

OLIVA GUERINI MORONI

# READING and WRITING

**proposal for an operating project**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION.

The aim of this handbook is to offer an operating track for the learning of reading and writing. However, before entering the heart of the discussion, I will use some pages to broadly illustrate how I came to outline this working hypothesis.

Interest in the signs and in the image, during my years of teaching at school, lead me to deepen the theme of the child's graphical expression from scribble to graphical representation and to writing.

I have considered several Authors, from art to psychology, from pedagogy to anthropology. By studying the ancient art, I found the straight sign repeated on the objects and the circular signs on the "churingas" of the Australian aborigens.



*"... these are small rock or wooden plates carved with abstract patterns which illustrate the body of the mythical ancestor or the places where the myth is living ..."* (Leroi-Gourhan, 1977)

*"... one can use spirals and circular coils of the Australian aboriginal art to illustrate almost anything, even if for us they are only abstract art. Only because the abstract symbols of the neolithic art actually represent the external reality, they could become the actual first writing of the western human kind ..."* (Ehrenzweig, 1977).

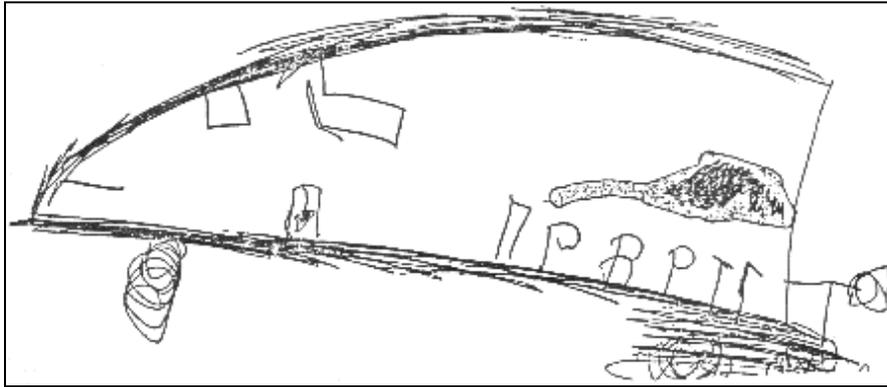
To the study of books I coupled the direct observation of the birth of the sign in some 3-year-old kids. I reviewed the different methods proposed for the teaching how to write and read. I was also interested in the way computers can read.

By observing the children's drawing, I became more and more convinced that nowadays, although in a pre-school age, children are very much attracted by the written material entering every house.

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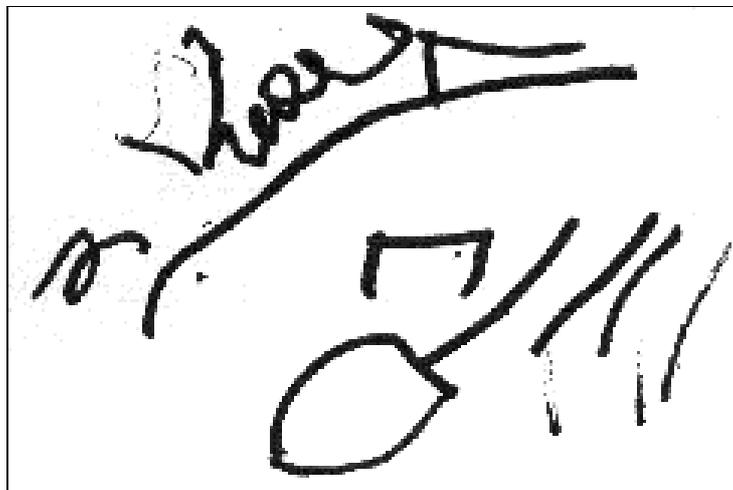
Kids copy titles from the newspaper, to imitate the adults' writing both in capital letters and in italics. They see words (...verbal shapes...) on the TV and on the computer, on advertising posters and, eventually, they "write" their name with clear satisfaction.



