

Releasing the learning potential: Acquiring the reading-writing process through creative constructionist activities

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Project carried out with 3-year-olds and pre-school children 5 and 6 years old

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We want to start with an idea of Emilia Ferreiro's that we have worked with throughout our 12½ years of teaching experience. In each instance we feel more strongly that:



“Children have the bad habit of not asking permission to start learning.” --Emilia Ferreiro

We don't know if you experience the same feeling. We also ask ourselves about this matter: if children begin to learn without asking permission how do they get to the moment of saying: I don't know how! I can't do it! In our reflection, we conclude that the experiences facilitated by the school, like the interventions of parents on their own, aren't always adequate and result in the loss of interest and curiosity on the part of the children who then do not have the intrinsic motivation to explore the written language by themselves.



From our perspective, we are convinced that children have more than one language to use and to learn in order to express themselves. It is this that we value. The following poem by Loris Malaguzzi has inspired educators to make changes in educational practices at an international level:



A child has a hundred languages, a hundred hands, a hundred thoughts, a hundred ways of thinking, of playing, (always one hundred), a hundred ways of listening, of surprising, of loving. One hundred happy reasons for singing and understanding, one hundred worlds to discover, one hundred words to invent, one hundred ways of listening to the world.

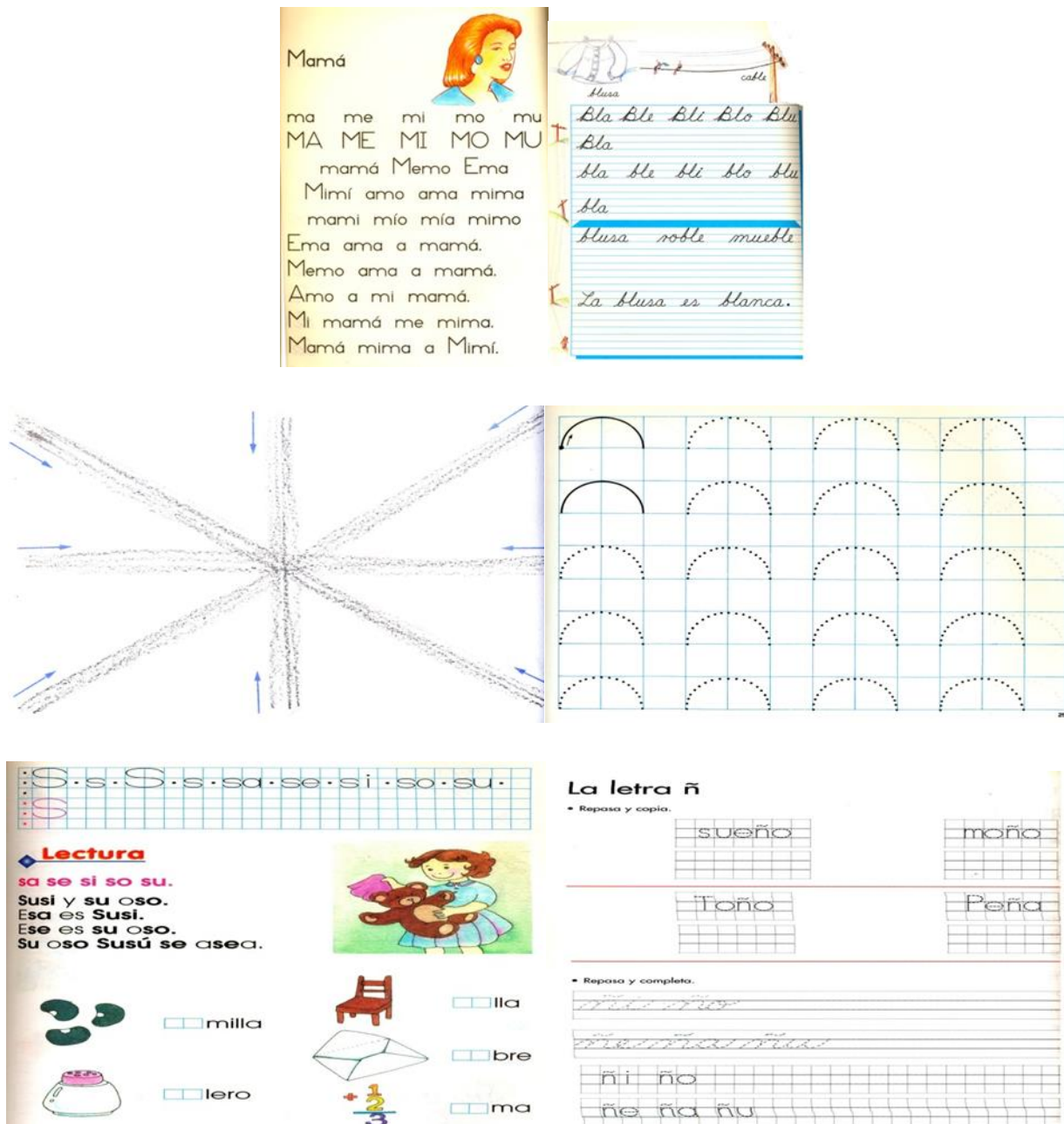
The child has one hundred languages; but they take from him ninety-nine: the school and the culture, they separate his head from his body. They say to him: you must think without your hands, you must act without your head, you must write but not speak, you must have understanding without joy, you must love and be surprised only on Easter and Christmas. They say to him: You must discover the world that already exists. And then they take away another ninety-nine.

