

Loris Malaguzzi at 100: pedagogical influences and contemporary importance

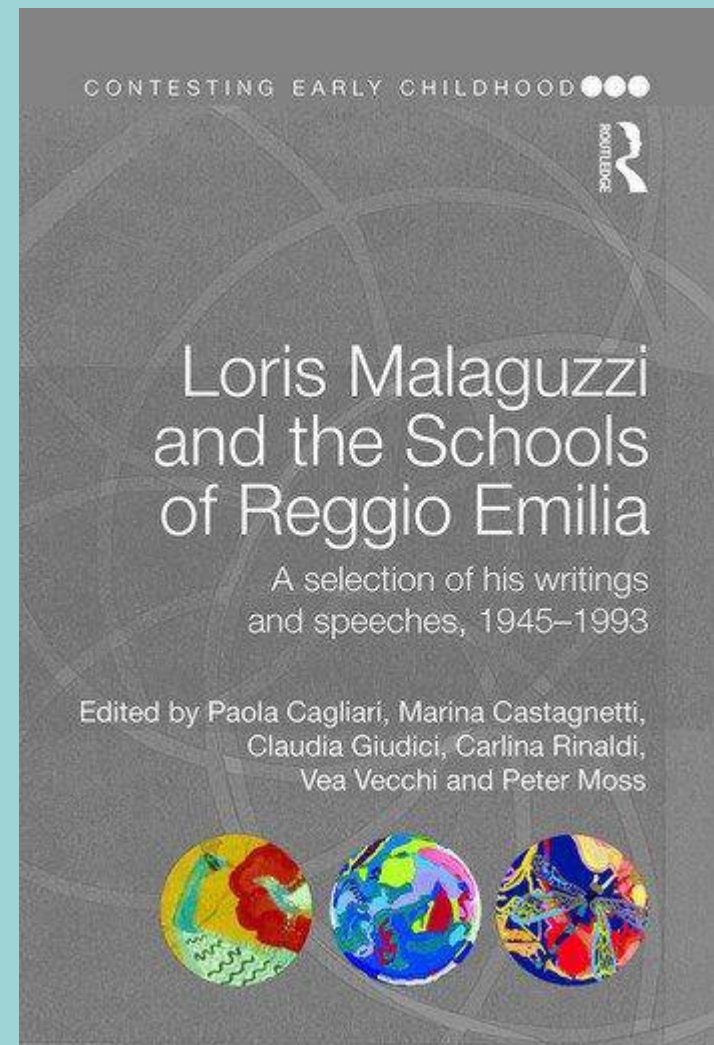
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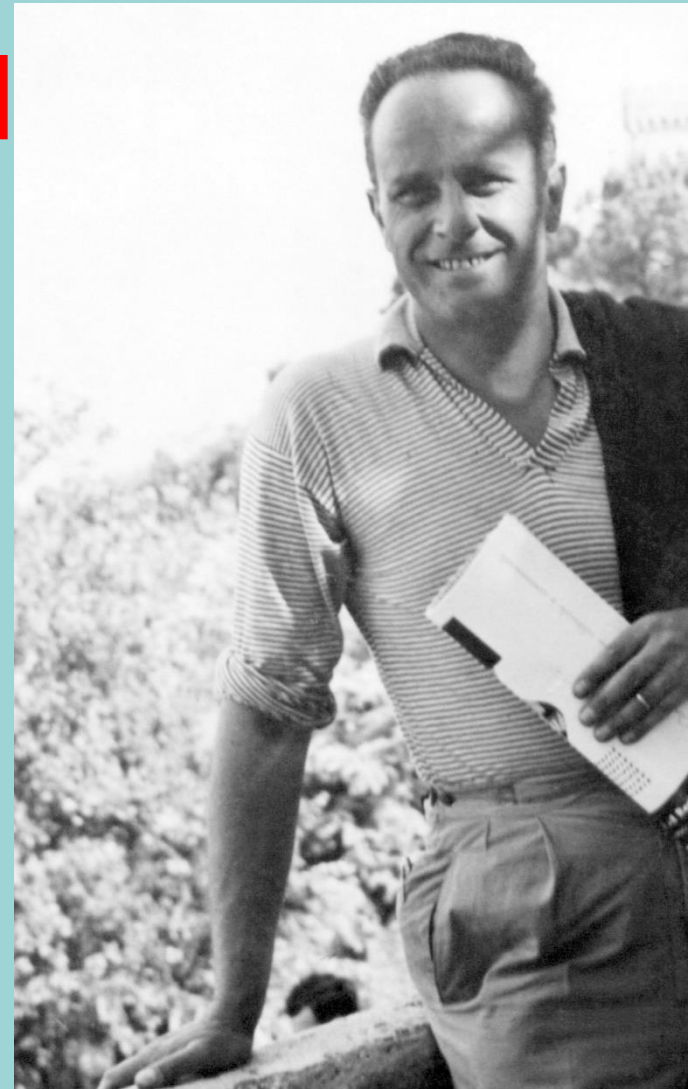
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1. Historical, political and cultural **influences** on Malaguzzi's life and pedagogical work
2. Malaguzzi's multiple **roles** in the educational project of Reggio Emilia
3. Some **provocations** Malaguzzi offers to contemporary early childhood education – his contemporary importance

Use Malaguzzi's own words



Historical, cultural and political influences



Malaguzzi's early life

1920: born in Correggio, near Reggio Emilia

1923: moves to Reggio Emilia

1938: qualifies as a teacher → worked in primary, secondary and adult education

1947: newspaper work

1951: psychology course → employee of *comune* of RE in centre for school children with psychological difficulties and in summer camps + newspaper and theatre work

Malaguzzi and the schools of RE

1963: first municipal school in RE for young children 3-6...1971: first school for 0-3 → Malaguzzi as Consultant, then Director of Schools

1981: RE exhibition opens in Stockholm

1984: Malaguzzi officially retires but remains active

1991: *Newsweek* nominates Diana school as one of best in world

1992: LEGO Prize

1993: Kohl International Teaching Award

1994: dies in RE

Historical influences

1920-1994: a life lived in the 'short 20th century'

Fascist regime (1923)...World War (1939)...Nazi Occupation (1943)... Liberation (1945)...
economic miracle (1950s-60s)...*Anni di Piombo*
[Years of Lead] (1970s)...rise of neoliberalism
(1980s)...Fall of Berlin Wall (1989)...Dissolution
of Soviet Union (1991)

Historical influences: Fascism

*“We asked what prompted the people of Reggio Emilia to design an early childhood education system founded on the perspective of the child. [Bonacci, Mayor of Reggio Emilia in the 1960s] replied that the **fascist experience had taught them** that people who conformed and obeyed were dangerous, and that in building a new society it was imperative to safeguard and communicate that lesson and nurture and maintain **a vision of children who can think and act for themselves**” (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013)*

Historical influences: Liberation

“I have had three of these places where I learned to speak and to live[. . .] [I must] hold on to these three places: Sologno, Villa Cella, La Liberazione [The Liberation]”

*“I remember these were times [after the Liberation] when **everything seemed possible**... At that time, after the war, after the grief, and after the ruins, there was a very strange phenomenon, impetuous and strong, it made possible a great longing, great fervour and great excitement. It was the ridiculous capacity of **being able to think anything**, and to think that **anything could be physically realised**” (1992)*

Cultural influences

Reggio Emilia in a region with:

- dynamic capitalist economy based on SMEs
- long established co-operative movement
- strong 'social capital'...dense networks of civic associations instilling habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness

Political influences

Reggio Emilia in a region with:

- strong left-wing politics...post-war Italian Communist Party (PCI) had mass membership, governed many towns and cities across Northern Italy...active in many fields to improve the lives of citizens
- 1945: Malaguzzi joins PCI

“[When I joined the PCI] I knew nothing about politics...of Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, Togliatti. But I was sure I was taking the side of the weakest, of the people who carried most hope’ (1989-1991)

Political influences

- The municipal schools of RE are part of a ‘**municipal school revolution**’ in the 1960s in towns and cities across Northern Italy...*comuni* take responsibility for the education of their young children and create ‘**local cultural projects of education**’

“[Malaguzzi’s ideas and work] were influenced by his participation in the struggles of democratic and progressive movements and by various examples of cooperative education” (Catarsi, 2004)



Malaguzzi's multiple roles in the educational project of Reggio Emilia

Multiple roles as Director of the municipal schools:

- administrator of school system
- pedagogical leader and researcher
- educator (workforce, parents, politicians, citizens)
- student...reads prodigiously
- networker
- campaigner and community activist

In close contact with children, parents, teachers

*“Malaguzzi offers an alternative of **democratic and participatory management**...He is a pedagogical leader constantly engaged with and contributing to the everyday lives of educators and children, working ceaselessly to involve children, educators and parents with his ideas and to learn with them. He did not just plan new schools and ensure their sound administration; he was constantly in them once open, taking the pedagogical pulse, engaging with all and sundry, talking and listening. When he spoke about education and schools it was from first-hand and current experience” (Moss, 2016)*

- Malaguzzi assumes the role of **intellectual**...connecting analysis of contemporary conditions \Rightarrow theories \Rightarrow practice...and he expects teachers to adopt the same role

*“The role of the teacher that the need for **school renewal** calls for is a **new type of intellectual**, a producer of knowledge connected with the **demands of society** that are expressed through various types of organisation” (1975)*

Malaguzzi provokes us to think about the **meaning of educational leadership** and the **type of management** required for an innovative, democratic and dynamic public education system...

and the role of the teacher



Some other provocations Malaguzzi
offers to contemporary early
childhood education

Early childhood education is a political practice

*“[Pedagogy is] always a **political discourse** whether we know it or not...it clearly means working with **political choices**” (1970s)*

- **Political choices** are made in response to **political questions** that have alternative and often conflicting answers...Malaguzzi's political questions and choices are a provocation to us to engage in a democratic politics of education, e.g...

What is our diagnosis of the times?

*“Our conception of pedagogy is dynamic, not mummified. Either pedagogy is remade, reconstructed and updated **based on the new conditions of the times**, or it loses...its capacity to correspond to the times it lives in, and above all to foresee, anticipate and prepare the days of tomorrow”*
(1969)

What are the conditions of our times?

How should education respond to them, e.g. harm done by neoliberalism...the environmental crises...the pandemic

What is our image of the child?

*“A declaration [about the image of the child] is not only a necessary act of clarity and correctness, it is the **necessary premise for any pedagogical theory, and any pedagogical project**” (1990)*

Malaguzzi's political choice

*“There are rich children and poor children. We [in Reggio Emilia] say **all children are rich, there are no poor children**. All children whatever their culture, whatever their lives are rich, better equipped, more talented, stronger and more intelligent than we can suppose” (1990)*