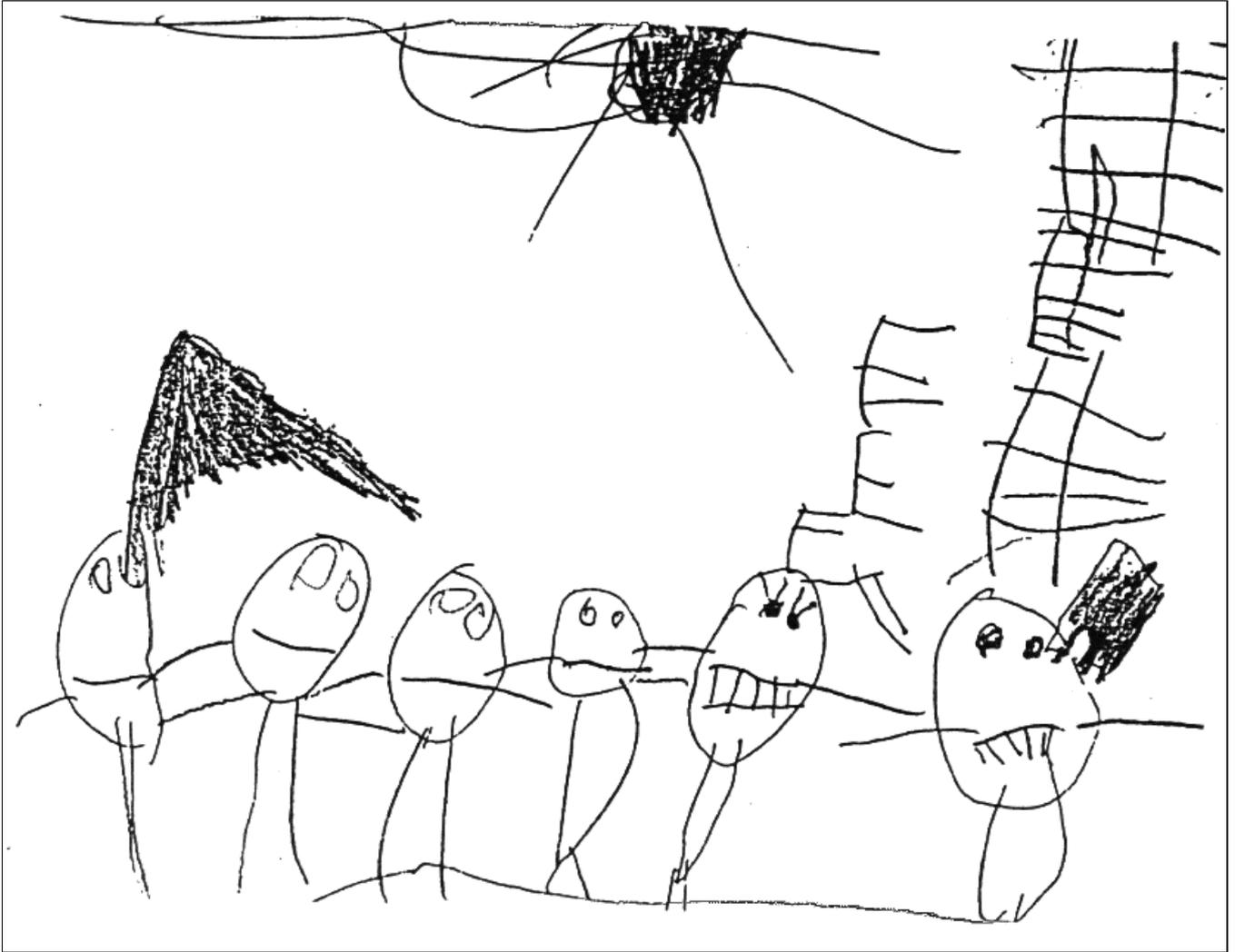
*"The airplane"* - Roberto, 2 years and 10 months old.  
The child already writes the identification codes of the airplane.



