

# What do we want for our early childhood workforce? Images, qualities and conditions

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- Decades of missed opportunities, including the early years workforce...and continuing dependence on low paid and low qualified women 'childcare' workers
- What do we want for our early childhood workforce?
- Offer my answers...image, qualities, conditions for the future early childhood worker
- But there are alternatives, other answers...we need public debate about alternatives – a democratic politics of education, not a dictatorship of no alternatives

# Decades of missed opportunities for early childhood services

- **1945-1997**: government disinterest and policy neglect...split system (childcare/education)...divided provision and workforce
- **Late 1980s**: rapid growth of marketised 'childcare' system and for-profit providers (1989-97: private day nursery places from 46,500 to 173,500)...early childhood becomes big business
- As private marketised provision increases, early childhood provision increasingly depends on low paid and low qualified women 'childcare' workers...an essential part of the business model

# Decades of missed opportunities for early childhood services

- **1997 – today** : early childhood becomes a policy priority...many initiatives...increased resources...first steps towards integration (administration, regulation, curriculum)

**BUT**

# Decades of missed opportunities for early childhood services

- No reflection/assessment/deliberation on policy options ►► more of the same...more marketization, more private provision
- Integration stalls with ‘wicked’ issues unresolved, i.e. entitlement, funding, type of provision...and workforce
- Did not get beyond the ‘childcare’/‘education’ split in how we think, talk or do early childhood...today we still talk about early childhood services as ‘childcare’
- Missed opportunity for an integrated, universal and democratic early childhood education (education-in-its-broadest-sense) with an integrated, well qualified and well paid workforce

# Decades of missed opportunities for early childhood services

- Some efforts to improve qualifications of early childhood workforce
- BUT**
- Low in ambition (graduate 'leader' at best)...Sweden/Denmark= 50% graduate workforce; New Zealand=80%
  - Never tackled pay and conditions...can't fix this when rely on private provision and parental fees

# 'Provision and use of preschool childcare in Britain' (TCRU, 2015)

- 'Childcare' workforce = around 300,000 (excludes teachers)
- Some increase in qualifications...but mostly below graduate level
- Childcare workers not rewarded for increase, still low paid
  - average £6.60 per hour or £10,324 per annum (2012-14) compared with £13.10 per hour or £24,128 per annum for other occupations
  - only 10p above the 'National Minimum Wage' level and £1.25 below the (real) 'Living Wage for the UK'
  - Pay particularly low for childcare workers in the private sector (£5.60 per hour compared with £7.80 per hour in the non-private sector)
- Still overwhelmingly female – 98%

# Decades of missed opportunities for early childhood services

We cannot continue

- tinkering with an inherently bad system
- relying on a strategy of more of the same, only a bit better
- depending on a devalued and gendered workforce

We have to confront the need for real transformation and this means asking and contesting political questions

*Not mere technical issues to be solved by experts...[but questions that] always involve decisions which require us to make **choices between conflicting alternatives** [Chantal Mouffe, 2007]*

# What do we want for our early childhood workforce?

To answer this political question, we need to start with more political questions, such as:

- What is your image of the child?
  - What is your image of the early childhood centre?
    - What is your image of the early childhood worker?

# What do we want for our early childhood workforce?

*'Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia: A selection of his writings and speeches, 1945-1993'*

Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994): teacher, psychologist and Director of municipal schools for young children in Reggio Emilia

# What do we want for our early childhood workforce?

Education is first and foremost a political practice

*“[Pedagogy is] always a political discourse whether we know it or not. It is about working with cultural choices, but it clearly also means working with political choices” [1970s]*

# What do we want for our early childhood workforce?

The first political question: what is your 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...***

*The absurd thing is that this explicit **public declaration of the identity of the child, which is the proper and unavoidable premise on which to base our theoretical foundation when starting work, is a quite unusual operation in a world more usually unclear and dominated by praxis (or at any rate doing) without the need for prior references”** [LM94.90]*

# What do we want for our early childhood workforce?

## RE's choice: the image of the 'rich' child

*“There are rich children and poor children. We [in Reggio] 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...If we start from the concept that all our children are rich children, and all need acknowledgement, all need great respect, much more than we concede today, we are crediting them with the capacity, the talents, the resources that must emerge because children possess these qualities”*  
[LM96.91]

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What image of the child?

The 'rich' child who is born

- with a 100 languages
- a protagonist, an active subject...competent, seeking to make meaning of the world...with the capacity to learn
- a citizen and subject of rights
- with limitless and unknowable potentiality – “[W]e never know in advance what a body can do” [Baruch Spinoza]

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What image of the EC centre?

- Not as a business...not as a place to apply technologies to children to achieve predetermined goals and 'readiness' for school
- But as a
  - public space and place of encounter for all citizens
  - multi-purpose community resource capable of many projects... with limitless and unknowable potentiality – “[W]e never know in advance what a body can do”
  - place of education in its broadest sense
  - “living centre of open and democratic culture, enriched and informed by social encounters” [LM41.71]

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What image of the EC worker?

- Not as a substitute mother...not as a technician...not as a reproducer of pre-defined knowledge...not as a 'poor' worker for a 'poor' child
- But as
  - a 'rich' teacher for a 'rich' child
  - a co-constructor of knowledge, values and culture
  - a critical intellectual
  - a researcher and experimenter
  - a democratic professional

# My answers –What image of the EC worker? but there are alternatives

## A 'rich' teacher for a 'rich' child

*“The rich children are those requesting rich intelligence in others, rich curiosity in others, a very high and advanced capacity for fantasy, imagination, learning and culture in others” [LM95.90]*

*“The hundred languages of the children have to become the hundred languages of the teacher” [Carlina Rinaldi]*

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What image of the EC worker?

A co-constructor of knowledge, values and culture

“[Children are first and foremost] *active in constructing the self and knowledge through social interactions and inter-dependencies*” [LM94.90]

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What image of the EC worker?

### A critical intellectual

*“The need for renewal requires the kind of teacher who is a new type of intellectual, a producer of knowledge connected with organised social demands”* [LM59.75]

- Critical thinking about wider cultural, ecological, political, social and economic conditions...relating pedagogical work to these conditions, to a ‘diagnosis of the times’
- Contesting ‘dominant discourses’ (*“those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable”* [Nikolas Rose]), power relations and injustices

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What image?

### A researcher and experimenter

*“[Municipal schools] 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.... [We desire] pedagogical research as a permanent method realised together by teachers, auxiliary workers, families, citizens” [LM61.75]*

*“We want our research, as teachers, to be recognised. And to recognise research as a way of thinking, of approaching life, of negotiating, of documenting. It’s all research” [Carlina Rinaldi]*

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What image of the EC worker?

### A democratic professional

A professional with democracy as a fundamental value and practice working in a EC centre where *“[d]emocracy forms the foundation [and all] activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values”* [Swedish Preschool Curriculum]

*“[This concept of the democratic professional is based on] participatory relationships and alliances. It foregrounds collaborative, cooperative action between professional colleagues and other stakeholders. It emphasises engaging and networking with the local community”* [Pamela Oberhuemer]

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What qualities?

- Reflective, critical and curious...love of border crossing and openness to new ideas, perspectives, readings of the world
- Aware that knowledge and understanding is partial, provisional and perspectival...there are other 'readings of the world'
- Valuing diversity, subjectivity, uncertainty
  - "I must respect positions opposed to my own, positions that I combat earnestly and with passion"* [Paolo Freire]... *"ours is the profession of uncertainty"* [LM90.88]
- Creating opportunities for children's learning
- Welcoming the unexpected...a capacity for wonder and surprise

# My answers – but there are alternatives What qualities?

## Creating opportunities for children's learning

*“An active and constructive child stimulates the teachers to place more attention on the organisation of opportunities than on predefining objectives...[The role of the teacher is] removed from the fallacy of certainties and [reassumes] the responsibility to choose, experiment, discuss, reflect, and change, focusing on the organisation of opportunities rather than the anxiousness to pursue outcomes, and maintaining in their work the pleasure of amazement and wonder” [Aldo Fortunati]*

# My answers – but there are alternatives What qualities?

## Capacity for wonder and surprise

*“[Reggio Emilia’s] strength in resisting for so many years comes 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. A world that is a living witness to the children. To be capable of maintaining this gift of marvelling and wonder is a fundamental quality in a person working with children” [LM95.90]*

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What conditions?

- Fully integrated early childhood system with a fully integrated workforce based on an early childhood teacher (50%+ workforce)
- Strong initial graduate education and subsequent education (postgraduate qualifications and professional development)
- Commensurate pay and status – parity with school teachers
- Strong support from a ‘competent system’, e.g. *pedagogistas* to work with teachers and centres
- Adequate funding effectively dispersed, i.e. tax-based; 1% of GDP+; services funded not parents (funding linked to qualifications of staff)
- Rich and democratic curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation

# My answers – but there are alternatives

## What conditions?

- Framework curriculum – not prescriptive curriculum...scope for interpretation and addition...related to local context
- Pedagogy of relations and listening – not ‘prophetic pedagogy’
- Evaluation based on participatory methods, e.g. pedagogical documentation – not ‘testology’

# Prophetic pedagogy

*“knows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen, knows everything, does not have one uncertainty, is absolutely imperturbable...[It] prophesies everything, sees 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’ intelligence, a complete humiliation for children’s intelligence and potential”** [LM98.92]*

# '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"*

[LM90.88]

# To conclude

These are my answers, what I want to see

There are other answers, other possibilities

We need public debate about political questions and alternatives

We need a democratic politics of education, not a dictatorship of no alternatives

To discuss, contact me at  
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For a FreeBook of 'Loris Malaguzzi and the  
schools of Reggio Emilia' go to  
<https://www.routledge.com/posts/9621>