The Hundred Languages of Children

This poem by the founder of the Reggio-Emilia approach beautifully conveys the important roles imagination and discovery play in early childhood learning. Much of Reggio-Emilia philosophy is based on protecting children from becoming subjected too early to institutionalized doctrines which often make learning a chore rather than an extension of natural curiosity.

The child is made of one hundred.
The child has a hundred languages
  a hundred hands
  a hundred thoughts
  a hundred ways of thinking
  of playing, of speaking.

A hundred.

Always a hundred ways of listening, of marvelling, of loving
  a hundred joys for singing and understanding
  a hundred worlds to discover
  a hundred worlds to invent
  a hundred worlds to dream.

The child has a hundred languages
  (and a hundred hundred hundred more)
  but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture separate the head from the body.
  They tell the child:
  to think without hands
  to do without head
  to listen and not to speak
  to understand without joy
  to love and to marvel only at Easter and at Christmas.

  They tell the child:
  to discover the world already there
  and of the hundred they steal ninety-nine.

  They tell the child:
  that work and play
  reality and fantasy
  science and imagination
  sky and earth
  reason and dream
  are things that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
  The child says:
  No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi
Founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach