and their families, it is worthwhile to try to counteract such trends and model the value of community by strengthening all the partnerships and networks within and surrounding schools. As many school reformers have convincingly demonstrated, schools and child care centers can be focal points for interaction and social connection in the neighborhood and create a sense of belonging for many children, parents, teachers, and community members. We need to reject a vision of moral community or community of inquiry that is focused on the individual classroom and on social relationships involving one teacher and a group of children and instead think about the classroom as existing within nests of surrounding communities. In thinking about how to create and sustain an emergent learning community where both children and adults enter into dialogue and collaboration, we need to think about the time of relationships (or "time in relationships") in more extended and extensive, particularized and contextualized, cyclical and open-ended ways; and do what we can to increase the stability, continuity over time, and multifacedness of children's friendships and attachments.

Second, we need to rethink the goals of participation in democratic school communities with respect to the developing individual. Instead of assuming that the purpose is to help that individual become an autonomous and self-regulated decision-maker (the "informed voter"), we need to start from the point of view that democratic citizenship is fundamentally about participation--becoming a protagonist in a group, a community whose participation is continually transformed by, and transforms, the directions and activities taken. The goal, therefore, is interdependence rather than independence, and the child who can think "with others" rather than "for himself or herself" is the one who best exemplifies the gift bestowed by education as

relationship.

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