

Speech by Loris Malaguzzi at international conference “*Who am I then? Tell me that first*”.
Knowledges in dialogue to guarantee citizenship to the rights and potentials of children and adults,
Reggio Emilia, March 1990
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[...] At this point I would like to take the discussion back to what children can be. Again a powerful image: 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. On the other hand poor children exist. They are not poor in the class-based way identified up to now, but poor like Alice [in Wonderland]: poor in the sense they do not feel that measure of identity they need to survive. These are the poor children. 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. It is not possible for us to continue to tolerate in silence, with a universal complicity, that human intelligence and individual intelligence be wasted, consumed, come up against obstacles and go unused. It is not possible for us to constantly cover everything up in a collective unspoken agreement. Nor can we think of children as objects we can deprive, offload, declare poor, declare impoverished. Poor children get what adults want for them. They can be left outside the door, put inside the door, have any kind of schools, any kind of teachers.

Instead rich children must be richly acknowledged. However all children are rich, this is the issue. I know what you might say, but we start from a strong position, strong with reality and hope, and we have a lot of confirmation coming from different areas, coming from discoveries in the neurosciences and biology. For example biology is a subject that has no existence on a pedagogical level, it is absent, no-one knows about it. [Yet] our life is in there. How can we under-nourish it so?

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. If we start from a small and needy poor image of the child, as happens in European countries, and happens elsewhere in even more dramatic desperate terms, then immediately a sort of hierarchy arises of a racist kind. [...]. Travelling around Italy, travelling around Europe, travelling everywhere, you find these differences. Certainly, the differences exist. [...]

If we were to go in this direction we would go towards a strong image and a strong pedagogy. Weak pedagogy for poor children is the pedagogy of nurses. [...]

We are at a point in history where fake science really is being used in a culture of nursing that above all saves the poor and weak. However the children we generally see are not poor and weak. They are absolutely normal children, absolutely pre-disposed to joy and gaiety, pre-disposed to growing, to singing; and [yet] they are restricted. It is my impression that after all our achievements over the years, after all the events of history, all the scientific discoveries, the *tabula rasa* image of children still predominates. The anonymous child, the silent child, the child forced to be silent, the child who does not speak, the inaudible child, is a child who will go along with anything. Adults, the economy of adults, the economies and policies of governments, know exactly where to divert the money, the wealth [...].

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