

Carla Rinaldi Lecture
(I: Interviewer P: Participant)

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Thank you, my most heartfelt thanks to His Excellency Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce and Mrs Scarce; the Honourable Jay Weatherill, Premier of South Australia; the Honourable Grace Portolesi, Minister of Education and Child Development; Gabrielle Kelly, Joe Hay and everyone in the Thinkers In Residence team; all the partners, who together with the Thinker Residence team have made this residency a reality and who have cared for me so well; my dear friend, [0:22:42.8 Jan Milligan] who has come from Melbourne to be my support and cultural mediator. Everyone I have met so far in South Australia, I have been so warmly welcomed and your enthusiasm is overwhelming, my gratitude, my gratitude to all of you here in this important moment.

I wish also to give a special thanks to all in South Australia and indeed those around the world to aspire to construct a better future, a better humanity for and through the education of our children and young people. But let me start with a question, an open key question for our experience in Reggio Emilia a question that was and still is, I repeat, an open question. Who is the subject that we educate? Who is a child? How does he/she learn? What are the tasks of a school for a young child and what are the tasks for a school in general? Questions that belong to all of us because depending on how we give answers we define our role as teachers, our role as parents, our role as educators, the relationship between teaching and learning, the identity itself of the school and of our living together inside the school, the meaning of the school itself.

Let's try then to ask ourselves this simple but founding question again. Who is a child? Who is a girl child, which identities, which rights? Try to think about it and please bring always this question with you. The Chart of Rights of UNO gives us a definition; the books of psychology give us another. You, each of you, is thinking now, is searching for, and each of you could give an answer. That is why I invite you to modify the question. In fact, as you know, good questions are better than good answers. To modify the question or better to express it in a more complex way which could help us to understand better what is the image of the child, the image of the child that we have, that you have, that the sciences have, that the legislation has, that the society has.

The Premier before was talking about this and in fact this is the big issue. The word "image" is a philosophical word and it introduces a substantial modification. It makes us reflect on the fact that it does not exist, only one definition, only one answer to the question, "who is a child," but many. As many as the point of view, the values, that guides us in reading and interpreting reality. What is then an image? In the society of images which kind of approach do we want to give to

this word? I offer you a possibility. I think – we think – that it is an interpretation of reality as a picture. A picture is an interpretation of reality because I think that each of us sees interpreted the reality in different way. This is the big theme of subjectivity, of relativity, of the point of view, this question, this idea, open to the issue of our relateness, our sense of limits.

So far there are many images of the child, among those that of psychology, that of psychoanalysis, that of the pedagogical theory, that of mass media, that each of has. These are all important and interesting images but many of them tend to underline the needs of the child, what the child does not have, what the child is not. For example, in Italian childhood is *infanzia* that comes from the French word, *enfant*, that means “does not speak.” It is the only category that is defined for what they are not able to do. So what comes out is a weak, weak, fragile child full of needs to whom we need to give one-way relationship, no reciprocity, a child of whom it is possible to decide everything, more a private subject: son or daughter of. Often, in certain reality, a sort of property that the parents can do and not do what they want, a subject that the societies can ignore, abuse, hide.

Few, very few people, even if in the third millennium, even if after many declaration, even if after the many researchers and expertise highlight the potentiality of the child, very few societies and country choose and act starting not only from the needs, from the fragilities of the child, from his or her being unprotected, but rather from his or her rights, is her competencies, is her potentialities. The child, as the Premier said before, has the best essence of human being. Childhood is a common good, like the water, like the earth, like the sun. So in this permanent debate all over the world, among the many interesting possibilities, one shared by the many but above all lived with our children and teacher in Reggio Emilia, is the image of the child that we choose and we still are choosing, the identity that we recognise and we want to offer to you tonight to choose in terms that deeply means to choose. That is to take on responsibility. It does not mean to go from uncertainty to certainty but rather than to risk towards an image which is more suitable, more respectful, richer of the subject himself, too choose to risk with the children.