They say to him: you must play the game and do the work: reality and fantasy, science and imagination; the heavens and the earth, rationality and dreaming are things that do not go together. And they say to him one hundred does not exist. The child says, on the other hand, one hundred does exist. - Loris Malaguzzi

One of the objectives of documenting this experiment is to record exactly that each child does have one hundred languages that should be respected. However, certain questions arise: How many ways can a child express himself?

Do we as adults have the capacity to understand or at least realize the variety of ways that children communicate?

The reading-writing process can be acquired through a variety of methods. Schools exist where children learn different letters on different days; each letter commanding its own lesson. The children repeat the letter until it is memorized. In other schools, children learn by writing the letters and still in other classrooms they learn by joining simple syllables to make words. Nevertheless, in many of these teaching situations, the context for the child is not relevant to what is truly significant, which results in classroom activities that do not motivate the student. It also leaves reading and writing unconnected. Writing itself functions solely as an indication of finished classroom work or of completed homework assigned by the teacher. It is not something the child would do in his free time.



The type of teaching shown in our documentation uses different strategies that are implemented inside the classroom. These strategies foster the enjoyment of reading and writing in children who are in the phase of social-constructivism as derived and researched by Emilia Ferreiro. This works with part of the premise that children move through four stages in the acquisition of the reading-writing process (pre-syllabic, syllabic, syllabic-alphabetic, and alphabetic). There is great importance in knowing and respecting these steps as it shows the child as a constantly developing human being who is tenacious and capable of reaching higher and higher levels of knowledge. The child will continue to achieve if he is

offered opportunities to learn in an entertaining and social environment that accommodates personal learning styles.

A Brief History of Writing

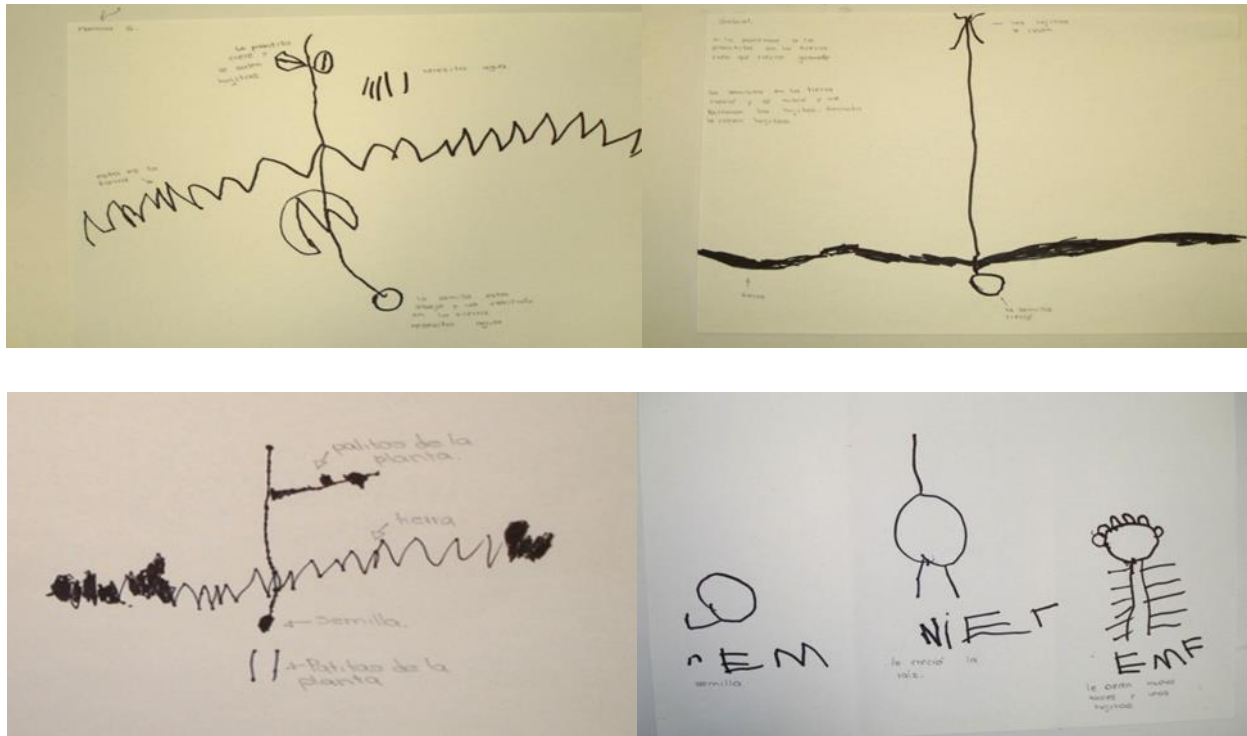
The possession of language is one of the distinguishing characteristics of human beings. But the possibility of expressing oneself through the medium of the written word was accomplished due to a long process that lasted thousands of years. From primitive times, man felt the need to express his feelings and beliefs in an enduring way by creating drawings and paintings; but drawings and paintings were not enough. He dreamed about other forms of expression which led to the creation of different writing systems.



It is important to mention the history of writing because it permits us to view the similarities between the historical process and the child traveling the path to legible and comprehensive reading and writing.



At an early age, a child is already capable of drawing if offered the necessary tools, although in these first phases there is no differentiation between drawing and writing. The child's intention is to represent his point of view, to express ideas and to note information which he considers important.



“When a child draws, it is not only a graphic intervention but also a selection of ideas. There is a need to establish the problem within defined limits; and having these clear limits, he advances further still, producing more with a constant momentum that resembles the propulsion of a firecracker.” - Loris Malaguzzi

Beginning with a historical analysis about the initial steps of writing, and returning to the contributions of researchers who work under the constructivist theory, allows us to put the results from our creative constructivist strategies into the appropriate framework. Here, we want to review four learning factors that we have inherited from Piaget.

Learning Factors

1. Physical Experience.

The subject should be active, should be able to move items and understand the structure of his own actions in relation to objects.

The teacher should make certain that the material is rich and varied and permits a flow of questions whose answer opens a path towards new possibilities.



2. Social Interaction

Although physical experiences sit at the forefront of the child's mind, verbal interaction with peers and teachers gives additional experience to the child and promotes cognitive growth.



It is necessary that the teacher looks positively on students speaking among themselves and that the teacher organizes more formal verbal encounters with the goal being for the students to share opinions.