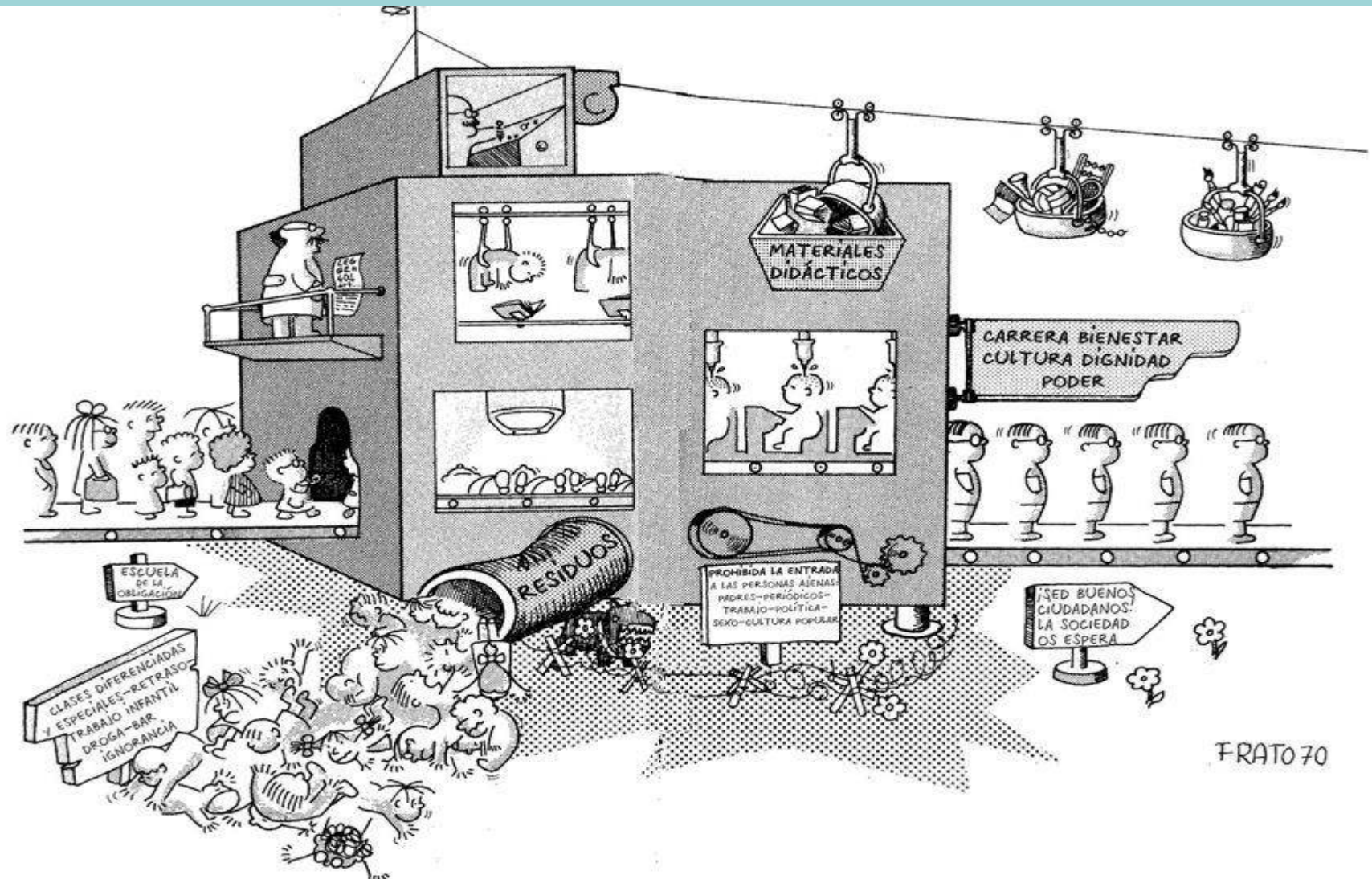
- **Rich children** are citizens with rights...born with 100 languages...protagonists

“[They are] not bottles to be filled” but “active in constructing the self and knowledge through social interactions and inter-dependencies”...“not bearers of needs, but bearers of rights, values and competencies” (1990)

What is our image of the EC centre? Malaguzzi's political choice

EC centres are **NOT**

- childcare centres (but 'must adapt to factory hours')
- businesses selling products to parent-consumers
- substitute homes ('*scuola materna*')
- preparation for compulsory school ('*scuola preparatoria*')
... 'This concept completely contradicts certain beliefs we have: that children's education begins at birth' (1977)
- factories using human technologies to process children



EC centres **ARE**:

- **schools** providing education for children as a citizen right – ‘*scuola dell’infanzia*’...”*focusing on children and their rights*” (1969)
- “*living centres of open and democratic culture*’...for ‘*creating culture*” (1971)
- a **public responsibility** and **public spaces**... completely open to families and local communities...”*no longer seen as a separate institution...but participating in building an educating society*” (1975)



What pedagogy?

Malaguzzi's political choice

Malaguzzi rejects a 'prophetic pedagogy' that

“knows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen, does not have one uncertainty...[It] prophesies everything, sees everything to the point that it is capable of giving you recipes for little bits of actions, minute by minute, hour by hour, objective by objective, five minutes by five minutes. This is something so coarse, so cowardly, so humiliating of teachers' ingenuity, a complete humiliation for children's ingenuity and potential” (1992)

...and its accompanying ‘Anglo-Saxon ‘testology’, with
“*Its rush to categorise...where it is enough to do some tests
on an individual and immediately the individual has been
defined and measured in some way...which is nothing but a
ridiculous simplification of knowledge, and a robbing of
meaning from individual histories*” (1988, 1990)

“CHILDREN HAVE A HUNDRED LANGUAGES: **THEY ROB**
THEM OF NINETY NINE
SCHOOL AND CULTURE” (1970s)

Not a fan of prescriptive curricula and standardised assessments!

What pedagogy?

Malaguzzi wants a pedagogy fit for 'rich' children

- a pedagogy of relationships, listening and liberation
- a pedagogy of children and adults co-constructing knowledge through processes of building, sharing and revising theories, always in dialogic relationship with others
- a pedagogy that values and desires the unexpected and unpredictable...wonder and surprise

What fundamental values for education?

Malaguzzi's political choice

- complexity and inter-connectedness
- subjectivity and uncertainty
- wonder and surprise
- research and experimentation
- participation and democracy

Malaguzzi's choice of values in his own words

Inter-connectedness

*“Interconnecting, the great verb of the present and the future. A great verb we must be capable of understanding deep down, and of conjugating as part of our hard work; bearing in mind that we live in a world no longer made of islands, but in a world made of webs... in which **interference, interaction, inter-disciplinarity is the constant**, even when we cannot see it, even when we think it doesn’t exist, or that it isn’t there. **Interdependence** is there” (1989)*

Uncertainty

*“Ours is the ‘**profession of uncertainty**’...I believe uncertainty should be freed of its small degree of negativity and any denials of its virtuous nature; it must be brought back as a **constituent element of our lives**, of our relations with ourselves, with others and with nature...as a constituent element of our growth...**Uncertainty can be turned into something positive** when we start to test it and see it as a state of ferment, a motor of knowledge” (1988)*

Surprise and wonder

*“[The strength of Reggio came] precisely from this fact that every other week, every other fortnight, every month, something unexpected, something that surprised us or made us marvel, something that disappointed us, something that humiliated us, would burst out in a child or in the children. But this was what gave us **our sense of an unfinished world, a world unknown, a world we ought to know better**” (1990)*

Surprise and wonder

*“Perhaps the attitude that is necessary [for adults working with young children] is an **attitude that remains open to wonder and to marvelling**. If you are equipped with this - you as an adult - then children will respond to you with a great openness to wonder and to marvelling” (1991)*

Research and experimentation

*“[T]he scuole dell’infanzia managed by comuni effectively constitute an experience that **consciously attempts real research and experimentation**, and which has decided to debate and examine the choices made, or that could be made, with workers, families and the people”(1975)*

Democracy

Democracy lived out in pedagogy, relationships, everyday life and in management

“[The school must be capable of] living out processes and issues of participation and democracy in its inter-personal relations, in the procedures of its progettazione (project work) and curriculum design, in the conception and examination of its work plans, and in operations of organisational updating” (c.1984)

Democracy

- Parents must participate in all aspects of school management...not just administration but also pedagogical/educational issues

“Families must be taken from a passive position as pure consumers of a service and brought to an active, direct presence and collaboration” (1964)



After political questions and political choices,
Malaguzzi asked **technical questions**

First ‘what do we want?’ then ‘how do we get it?’...

What conditions?

Malaguzzi understood that for transformative change, we must ask ‘**under what conditions is it possible?**’

*“[Today] we hope for a new expression of our art and our literature, and more than that, new substance...However waiting for the birth of an artist does not mean waiting for a miracle from heaven. True, **we cannot create an artist at will, but it is equally true that the conditions for an artist to be born and to develop can be created from now on**” (1945)*

Conditions for the municipal schools

- Fully integrated 0-6 EC system in education providing schools
- School workforce: 'rich' educators for 'rich' children
 - proper pay
 - time for continuous professional development and other collegial activities
 - an end to 'deforming solitude' and 'humiliation'... importance of the group, support, solidarity...working with a rich pedagogy
 - cooperative and non-hierarchical working relations

- **Other conditions** include:
 - pedagogical co-ordination from *pedagogistas* and psychologists (support system)
 - provision of *ateliers* and *atelieristas* (100 languages)
 - two teachers together in each class
 - architecture and design: valuing all environments indoor and outdoor as spaces of learning, including kitchens, bathrooms and gardens
 - participation by parents and the local area
- (from 1972 'Rule book for municipal schools)

Malaguzzi is intensely practical and his focus on conditions has enabled a network of nearly 50 schools to continue evolving an open, democratic and creative early childhood education for over 50 years...

an example of a 'real utopia' that combines desirability and achievability

Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia:

- **contest today's dominant narrative** of early childhood education...instrumental, technical, economic
- **demonstrate that alternative narratives** are possible and sustainable...if we ask political questions, make political choices, analyse necessary conditions
- provoke us to construct our own **local cultural projects of education**



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