

# **A picture is worth a thousand words**

Exploring the gifts & possibilities inherent in children's  
early attempts to draw and write

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Reading Recovery Teacher Leader

An abstract red line drawing on a light green background. The drawing consists of various geometric shapes, including circles, squares, and rectangles, connected by lines. Some shapes are filled with red, while others are outlined. The overall composition is complex and layered, with some elements appearing to be drawn over others. A large, faint, light-colored circle is visible in the upper right quadrant of the image.

# Overview

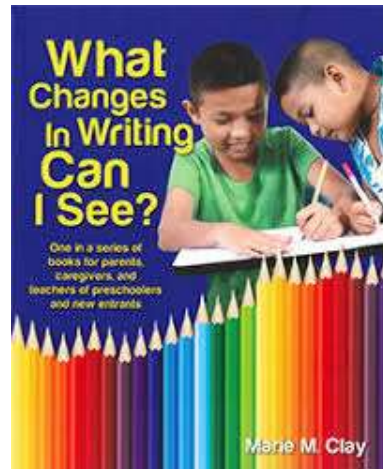
- Introduction
- Gifts of Drawing
- Approaches to instruction

# What are your thoughts/questions when you look at this drawing?

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**My own initial thinking/questions**

- **There are many paths to literacy...**
- **When does his scribble/drawing turn into trying to write?**





# An historical perspective

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**“Between the years 3500 BC and 3000 BC, some unknown Sumerian geniuses invented a system for storing and processing information outside their brains, one that was custom-built to handle large amounts of mathematical data...The data processing system invented by the Sumerians is called “writing”.”**

p. 122, Sapiens ,Hurari, 2014





# But what about this?

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**“Cave art, generally, the numerous paintings and engravings found in European caves and shelters dating back to the Ice Age (Upper Paleolithic), roughly between 40,000 and 14,000 years ago.”**

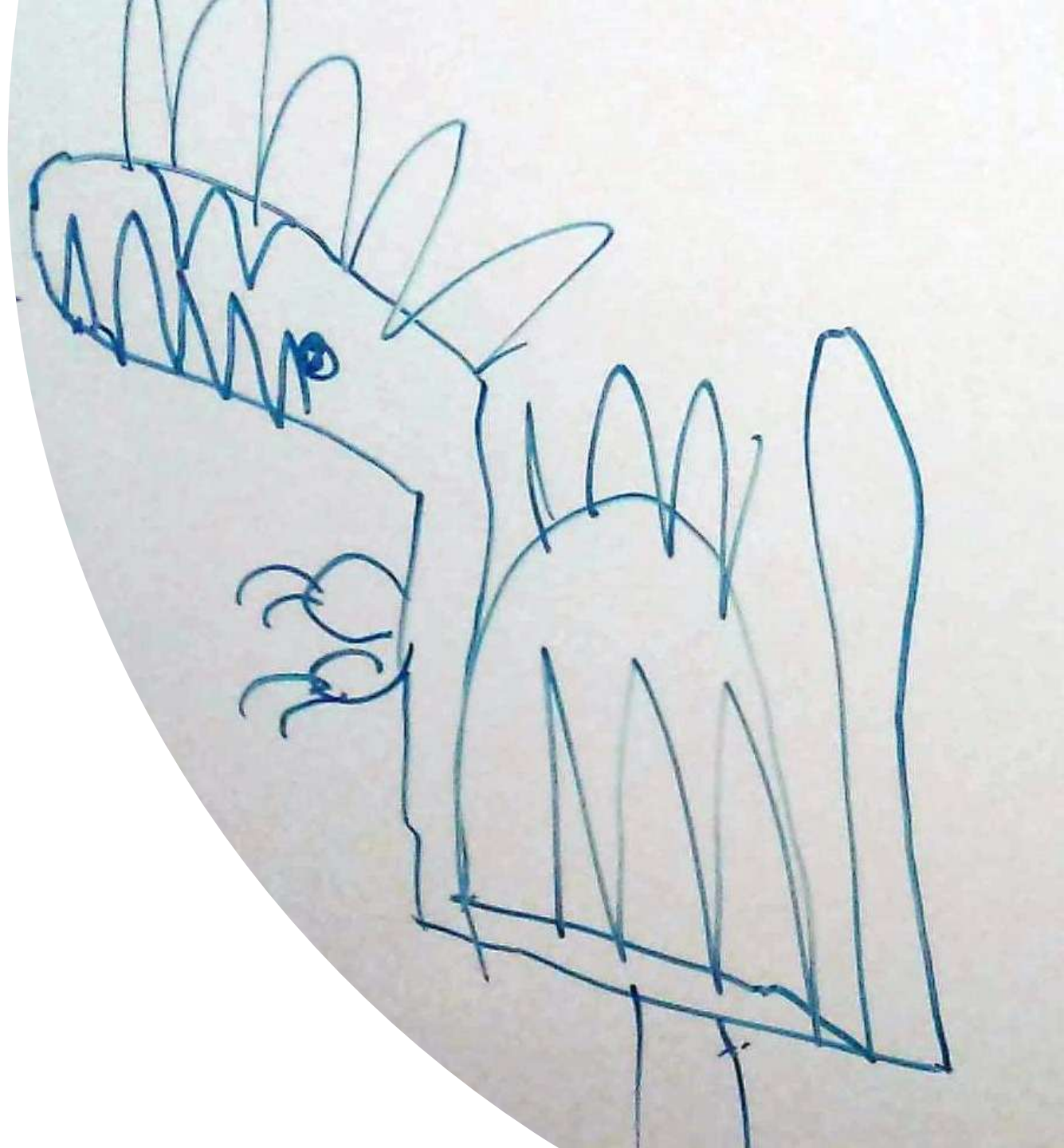
<https://www.britannica.com/art/cave-painting>