*"My house and my name"* - Stefano, 2 years and 7 months old.



*"All this is my name"* - Stefano Bastiani



*"The children play ring-around-a-rosy.  
On my head I have my hairs and my name as well.  
My name is Fiorenza and my mother taught me how to write my name.  
My mother takes the ladder and climbs up to the sky.  
My mother and I have very white teeth.  
Look, the cloud went towards the sun and this is a big mountain"*  
(Fiorenza, 3 years and 2 months old).

To give the happiness of writing and reading to so young kids it was necessary to build up a proper material. I was busy with many other things, but I was keeping on being interested in the problems related to the visual and auditory perception and to the various types of writing. In the composition the use of dashing allowed endless combinations, but, above all, it was possible to shift from the iconographical to the verbal expression and viceversa, with freedom in the perception of the polyvalence of the mark.

While observing kids at the nursery school, I saw an analogous action, formally, even if, obviously, the contents were according to their age. In the previously shown drawing by Fiorenza, the same configuration was used for an alphabetical letter (F) and for the hairs, before being transferred to the ladder and the teeth.

### **"Polyvalence of the mark"**

With this idea clear in my mind, I came back to work on the basic mark and every day it became clearer and clearer to me that they should satisfy these characteristics:

- 1) to be already present in the childish expression;
- 2) to be fit for ideographical pairings significant to kids;
- 3) to allow consistent and practically explicable subdivisions;
- 4) to build up the symbols of the talk by means of one or two pairings and, thus, presenting a very low degree of difficulty;
- 5) then, to allow order and proportion in height and width while constructing the word;
- 6) to represent autonomous material for composition, writing and reading with an active participation of the child;
- 7) above all, to be based on the "construction" of the printed lower case, because that is the prevailing type within a common written page, and therefore to allow the child to approach any text from a book to a newspaper.

*"Making marks is relative to single, autonomous, graphical entities, i.e. those combinations of straight and curved lines building up the alphabet ..."* (Pozzi, 1981).

What helped me in circumscribing the search and the selection of the basic signs was the observation of special material used in USA several years ago for teaching how to read. In this material the problems of perception and, in particular, the difficulties in learning of meaningless configurations, were taken into account. Some basic signs with different subdivisions were highlighted by colours in the letters and in the words on reading handbooks printed in capital. The teaching offered by this and other researches had been already adopted by many teachers who started the teaching of the alphabet in capital letters and who were happily followed by all the children. But then, in the passage to the lower case and to proper reading, the children were facing almost a new language. Therefore my interest was directed towards the printed lower case in order to think not only about reading but also about writing and about an active use of the material.

Without losing touch with the graphical language of the child, the progressive ability to focus and the shapes and the relationships in the space of the page, I experimented with different approaches and materials for long time. While working with difficult children, I understood that for some of them the obliqueness was not graphically obvious. Therefore, if the material had offered, e.i., the ready-made V sign, it would not have been possible to point out difficulties for the child in understanding the oblique direction, midway between horizontal and vertical.

It was necessary to try to solve the problem of segmentation, of pairings and of proportions. Eventually I obtained seven signs to manage and to combine (like the seven notes!, I thought).

With the use of three primary signs the child could manage the construction of the alphabetical signs and the learning of such shapes occurred in very short times. The graphical difficulties were thus overcome and the interest and the commitment could be rapidly shifted to the differentiation of the sound, to experience the movement, and all the matter could become harmonic and significant. The traditional mnemonic, beating learning of the alphabetical letters was no more looking adequate to me not only for the pre-school-aged children, but also for the 6 years-old children. Instead, the teaching procedure proposed could lead the child from shapes significant to him/her to the conventional shapes of the verbal expression.

Through manipulation, the skill obtained in the sense-motorial experience could be transferred to the graphical sign. The learning of reading and writing could be seen as a part of a wider expressive experience involving the whole human being.

At the end I thought about writing down a proposal, a track not only for a teacher, but also for a parent or for an adult interested in facing the adventure of teaching how to read and write.

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