When children give ideas that promote thought, attention, discussion, concentration and tolerance that respects different opinions there is the creation of real dialogue. A real dialogue implies that there is always important reflection on the part of each participant. Through this dialogue we can know what the children are thinking and how they express themselves.

When we develop the children's abilities to take part in discussion we are exercising the children's thinking skills. A true exchange of thoughts and discussion allow children to:

- Justify explanations
 - Check facts
 - Resolve contradictions
 - Explore attitudes
3. Maturation

"Children bring about their own meanings as they gradually develop their intellect."



In the classrooms maturation is translated in terms of time. Time for:

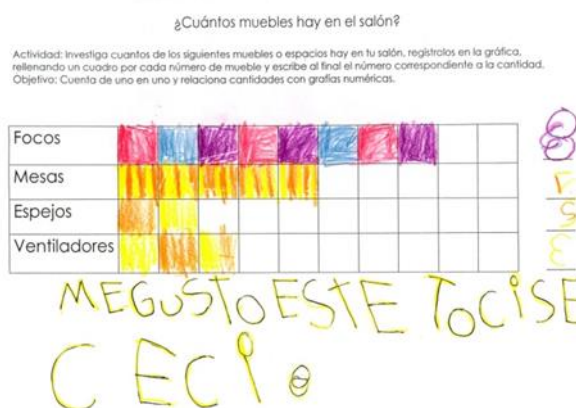
- Reflecting about their own ideas
 - Allowing the children's ideas to flourish
 - Proving points of view and testing ideas with other children while privately arranging their thoughts of the interchange
 - Planning parts of the day and deciding how to use the scheduled time
4. Balance

A consolidation of the processes that accompany the physical experiences, social interaction and maturation.



Tomados de forma individual, ni la maduración, ni la experiencia física o social pueden explicar el desarrollo intelectual, sino que las interacciones entre ellos es lo que influye en el desarrollo.

Equilibración



Taking physical experience or social interaction or maturation in isolation does not explain intellectual development. It is the interaction between the elements that influences development.

That which signifies learning is not a simple matter of transmission, internalization and accumulation of knowledge. It is an active process on the part of the student to assemble, extend, restore and interpret data, thereby constructing knowledge from the sources of experience and information received.

Social Focus

In the field of written language we say: "Writing is the representation of ideas with written symbols of a given language that works in a functional and communicative sense."

Nevertheless, as teachers we are often confronted with the greatest question from parents:

When is my child going to read and write?

We can use the core idea of Emilia Ferreiro and say: Instead of asking us "What we should or should not teach" there should be concern about giving children the occasions to learn. The written language is more than a combination of written shapes. One mode of the language's existence is to be a social object, part of our cultural heritage.

In our practical pedagogy we have found that facilitating initial phases of the reading-writing process is fundamental and our work has focused on using, discovering and inventing creative strategies that promote this learning. As constructivist teachers we maintain the ceaseless task of reflecting about our practices promoting, sparking and creating experiences that guide the children through this process.

We are aware that by correctly managing the system, the child should carry out three “discoveries”:

1. The difference between oral and written language
2. The difference between drawing and writing
3. The grapheme-phonetic correspondence (phonological awareness)

Characteristics of the Process:

- Major or minor experience in contact with the reading-writing relationship and the readiness on the part of the child to “risk” production.
- Ferreiro shows clear evidence that the child passes through a long process of writing acquisition before arriving at conventional writing.
- All children travel through the same phases but not necessarily at the same age nor does each child experience the same time frame for each phase.
- The child in the process of reading-writing acquisition moves through these four phases:

Pre-syllabic Phase: Where one sees a predominance of drawings, the writing without quality of control-utilizing some known letters to represent all words, a mixture of letters with numbers-it would seem that the primary object is to run into the margins. There is no correspondence between the written and spoken letter.

Syllabic Phase: One begins to look for syllabic value, generally the child uses one letter for each syllable. The child tries to fulfill a correspondence between letters and syllables with matching spoken sound.

