Powerful Children

Some 'Big Questions'…

- What *is* power?
- Where is the learning power in schools/classrooms/early learning settings?
- What is schools' view of childhood – *my* view of childhood?
- How does this image connect to my philosophy of learning?
- How does it influence my pedagogical stance?
- How does their image of the child affect the 1000s of decisions teachers make everyday?

What does it mean to be a powerful learner?

influence

CONTROL

strength

energy

capacity

potential

capability

Re-define Power

External Power OVER

…..or….

Internal Power to BE

Power to DO

"There are hundreds of different images of the child. Each one of you has inside yourself an image of the child that directs you as you begin to relate to a child.

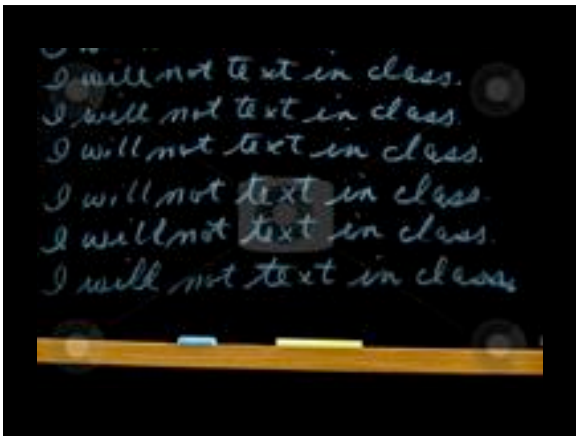
This theory within you pushes you to behave in certain ways; it orients you as you talk to the child, listen to the child, observe the child. It is very difficult for you to act contrary to this internal image.

For example, if your image is that boys and girls are very different from one another, you will behave differently in your interactions with each of them."

Loris Malaguzzi, Reggio Emilia pedagogical founder

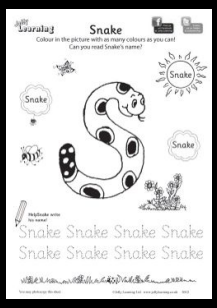
Four Views of the Child

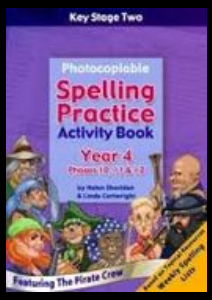
- **Innocent**
  – we must protect them
- **Threat**
  – we must control them
- **Empty or Incomplete**
  – we must teach them everything
- **Competent and capable**
  – we must challenge them
  – We must respect them


I will not text in class.
I will not text in class.
I will not text in class.
I will not text in class.
I will not text in class.
I will not text in class.

Does she do this because she doesn't know how to work the TV?

2004





Pedagogy of Control

Mellinee Leslie University of Texas, Language Arts, vol. 80, no. 6, July 2003

"Extensive use of worksheets actually hinders the acquisition of literacy for all children…worksheets are extremely limiting and confusing for children who are emerging in their literacy skills."

"A worksheet-driven curriculum violates the literacy rights and learning potential of special needs children."

"Could you at least lay off the flash cards until we can see a head?"

Active or Passive?
Receiver or Constructor?

Do we see children as *passive receivers* of education?

School is *'done to them'*

Or as ACTIVE PROTAGONISTS in their learning?

co-construct understandings

have a voice in their learning

Too many of our teaching practices betray an view of children as competent learners

They are robbed of their power to be an active co-constructor of understandings

Their voice is not heard

Their 'languages of learning' are not valued

"When the competent child is born, so too is the competent parent."

Carla Rinaldi

What does this mean for the competent educator?

Provocation…

How do we see the

'under 5 year old'

who will now start school?

…or the 5 year old who will now

be in preschool?

Empty? Incomplete?

"They won't know how to do anything!"

"They won't be able to do the things we expect them to do at school."

"They will need so much help."

"They'll be bored in preschool."

"We'd better have an intensive teaching time so they know how to be at school."

Innocent?

"They'll be scared of the big kids."

"They're too little for school on their own."

Threatening?

"They won't be able to sit and listen like they have to at school."

"They need more than what we can offer at kindy. We'll have to be more structured for the 5 year olds."

"I can't be expected to teach such a wide range of ages in one class."