# Drawing offers many gifts

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- Intrinsically motivating
- Self-extending
- Thinking tool
- Contributes to development of motor control, coordination and graphic language
- Vehicle for social interaction
- A pathway to literacy





# Intrinsically motivating

**“The impulse to make marks seems innate. Babies and toddlers discover by themselves the surprises of mark-making with fingers in split food, water and so on, but it’s when the use a crayon or a stubby felt-tip pen on paper that their graphic adventures really take off.” p. 9**



# Self-extending

**“The more they see something happening on paper, the more seductive the experience becomes. And so play with a marker starts: getting the “feel” of it, finding out what it can do, and learning to stay *on* the paper.”**

**Kolbe, 2005, p. 9**

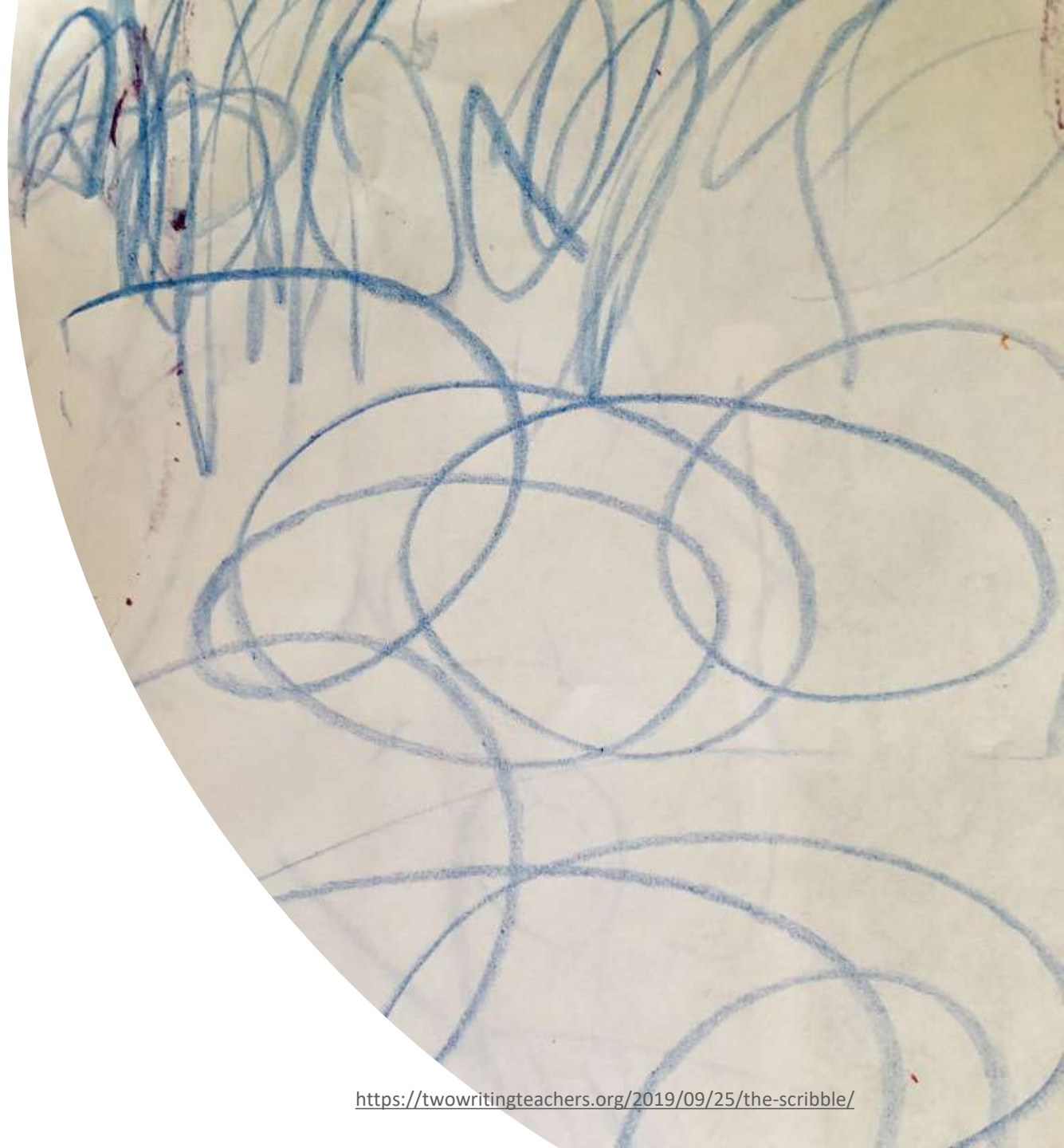




# Thinking Tool: Marks to Meaning

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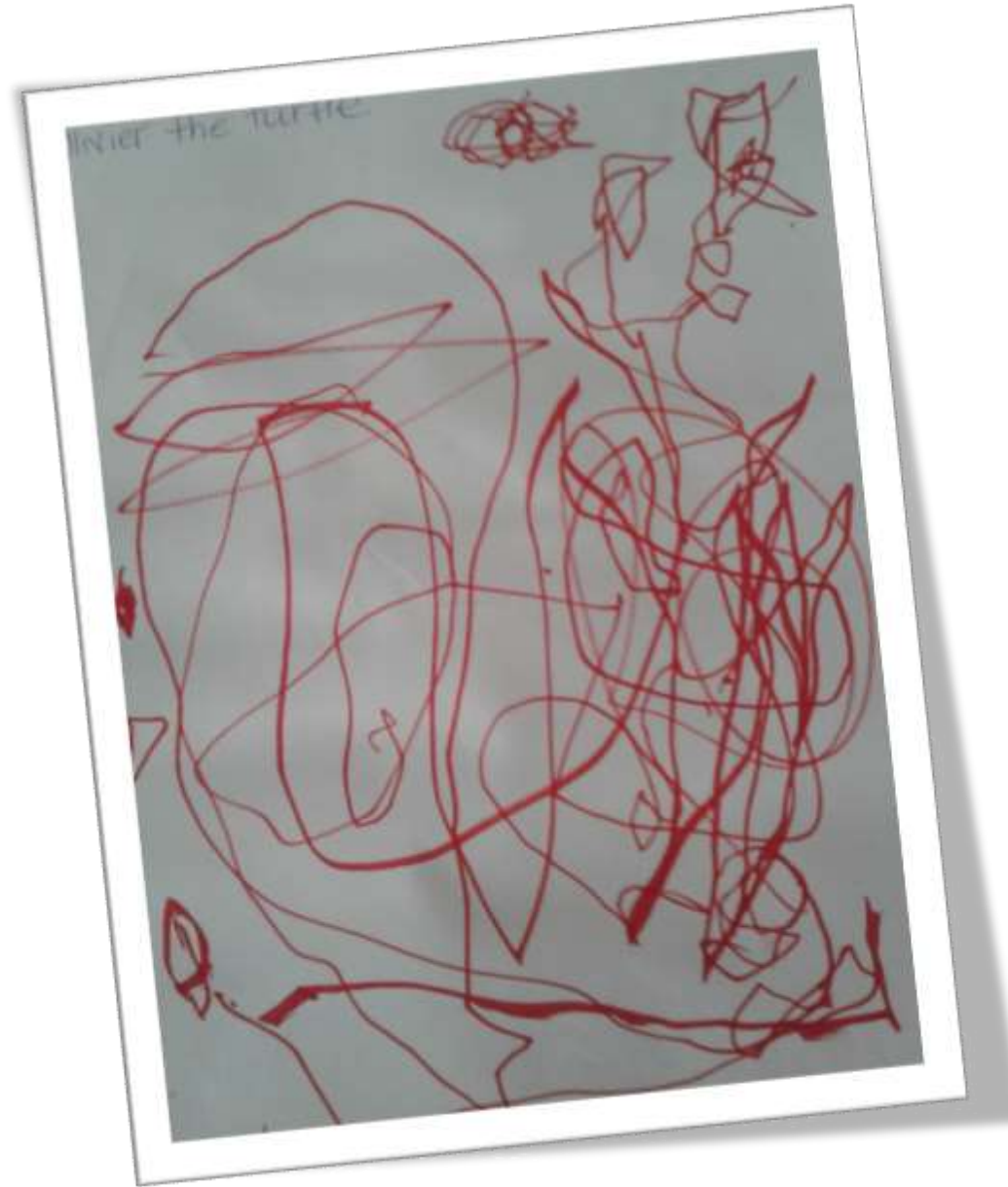
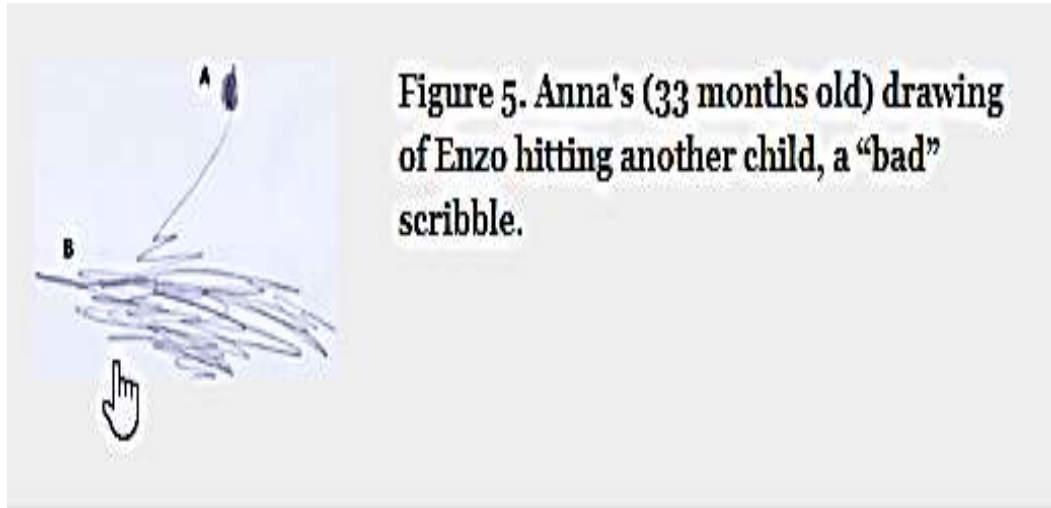
- What value do we ascribe to scribbling?
- Young children imitate the gesture that they see adults make- to receive adult attention
- Translation of objects as elements of dynamic events; the affective quality of the object
- Longobardi et al.,2015



# Thinking Tool: Marks to Meaning

**“I thought it was just a scribble. But it isn’t – if you understand what it is you’re looking at!”**

**Clay, 2010, p. 6**



# Thinking Tool: Marks to Meaning



**“...a child sees something that perhaps reminds her of a feature of her experienced world. *Finding* meaning and making connections is often how representation in drawing begins.”**

Kolbe, 2005, p. 10



# Thinking Tool: Marks to Meaning



**“...children use drawing as a powerful tool for thinking. In different ways and at different rates, they develop a range of mark-making skills and strategies, and use drawing for various representational purposes in their quest to make sense of themselves and their world.”**

Kolbe, 2005, p.10

# A Thinking Tool: Fantasy Play in action drawing

- Drawing can serve as a tool for play in which children are able to play with experiences and events in order to create new scenarios or stories.
- Drawings are not always representational, it may just be scribbling, or some other kind of mark making and talking that result in the creation of these “stories”



...the beginning of story

VIVIAN GUSSIN PALEY

# *The* GIRL *with the* BROWN CRAYON



Author of *Kwanzaa and Me* and *You Can't Say You Can't Play*

## Thinking Tool: Creating & exploring imaginary worlds

- “I look up to see five children drawing mice: and by some unspoken agreement they are following a new curriculum.” Paley, 1997, p. 6
- “Reeny insists we need a Frederick poster, “like in the museum” Paley, 1997, p. 8
- “We need to give the child freedom to explore and learn on his own...The child is self-stimulating and self-starting provided conditions are right for him.” Clay, 2015, p. 61



# Development of motor control, coordination and graphic language

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In the absence of representational drawings, it's important to remember what *is* there:

- exploration of straight and curvy lines.
- strengthening of fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination.
- development of meaning-making.

Kelsey Corter, [Twowritingteachers.org](https://twowritingteachers.org)



<https://twowritingteachers.org/2019/09/25/the-scribble/>

# Development of motor control, coordination and graphic language

**“If you save several drawings made by one particular child, you will often find that he is working to a basic plan...he produces the same pattern or schema again and again... the child has learned a plan of action...This gives the child enough control over pencil and paper to play with variations, which often leads to new discoveries.”**

**Clay, 2015, p. 50**



# Social Interaction: Oral Language Development





VIVIAN GUSSIN PALEY

# *The* GIRL *with the* BROWN CRAYON



Author of *Kwanzaa and Me* and *You Can't Say You Can't Play*

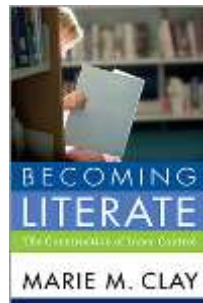
## Social Interaction: child to child

- “I look up to see five children drawing mice: and by some unspoken agreement they are following a new curriculum.” Paley, 1997, p. 6

# Social Interaction: adult and child

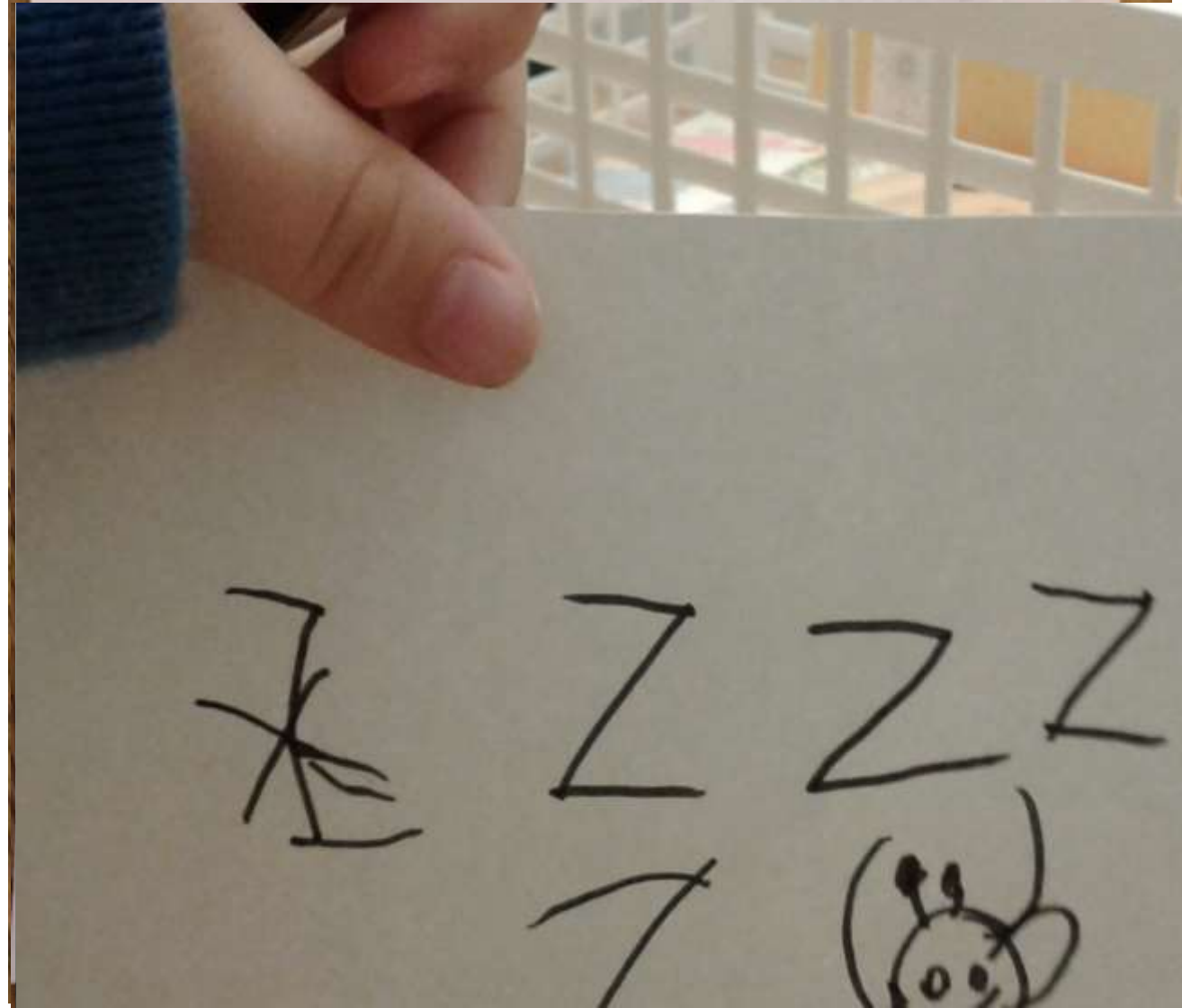
**“By working alongside a child letting him do all that he can but supporting the activity when he reaches some limit by sharing the task she is more likely to uncover the cutting edges of his learning.”**

Clay, 2015, p.67



# Pathway to literacy: from drawing to writing

How might this occur?





# Pathway to literacy: from drawing to writing

**When writing does emerge:**

**Questions to guide the analysis of early writing samples**

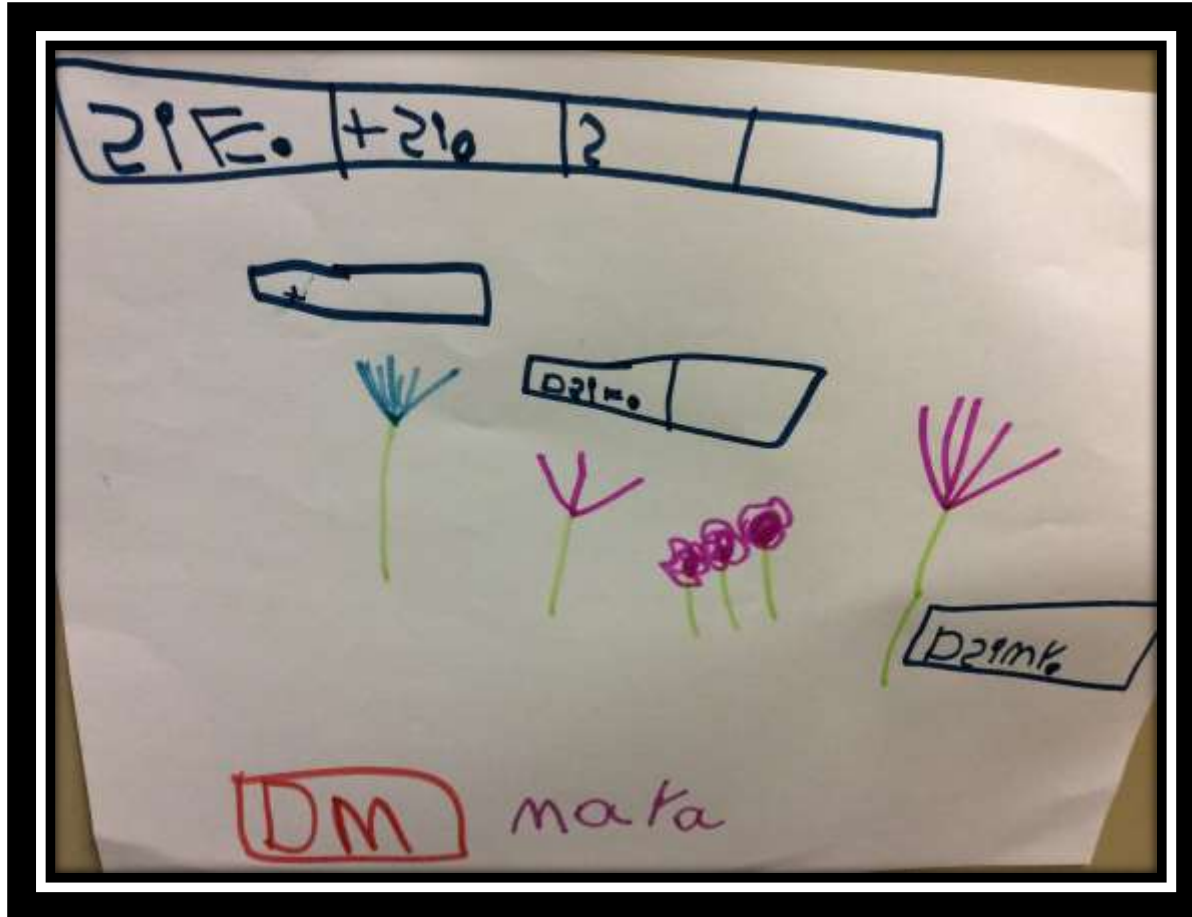
- **List the real letters the child knows or forms correctly. Count them.**
- **Did he say anything about letters, such as ‘That’s for ball’**
- **Sum up. Does the child know very few, about half or most of the letters of the alphabet**
- **How does the child work on the page (left to right, right to left)?**
- **Record any comments the child makes. Often he will tell you about a problem he had and how he solved it.**
- **Make a note about unusual things-layout on the page, or speed of working**

# Pathway to literacy: from drawing to writing

**“The activity of handwriting presents the two-fold challenge of physically forming the letters and words as well as composing the messages in the mind.”**

Clay, 2015, p. 9

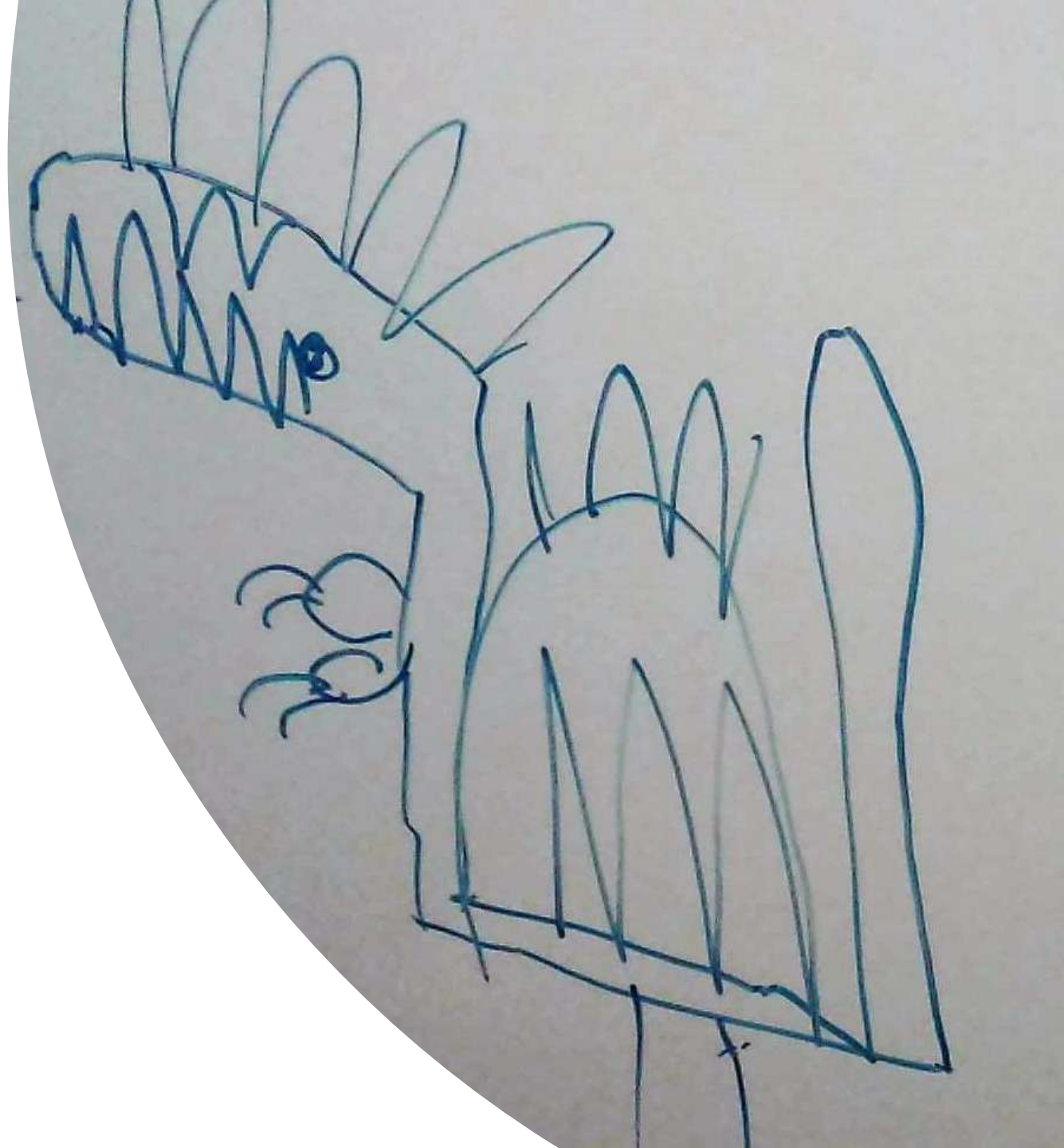
# Pathway to literacy: from drawing to composing