Syllabic-Alphabetic Phase: The child begins to combine words as representation according to the syllabic sound and the representation of a letter sound by each letter.

Alphabetic Phase: There is a disappearance of syllabic analysis. The writing is formed on the basis of correspondence between phonemes and letters.



PICTURE (caption from top left to bottom right) Pre-Syllabic, Syllabic, Syllabic-Alphabetic, Alphabetic

Learning is not a simple matter of transmission, internalization and accumulation of knowledge but an active process on the part of the student to assemble, extend, restore and interpret thereby constructing knowledge from the resources of experience and given information.

“Whether we should teach or not teach, there is a concern about giving children the occasions to learn. The written language is much more than a combination of written forms. One mode of the written language’s existence is to be social object, part of our cultural heritage.” - Emilia Ferreiro

When the writing process is managed correctly the child will carry out three “discoveries”:

1. The difference between oral and written language.
2. The difference between writing and drawing.
3. The grapheme-phonetic correspondence (phonological awareness)

The Role of the Teacher

- Knowing the students very well (awareness of strengths and weaknesses)
- Being sensitive to cognitive conflicts in each student.
- Understanding the methodology.
- Guiding the students to the “discovery,” using the writing system and respecting each level of the process.
- Observing how children modify their hypothesis and how they act in consequence. Placing them in new activities that allow them to advance in the discovery of the alphabetic system.
- Thinking ahead in each situation, making questions that help the students to think and describe their mental processes in reaching solutions and allowing the student to say: ...just a minute, let me think.



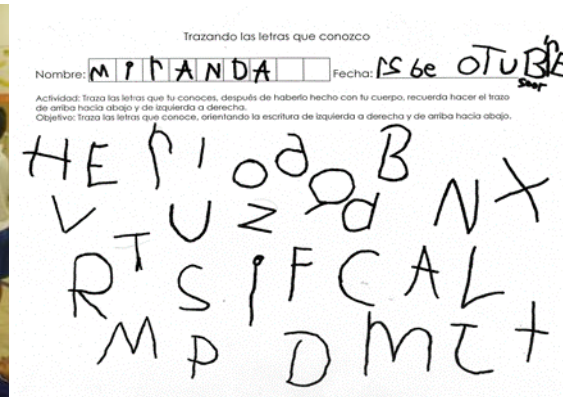
Creative Constructionist Strategies

Body Language

Why is it important that the child work with his body?

Maria del Carmen Alvarez, author of children's books, writer and singer of children's songs speaks to us about the extremely important role exercise plays when children work with their bodies. Body movement initially involves gross motor skills and gradually moves to involve fine motor skills that use

hand and finger movements. The child himself needs to reach an awareness of his body in order to transition from gross motor skills to fine motor skills.



(caption) The importance of your own name.



Emilia Ferreiro says this to us: Knowledge of one's own name is linked with the growth of self-identity, the child can say of his written name, "That's me," which is of strong affective significance because there is belonging. Letters that belong to the child, "are mine," "that is mine," in referencing his initial.

The child gives meaning to the written form beginning with the letters of his name. He conceives then, the written word as specific shapes which provide him with a basic alphabet for writing other names. With his letters he can write the names of other things.

The child, after understanding his name and the names or initials of his classmates will give meaning to the written word as follows: with a set of limited shapes, combining them in different ways will make them say different things.



(caption above) environment for the reading and writing learner

(caption below) Stimuli in the literacy environment





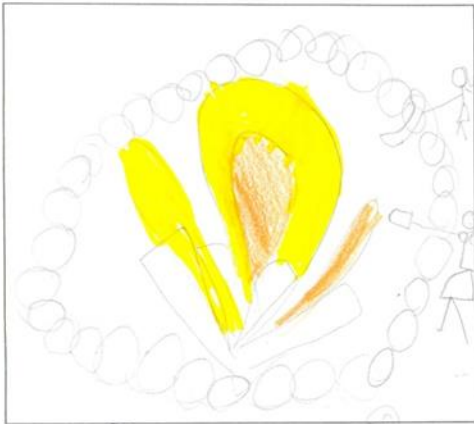
(caption) written registers



Nombre: MIRANDA .L.M. Proyecto 2 de Junio del 2008 Fecha:

Actividad: Recuerda lo que vivimos en el campamento, ahora trae a tu mente los dos momentos que mas disfrutaste en esta experiencia, imagina que tomas una foto de ellos y dibújalo en los siguientes recuadros, abajo explica que sucedió.

Objetivo: Recuerda hechos y detalles y los logra explicar de manera gráfica y oral.



LA FOGATA



CUANDO ESTABAMOS
CONTANDO CUENTOS

Name: Miranda

Date: June 2, 2008

Activity: Remember when we lived in a tent. Now, bring two moments of that experience that you enjoyed to mind. Imagine that you took a picture of those moments and draw them in the squares. On the lines underneath the squares explain what's happening in the pictures.

Objective: Remember facts and details and successfully explain them using an oral and written method.

(caption for square one) The campfire

(caption square two) when we were telling stories.

Proyecto

Nombre: cedp/c Fecha: sienera 2008

Actividad: Enlista las cosas que tu crees que necesitaremos para nuestro campamento.

Objetivo: Planifica lo que utilizarán para el evento del campamento.

- .ALUAD
- .CBTAC
- .MATINPPA
- .VERCLODEM
- .REFA
- .CAROL
- .CAMPDA
- .GRADCAPA
- .FOCKA

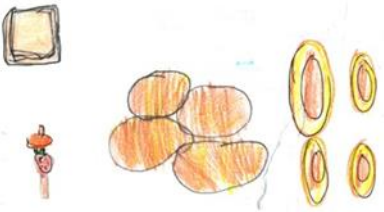

Name: Eric Date: January 24, 2008

Activity: List the things that you will need to go camping.

Objective: Plan out what you will use for the camping trip.



<p><u>Sopa</u></p> <p><u>Sopa de Tomate</u> \$ <u>40</u></p> <p><u>Sopa de Verduras</u> \$ <u>80</u></p> <p><u>Sopa de Frijoles</u> \$ <u>10</u></p> <p><u>Sopa de Ajos</u> \$ <u>39</u></p> <p><u> </u> \$ <u> </u></p> <p>Sofía</p>		<p>SOUP</p> <p>Tomato soup \$40</p> <p>Vegetable soup \$80</p> <p>Bean soup \$10</p> <p>_____ soup \$39</p>
<p>^{by PANDA} <u>BEBIDAS</u></p> <p><u>JAMAICA</u> \$ <u>10</u></p> <p><u>LIMONADA</u> \$ <u>8</u></p> <p><u>TAMARINDO</u> \$ <u>6</u></p> <p><u>AGUA NATURAL</u> \$ <u>5</u></p> <p><u>CAFE NESTLE</u> \$ <u>7</u></p>		<p>Miranda</p> <p>DRINKS</p> <p>Jamaica \$10</p> <p>Lemonade \$8</p> <p>Tamarind \$6</p> <p>Spring Water \$3</p> <p>Nestle Coffee \$7</p>

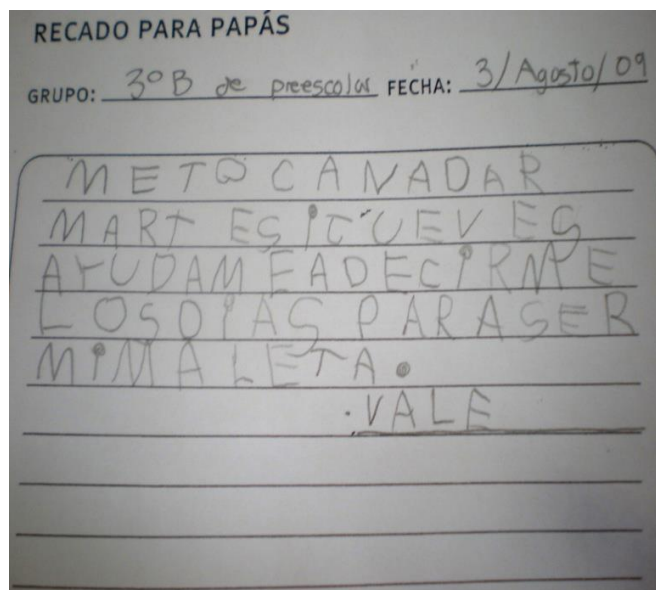
desayunos		Bebidas		Breakfasts
MOLLETES	\$20	JUGO DE NARANJA	\$10	_____ \$20
HOT CAKES	\$15	CAFÉ	\$10	Hot Cakes \$15
SANDUICH	\$20			Sandwich \$20
Brochetas de Fruta	\$15			Fruit Pastry \$15
				Drinks
				Orange Juice \$10
				Coffee \$10



(caption) telephone directory

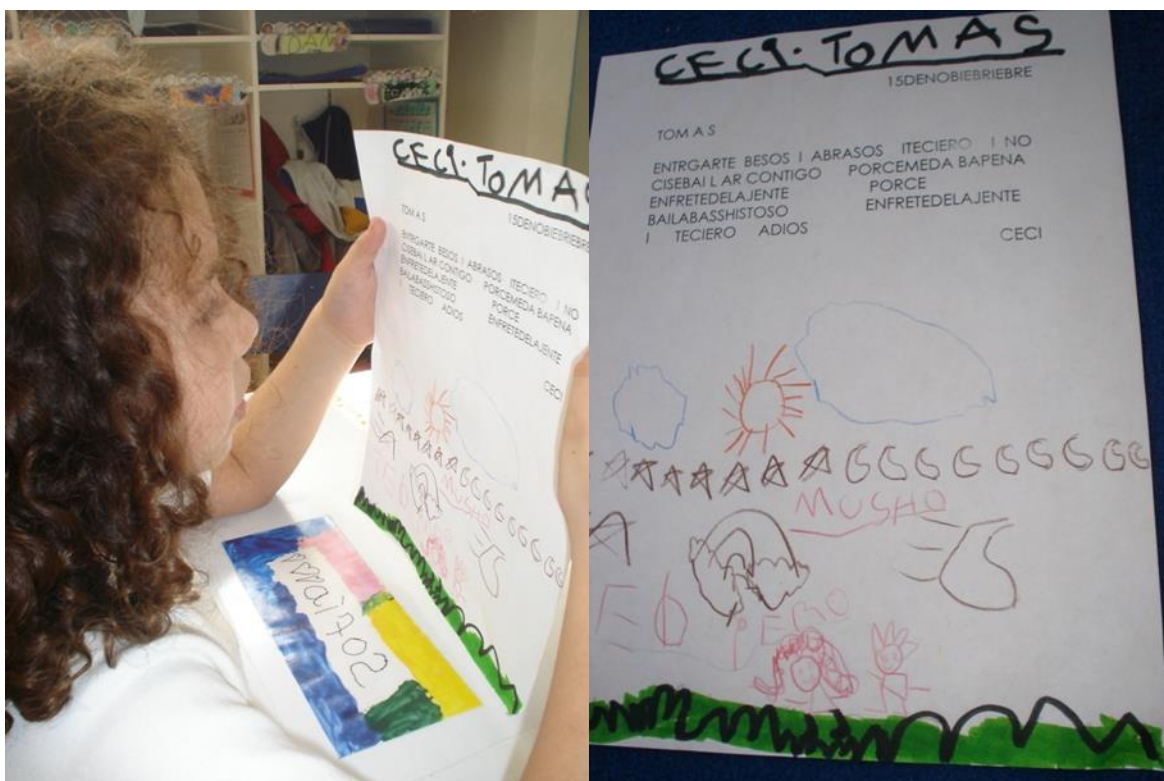
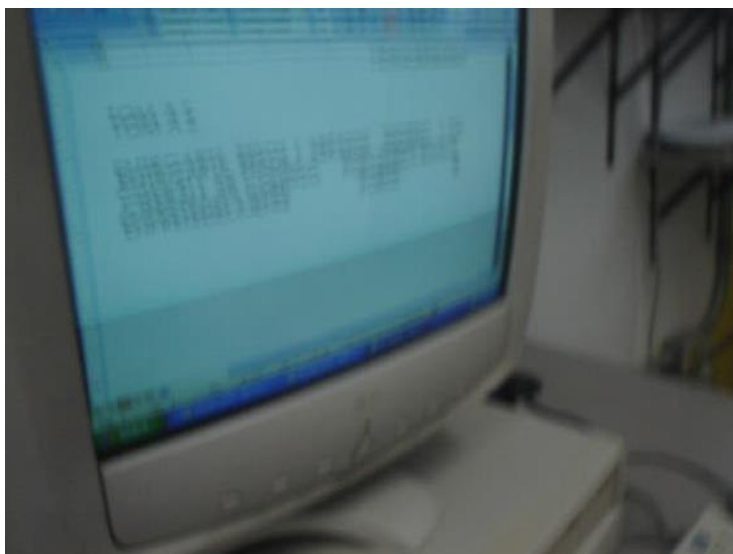