In fact, we choose and we still are confirming our choice, thanks to our teacher, children and parents, for the image of the child, strong, rich, powerful, competent, is enormous switch. And I am not talking about all the children. I am trying to define that all the children can be intelligent. All the children, also those with disabilities because they disabilities quite often our own disability as a society. In fact in Reggio we prefer to define the children with a disability, children with special rights instead of special needs. We are not excluding their needs. We recognise that but we tend to underline, to exhort, the possibility, the potentialities, the resources and the rights of the children. It is likely, really, to switch. The glass is not anymore full/empty. It is, how can I say ... half empty. Sorry, excuse me, is understandable what I am sharing? It's not half empty. It is half full.

Not only the child with a need but the child of the rights, protagonist and constructor of his own life and of the sense of life, in relationship with the others and with the world, a child is strong and rich, the strength and richness of curiosity, the strength and richness of the wise, the strength of those who want to have the tools for living, the strength and the richness of this wonder and astonishment, the strength and richness of curiosity, the wonderful curiosity of our children. Competent, I said, competent to learning, to loving and to be loved since the moment of birth; competent in the relationship and interaction with a great enthusiasm and curiosity for the otherness from him and her; competent in constructing himself while he and she constructs the world; competent in constructing explanation, theories, about the world; competent in reflecting; competent in thinking; bearer of values and rights; constructor of values and rights.

And these rights have to be recognised since the moment of birth. The first right is above all recognise them as citizen since they are born. That means that the family, their community, their society have to take responsibility of those rights and guarantee that those rights are respected and recognised. But we have to be aware by the fact that to recognise these rights means to be able to change: to change our point of view; to change our organisation of time and space; to change the way in which our schools, our houses, sometimes our cities are designed; to change our time with the time that the children offer us; maybe to change a part of our economy, to welcome the rights of children, to welcome. Childhood means to change the way in which we organise our life. All the parents know it but the most important is to recognise that these are rights of the new citizen, that they will not be the citizen of the future. They are the citizens of the present and they bring in their hands the future.

I said bearer, bearer of values, values such as solidarity, optimism, availability, courage, playfulness, joy; bearer of a new concept of beauty as in interdependency. These values have to become rights. And among these rights and these values that they possess, endeavour to be recognised, there is one that I would like to offer to your reflection. It is the right to the subjectivity; the value of subjectivity, of uniqueness; the right to be recognised as unique. Each of us is unique in this room. The diversities is here because each of us is unique and each child is unique. Why this? The recent study of the brain can clearly tell us about the uniqueness of the brain and the uniqueness of each of us, the uniqueness of every child, the uniqueness of his or her cognitive strategies, the uniqueness of his or her learning and knowing ways, the uniqueness of its time of learning. Nobody can order us. Now, you have to learn. We learn when we want and when we can.

That means to recognise the differences as values and put them in dialogue. But at this point I really need not only the help of Tina, one of my new but good friends in the team of Thinkers in Residence, but also the help of an old friend of mine, Laura: *Laura* in Italian. I met her many years ago in Reggio Emilia. I met her thanks to the teacher that have been taking these pictures. But I am always

grateful to Laura because she explained very clearly the big change, the big switch, regarding the image of the child.

I met, I told you, Laura when she was 10 months old. And what we are going to see is something that happened and can happen every morning in one of our infant toddler centres. There is a situation where many children are together. Some of them are playing together and some others are related to one of two teachers together. Here in this moment Laura is in a space, common space, with her other friends but she has the possibility to stay a little apart. And as we like to say, she is reading a book. We in a provocative way use the word “reading” because it’s not that reading start when we teach the children to read. They read images. They read the sign of life. They are able to read the hundred languages. But let’s go back to Laura. She is 10 months old and in general she is a child that is defined as a child that cannot speak and cannot walk. But thanks to this picture we can share together the big emotion of discovering what probably you know very well, looking at your children in your school and families, that children, they don’t speak the verbal languages when they are 10 months old. But they are able, only after 10 months of life, to speak the other 99 languages.

Now, look at the picture very carefully. Look at the details because with a child of this age you have always to be very, very careful to the details. Look at the position of the body of Laura and the position of the body of the teacher. No walls between them but look what happens. Did you see the change? Look at the body position of the teacher. Look at the body position of Laura. Now, did you see the change? The body of Laura, the body language, moved to the direction of the teacher and the teacher capture the intention of Laura that was to go closer. But look at the face of Laura. Can you see that she change expression? Is visible? But especially you have to look to this one. Do you know that this finger is a key in the history of humanity because it’s pre-verbal. That means that we can talk without speaking.

So the child at 10 months old can use clearly this kind of language. The body language, we said, and now you can see Laura is asking something. Without talking but she is asking and you can understand. Because now she is using three different languages: the body language through also the finger and the expression of the face. And now this is one of the keys of what is defined the Reggio approach but probably one of the key of the relationship between teaching and learning. The relationship that is key not only for our school but for our relationship with the children wherever they are, which is the role of the teacher.

I know that this is a metaphor but try to think that this issue could be the issue that you have with your children at 10 months, 10 years old, 20 years old at university. It is the role of the teacher to explain or to support their research of the children in founding not only good answer but new open questions. This is the key and this is where we have to stay longer and to reflect. In this case the teacher had this very short time but she decided to do what Jerome Bruner defined, the expansion of the

question, recognising that a child, a human being, the most important thing that he can do is to think, to reflect and to have good question to search and research for. This is a key difference among us and many other species, to have good question and to be able to find answers. But nowadays information are quickly captured by us. What is a new tension and a new tension and a new big issue, wonderful issue, is how to help the children have new good questions that open the door of the future.

So look at the face of Laura and look at what [0:50:53.3] the teacher, did, something apparently very simple but she offered the connection with the real watch. Instead of explaining, “Here’s a watch ... blah, blah.” And she gave this possibility that is expansion, that is to make connection between the elements and remember this picture was taken about 30 years ago. The watch was the kind of watch that were common at that time, doing tick tock, tick tock. So it’s clear enough, the concept of expansion, means a large question offering connection and possibility. But now I invite you really to look at Laura’s face. It’s amazing.

When I use the word “competent child” competent and amazing is being wonder in thinking and reflecting. If you look at her carefully you can metaphorically hear the sound of his brain making, what, hypothesis, making theories, like explanation, with element that she knows, satisfactory explanation. That means that obviously the children at this age and we can make mistakes. But what is important is to survive this attitude in making connection, in founding a relationship, in being a part of the mystery that is living with the others in the world. So try to bring home the face of Laura because the name of Laura is Laura but could be Josephine, could be Mary, could be whatever you want, is a child that exists all over the world. No gender issue, no ethic issue, no ability this, ability ... no, she is a child. Look and bring home this face. It’s a face of our childhood.

And now I can tell you that we were not wrong thinking that Laura is thinking and reflecting. [Laughter] So this is a competent child but if we get confused by the fact that this is a mistake we are wrong. Laura will learn very soon that the watch on the paper does not do any sound. But what we have to help her to cultivate is this capacity of making connection, thinking, making hypothesis. Try to be creative. Everybody can be creative. We’re born as a creative thinker then something happens and that’s why only artists are defined as creative but each child is a creative child because this way of thinking and learning is a very creative way of thinking and learning.

We were talking about uniqueness of the brain. We have to say goodbye to Laura but we will meet other friends that come here from Reggio to share with you the meaning of the words that I am trying to say in my English, not always so clear. We said before uniqueness of the brain is very well known. We know, as also was underlined before, that the brain, thanks to neuroscience, we know very well the plasticity of the brain, the incompleteness, from the birth and the fact that the completeness comes during the first years. So we know very well, we know very

well, that the first year are key for the development of the child. The brain will be completed almost during the first six years of life in connection with the appropriate context. What is an appropriate context? Again, bring this issue at home, at the school, with you because this is the issue of quality, quality of time, space and their encounters.

So it's clear now that it's not an issue of quantity but an issue of quality. So it's clear now that it is time to say no to the anticipate child, the early learning child, the reading, writing too early; no to the child performing like an adult; no to consider the child as an object that has to be or better as an empty vase, vessel, that has to be filled or isolated in a glass bowl, a child that has to stay out of life. The competent child want to be with us. The key word that I offer you to reflect is reciprocity. Education is a reciprocal act. In fact, epistemology underlined as each of us is a context for the others influenced by the others. Knowledge, we know very well, is a permanent constructed process, permanent constructed process, with the other. We are reciprocal. We are interdependent. When do we learn this, very early, immediately.

Sorry, I forgot. Let's go back to Laura. Look at this picture. Do you remember? Sorry, it's my mistake. Look at the picture now. Can you recognise somebody? The lady to your left is Laura now and the child in her arm is Laura's son and the teachers are Laura's teachers that now are teacher of her son. Then after this is indeed indispensable. Again, to go back to the issue of uniqueness, as I said, the issue of interdependency for understanding the deepness of this message and for understanding better what these children want to share with us. This is the experience of Lorenzo and Matilda. She is Matilda, 20 months old girl. We will meet her after Lorenzo.

Matilda and Lorenzo are outside in the schoolyard with other friends. They have been together for almost 10 months, going to the same infant toddler centre, need we say, and sharing a lot of experiences. They know each other well. They trust each other very much even if obviously sometimes there are some problems as has happened in the relationship between human beings. The sequence that we are now going to look at that described here shows how young children are able to read and grasp the problems posed by the context to make hypothesis and prediction and particularly to organise themselves when attempting to find consistent solution, again, to try to organise and to be organised in founding solution.

A stone, a precious little stone that Matilda discovered involuntarily ends up in a tight spot and it's impossible for her to get her hands into recover it. This picture was taken by the teachers. We will talk later a little bit about the importance of documenting this moment for understanding and reflecting the relationship between teaching and learning processes. Impossible that is for her chubby hand, like Matilda's hands. So she makes a quick evaluation and again she formulates an hypothesis. [laughter] Another child, a smaller good friend, could offer help.

Lorenzo, 19 months old, seems to be just the one. It shouldn't be difficult to persuade him. Is not sufficient and so now I invite all of us to admire the capacity of Matilda to make hypothesis, to measure and to persuade the friend. Yes, it seems to be.

Lorenzo in fact follows his girlfriend with whom he has shared many games and adventure. And together they re-evaluated the problem. Lorenzo could be the one to do it. We can try. Under Matilda's attentive and grateful gaze Lorenzo slides into the gap. [laughter] Matilda's evaluation was correct. Lorenzo's hand is definitely smaller than hers. His hand is one that Matilda knows very well, a friendly and familiar one. She has grasped the difference and knows who and when to ask for help to resolve the problem. That is another high level of competencies. He did it. Here is the stone. Matilda, the satisfaction is great and Lorenzo proudly shows Matilda they retrieved the stone, pleased that he has fulfilled this expectation. And Matilda, somebody says like women used to do, counting on Lorenzo's ability does not neglect a careful recheck of the situation. [laughter]

Yes, that's really the right stone. But now, how did that happen? How can they now develop the situation in a very easy way? The rescuing of the treasure does not seem to be particularly important. Holding hands, Matilda and Lorenzo walk away towards challenges that will reinforce their feeling of mutual esteem, collaboration and probable friendship. And this is to make learning and loving visible and this is Matilda and Lorenzo's story, among the many others that we were ... our teachers, especially, were able to document and to reflect during all these years. So now can be probably easier for you to understand why it can say, continue to say, as many of you think, that they are constructor of questions, meaning theories. He/she is co-protagonist in the construction of the knowledge they possess: the hundred languages of learning, the hundred languages of communicating, the hundred languages of expressing their discoveries.

So with this kind of image of the child in this kind of experience as we are trying to build in Reggio, the most important verb is not to speak, to explain, to transmit but is to listen. We talk about listening as a metaphor; to listen with all our body, all our senses; to listen with all our sensitiveness; listening as availability towards the others; listening as waiting for the others; listening, giving value to the others; listening is a reciprocal verb. You and me, we are together, listener and together. I am not the speaker. You are not a passive hearing people. You and I, we are developing the speech, I with my words, you with your living, listening, because you are giving meaning and value to my speech. Even if you don't agree you are respectful.

That's why listening means to give value and importance to the other. It means to pose the centre position to the child or better to our reciprocal listening, to base our teaching on our listening of the children in this metaphorical way that for Reggio means to record, to document, to reflect and to change with and for the

children. To learn to listen his/her languages with all our senses, to remember always that listening is a very active verb, not only a recording but interpreting the message. It's a verb that change both the listener and the speaker. The listener and the person that is listening are part of the same message. It's a reciprocal verb and the teacher are key people. Teacher and teacher are invited to create a context of curiosity, research, a context where teacher's theories and discovery made by children could feel legitimated because they are listened to and supported and put forward.

Every child has to feel welcomed, motivated, in condition of wellbeing, the pedagogy of listening. But also teachers themselves have to feel welcomed and listened and the parents too. It's a learning community. It's also a community of mutual listening and to create an environment of listening is also to create an environment where teacher, parents and especially the children not only can be listened but can develop their discovery and their relationship. Now, come to visit us. Reggio, the environment is not for us, and for all of us here too, a container but is a part of the learning process and that means that the environment is an essential part of our brain.

The right to beauty, beauty as a connector, beauty as a love, beauty as care, beauty as to be part of the project of life, beauty as a connector, here we can see some picture of the environment where the story like Laura and the other that we will show later can be developed if the environment can offer opportunity to the children, to the teacher and to the parents. So the pictures are the pictures of places where we learn how to be a learning community, the three subjects tother. All buildings are new buildings that want to express the same values like community building, learning as a group, osmosis, communication, the rights of children, the rights of parents, the rights of teachers.

A quick comment about the light and the transparency, here the transparency is also a metaphor, is a meaning, is an ethical issue, to make visible in the permanent dialogue the learning processes of the children within the community and to make this dialogue permanent and visible for all. The buildings are not only schools but places where people of the school and people in the community can meet, share and develop the concept of learning community. Light is not light but lights. From the morning to the evening, from Spring through Winter, is a vibrant place. It's a vibrant school, vibrant with the community, different materials, different opportunities. Volume, we often talk and discuss all over the world about how to guarantee safety space to the children. This is a place, an infant toddler centre, for children from three months to three years.

The volume were developed because it has to be also a place where parents and community can meet but also where to offer to the children a challenging issue for all of us. We have to educate our children in the glass bowl or to let them to become aware of the risk. And this is an important issue, perspective that can help the development of the point of view. Each of these pictures could have been

commented but it is only for giving you the vision of these spaces that in our culture, in our reality, we developed. It does not mean that they are right or wrong. They are the result of our common research and that's why we offer it.

Now, we can move to the last quick encounter with our children that could be done thanks to their experience that could have happened in one of our schools, what you define preschool and we say *scuole dell'infanzia*. This happened at the end of the school year in a class of five years old and they can show us how they have learned not only to be a community but also to take reciprocal responsibility. And this is an experience developed in an elementary school. Now, the last encounter with our children I will do very quickly. Okay, now, because more than many other words the images of these children can tell us a lot about the competent child and what we are missing if we don't encounter him or her. This is at the end of the year, as I said. They are taking responsibility to prepare something for welcoming the three years old children. The three years old children will come in September. How can we welcome them? Maybe the best is preparing some indication of how to have a good life in the school. That means what is the best to do in the school, to play. So a group of them decided to prepare a booklet with rules of ring-around-the-roses. Now we are focused on three children, especially two of them, on the processes in which they were supporting each other. Let's encounter them now.

