

The power of writing in children

*Almost without words, you've come to this world,
which understands nothing without words.*

ANTONIO PORCHIA

Children have ideas, theories, and hypotheses that they continuously test against reality and the ideas of others.¹

As children incorporate letters, and reading and writing skills, they evidence, through their stroke, their familiar symbolic representation, their own body image, their resilience, the way they process the information they receive, among other things. That is why writing is an excellent means to build psychism and favor the construction of reality. It is a critical process for improving the symbolic universe.^{2,3}

The body as a human production is inconceivable without words. The body is there tangled up, it expresses itself, it speaks, whether productive or not. Therefore writing is considered a "construction". It builds based on deletions, corrections, hesitation, or a blank space.³ As described by Julio Cortázar in his *Bestiario*: "A white space on the page will be all that indicates the lapse for you, the slender bridge that joins yesterday's scrawling to today's." It may be useful to analyze the details of graphism in terms of minimum and maximum limits of characters, and qualitative differentiations related to the shape of letters, differences in positioning and their combinations. It is also important to analyze how the body is positioned in relation to space and its environment at the time of writing.

Writing is a metaphor of human knowledge because it makes demands from the body and psychism; thus, writing plays an amalgamation role, connects dissociations, leads to conceiving body and mind as an unbreakable unit. It allows to express anything not evidenced with spoken words, the corners of unconsciousness. To quote Henri Michaux: "Pencil is a traitor; writing means revealing a secret, losing control of words."³ Writing is producing thought.

Piaget's theory describes the subject who actively attempts to understand the surrounding world and to find the answers to questions raised by this world. Piaget's subject builds his own categories of thought while simultaneously organizing his world.² It is during early childhood when the expression of emotions and basic affection are organized; faces are

formed—a critical aspect of identity—; posture and demonstrative gestures are established; the eyes and vision are combined into communication and learning; listening and attention skills are developed; the basis for communication is built; and the voice—now part of the body—is developed based on family prosody. At this time, in order for words to be written, it is necessary to develop the body and a specific skill. Writing may only be done once a certain level of motor skills are attained, and this supposes fine motor coordination and adequate spatial development.³

From an early age, children's experiences take place in an literate society, where they create hypotheses about the surrounding world and also about writing; for this reason, kindergartens and schools should respond to such previous knowledge so as to strengthen, modify, and develop it. The role of schools is prevailing because they promote creative, symbolic, and social skills through the interaction with others.

Writing is a powerful instrument of thought. Those who write, learn about themselves and the world, and communicate their perceptions to others; this allows preschoolers to start writing in line with the knowledge they acquire about the world. At the same time, writing confers the power to grow as an individual and make an impact on the world.⁵ We make an impact on the world when we write about our feelings, when we reflect the depths of our being, when we look at the world and society in a critical and brave manner.

In this regard, writing is not only a cultural and social tool but a complex cognitive-symbolic activity that, for children, implies building meanings and has an impact on their intellectual development because it involves superior cognitive and metacognitive processes.⁵ Alterations in the development of bodily manifestations might be an indicator of developmental abnormalities.

Learning to write requires the child to move along different stages, as per Ferreiro. During the pre-phonetic stage, there is no understanding of the alphabetic principle, so there is no letter-sound understanding either. During the phonetic stage, children start detecting syllables and the alphabet. Then, during the visual-phonetic stage, children write by respecting sounds and matching them to the corresponding letter.

Ferreiro stated: "Writing requires children to draw letters and also to be aware of the fact that what is said can be written".

Writing is shaped in a space where language finds a place to make itself visible. Strokes are unique and have the ability to be multiple. Once letters are part of a person, they never leave them.³

Writing is understood as a cognitive process, a set of intellectual processes conducted by the author while producing a text. Even though authors do not transform the world (although some believe they do), they are capable of transforming themselves; during such transformation, they also transform how they conceive it.⁴

Pescetti, a well-known children's book author, said that writing "allows life to be told just as it is, or as we would like it to be. We may tell stories that we loved, or stories that we hated, and we tell them not to feel alone. A horrible day, or a wonderful day, depending on what we are about to tell."

For this reason, as Pescetti said, offering children a pencil is like giving them "a magic

wand, the baton of an orchestra conductor, or a small lightning rod."⁶ ■

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Symbols and their therapeutic role: Looking for scientific grounds

The history of science and technology has frequently demonstrated that certain knowledge which had been considered highly prestigious in ancient times, was then dismissed and forgotten, to be finally rediscovered or assigned a new relevance at a later time.¹

In this regard, a long time before the embryonic forms of modern medicine became established, such as the theory of the four humors (fifth century B.C.-fifteenth century A.D.), and iatromechanics and iatrochemistry (sixteenth-seventeenth century), patient care was based on what is known today as primitivist medicine, which utilized magical thinking and the clinical impact of symbolic effectiveness.²

Anthropologist Levi-Strauss stated that the effectiveness of symbols refers to the phenomenon whereby a person, story or image acquires, at a certain time, the category of a symbol, and from that moment on it becomes an instrument utilized to assign a mysterious sense to an event in a

person's life, and as of this moment, such element (symbol) carries on transformations in real life.^{3,4}

However, for symbolic effectiveness to be materialized, the symbol should function within a support reference system, i.e., within a collective group that believes and has faith in it. A paradigmatic example of this is that of the shaman or witch doctor. Sick people place all their hopes in the shaman's alleged magical power, a phenomenon that the shaman reinforces by displaying symbol-rich and ritualistic aesthetics, masked by his/her garb, gestures and the repetitive rhythm of his/her chant, dancing, and music instruments.⁵ As it happens, this reminds us of the role of symbols in today's office visits, as pointed out by Balint, who coined the concept that a physician's presence is therapeutic itself.⁶

In addition, it is worth noting that we access the world (inner and outer) indirectly, i.e., through representations, either symbolic (images) or signic (words), bringing order and coherence