The Challenge…

To see the 'under 5 year old' as a competent and capable learner

Changes the mindset from *"How will the child be ready for school?"*

to

"How can the school environment **continue** *the child's competent learning that happens prior-to-school?"*

And

"How is the **school** *becoming ready for the child?"*

CONTINUUM OF VIEWS OF CHILD

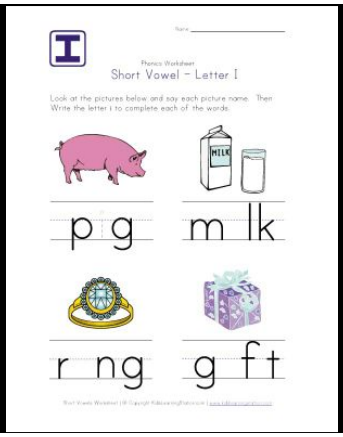
Empty	Competent
Incomplete	Capable
Incapable	Powerful
Passive	Active Protagonist

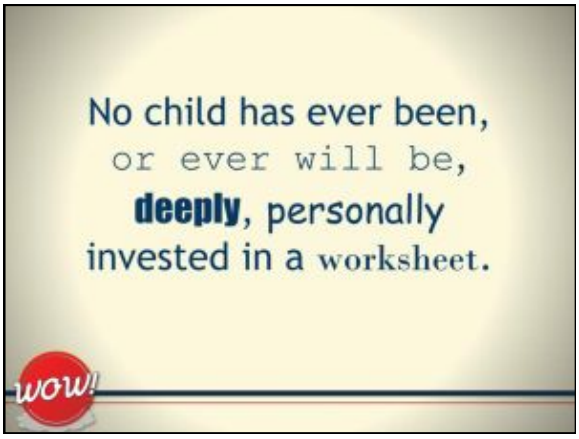
Our Image of Child Influences…

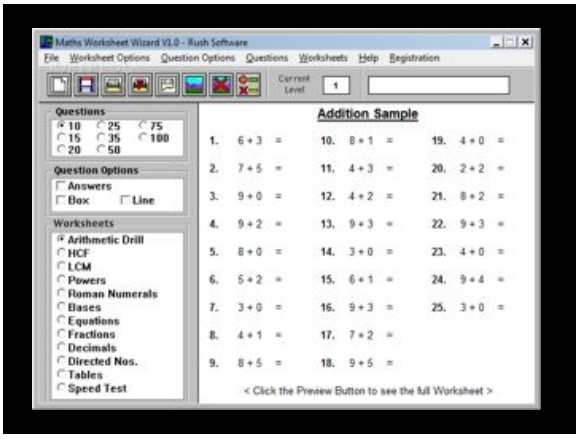
1. **Relationships -** and interactions *with* children and *about* children
2. **Learning Environment** - space, materials, time
3. **Pedagogy** – decisions about learning and teaching methodologies

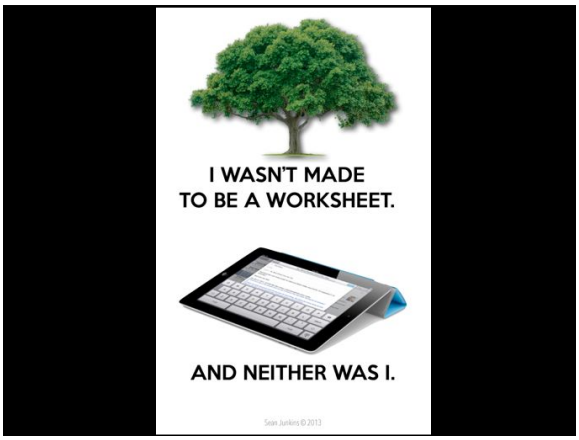
Powerful Learning Experiences

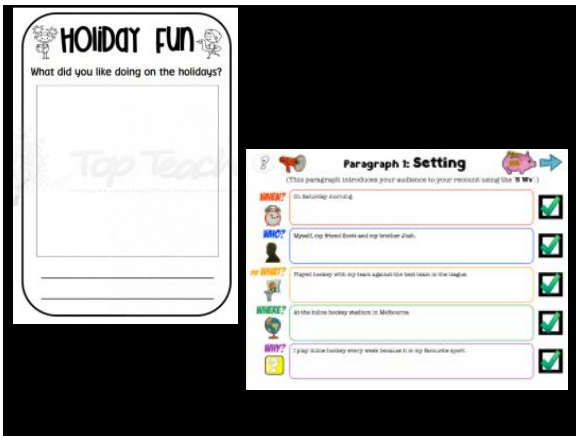
- Experiences and materials can hold power or potential for learning
- When children are viewed as 'incomplete' or 'threatening'…
  - Limited way to perform task or use materials
  - "Bells and whistles" toys
  - Little intellectual engagement or challenge
  - Direct learning to a narrow or specific outcome
  - Passive interaction with materials











Powerful Learning Opportunities

- Are we limiting children's learning by the type of learning opportunities we offer?
- Are we seeing children as 'less than capable' by the way we present learning opportunities?
- Are we giving children mixed messages about how we see them as learners?
- How are we helping children to see themselves as powerful learners?

Planning WITHOUT the Child in Mind

Are we teaching children that…

- Learning is something that is done *to* you
- Learning is something the teacher controls
- I don't need to think about what I'm learning
- I just need to do what the teacher wants from me
- If I'm quiet and do this activity the teacher will be pleased
- To be compliant but not engaged

“Nothing without joy!”
Loris Malaguzzi
info@lisaburman.com.au