This is Giovanni. Giovanni is a very well appreciated child and he is invited to share with the teachers and the other group of children how does he think it is good to ... how is possible to draw ring-around-the-roses. He said, "Drawing ring-around-the-roses is easy because you draw some kids with their faces in front and not all of them with the faces but all with their back." You can see how clear is the image that he has but as usual, and this is the theory of the hundred languages, to move from a concept, from a language, to another it takes a switch, more difficulties. Let's look at Giovanni. He said, "I drew a different kind of ring-around-the-roses with kids with their hands in front." So Giovanni is very aware and we could talk a lot about self assessment and how critical can be the children with their own development and their own potentiality.

Then let's encounter quickly another protagonist. Leonardo is really a funny guy and easygoing that we know very well the profile after three years of life together. Leonardo say, "I think it is easy to draw ring-around-the-roses because you draw a round shape like this then kiss then it's done." But, look, what a great ring-around-the-roses Leonardo has done. There's an arm here, that little longer, but otherwise it wouldn't reach. [laughter] The first character, then we can stop but we could continue. Let's encounter Julia, again, the girl of the group. So self conscious, responsible, severe as many girls can be. Julia, "Well, they're not really ring-around-the-roses but I did best I could." Then you can understand also how smart Julia was, creating the diagonal.

What now is important to underline and we are close and we go to the hand. It could be in a quick overview how the teacher here, they didn't say, "You have to do this and this and this." But again, through documentation and reflection they were able to do something that is indispensable, to give time and trust to the children. So they were discussing together founding an incredible solution that is before they compared then go ahead. They discussed and they decided, "We can do this, our drawing, in three dimension. So we can understand which kind of mistake we have done." So look at Julia and she asked for six friends but she was not able to develop the program but at the same time she found some smart solution. Go ahead and you see how Julia invited the friend to have the head in this diagonal way because she was struggling with the concept.

Look at Leonardo. [laughter] Leonardo ... and there is a lot of laughing and fun in the learning processes. Learning is difficult but it's also joyful if you share it with friends. And if mistake are not punished but are part of your learning processes, if what you try is what you really are convinced that you can share with the others, go ahead. This is the larger group that is invited to support the big issue because even after this experience they were not able to find a solution but they were invited to look at the picture that the teacher has taken and to reflect. But Julia is still stopped on the program but now her friend, Giovanni, goes to help her and invite her to observe how the ring-around-the-roses is made. But she is still in term of difficulties because she can understand the back but not the front, how to combine. Then she continue and Giovanni is still trying to help here there, giving her a big suggestion, "Julia, try to do the profile."

To do a profile takes a lot of energy. The teacher told us that it is very difficult and to capture the different point of view is a very advanced moment. But the children here were close. Giovanni is showing her his position but Julia is still stuck. She added the other two but she is stuck. Anyway, "Let's go." Giovanni insist and with the help of Leonardo and they are trying again to explain how to do ring-around-the-roses, in front, left, right, try to ... try it, let's try, go, go. Finally Julia found a profile but not yet enough. This time took a lot of time to do this and a lot of sharing. We are talking about weeks, not hours, weeks. Giovanni, "Julia, please look at my drawings." And here we have one important step. This is borrowing knowledge. That means that Julia was able to look at Giovanni drawing, understanding what she was missing, and then finally Julia succeeded.

That's why the learning processes of each of us is an adventure for all humanity. That's why every child is a greater opportunity for the humanity and that's why we have to welcome all the Lauras. Now we could continue to compare and make comments but there's no time. It's time to say , "Welcome Laura and welcome to all the children all over the world." Thank you very much.