(caption left) reading corner (caption right) using writing as a medium of expression

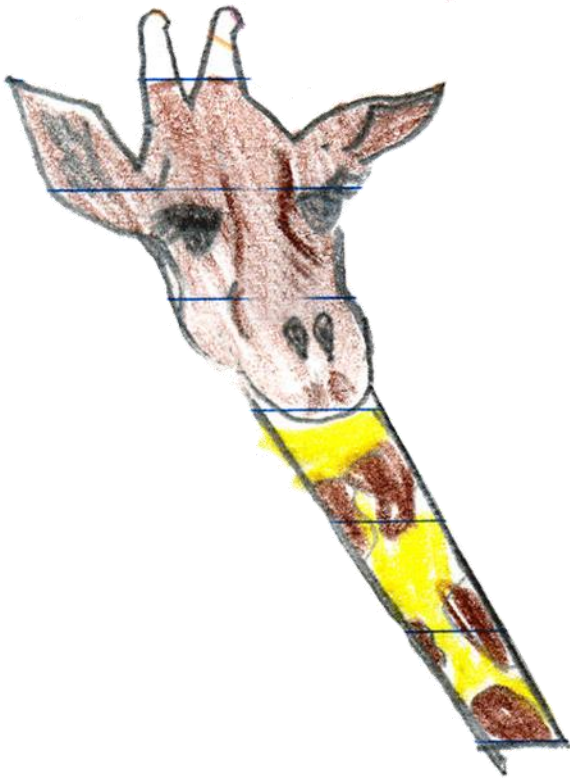


LOS INVITAMOS A NUESTRO
MUSEO DE OBRAS DE
ARTE. VA ABER CUADROS
HECHOS POR NOSOTROS LOS
AMIGOS DE TERCERO B.
ESMAÑANA MARTES 27
Hora De visita: _____
LOS ESPERAMOS

We invite you to our museum of artworks where you will see pictures done by our friends. It's tomorrow, Tuesday the 27th: time of visit _____ We hope to see you there.



(caption) Using writing as a medium of expression



The Giraffe

Has a heart far from the thoughts
That he loved yesterday
And still does not know it
Not being a giraffe, not having a heart
Away from my thoughts
Being in love and knowing perfectly
That the force of love extends us
With things, words, facts, hardships
And intelligence
That we are enveloped in this day
Constructing a journey of great pleasure and
culture
Around this profession that honors us.
Now, also, the giraffe has realized that he is
In love and has put his heart near his thoughts
And he is with you And he is with me

- Loris Malaguzzi



We invite you to try new paths...

It is an adventure that you will enjoy!