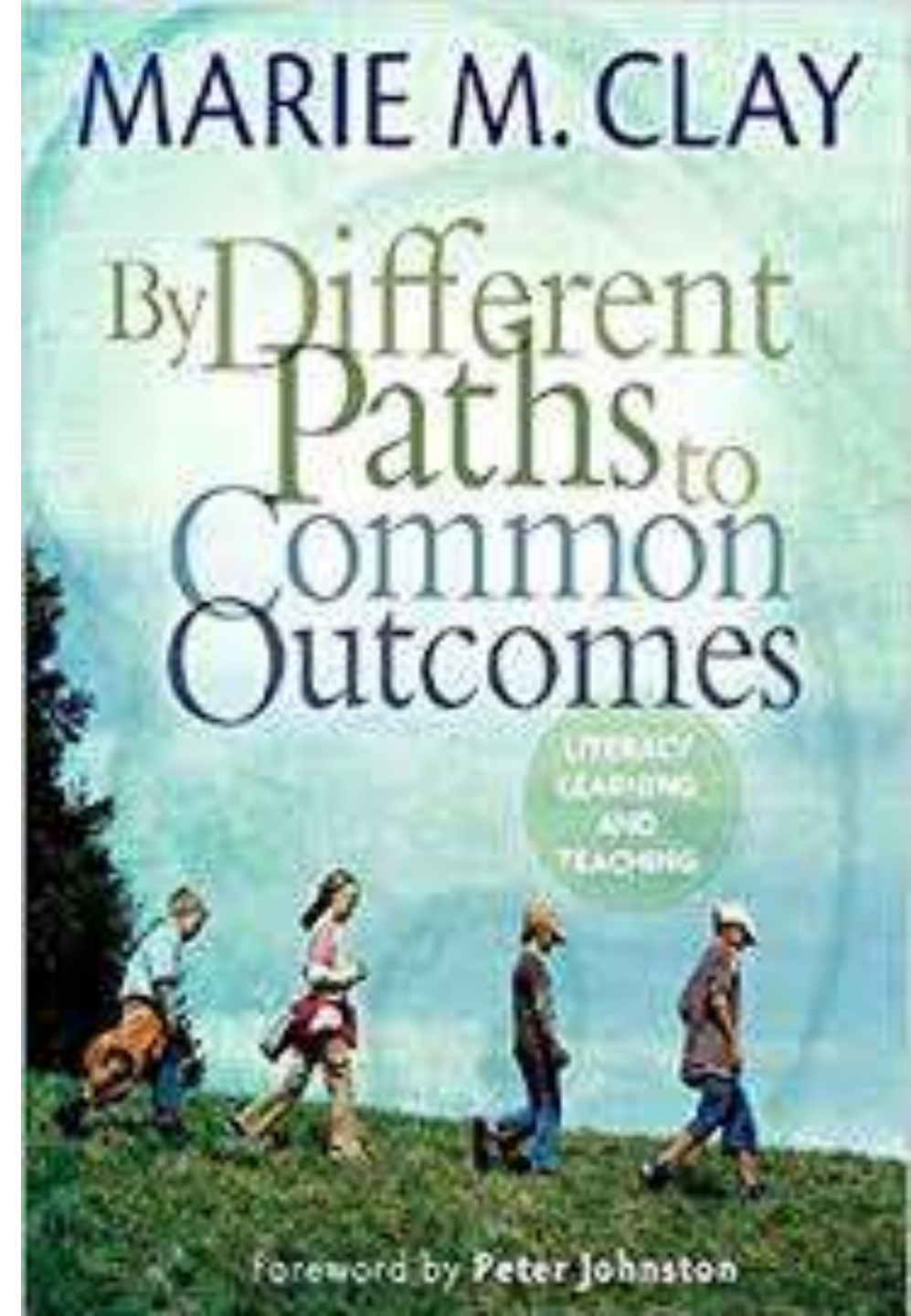
# Drawing offers many gifts

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# Powerful Possibilities

**“I see every reason to assume that a teacher’s call to construct a response, whatever form that response takes, requires the child to relate, link, remember, call up, relearn, monitor, problem-solve, and all those other powerful mental activities that help children and adults adapt and create solutions.” (p.205)**



# Thinking about drawing in the instructional context

**“Producing artwork gives children occasions for problem solving, creative thinking and self-expression as they make new discoveries, explore materials and cope with emotion.**

**Engaging in art activities, like early scribbling and drawing, lays the foundation for literacy by preparing children with knowledge and skills that will make it easier to read and write later on.”**

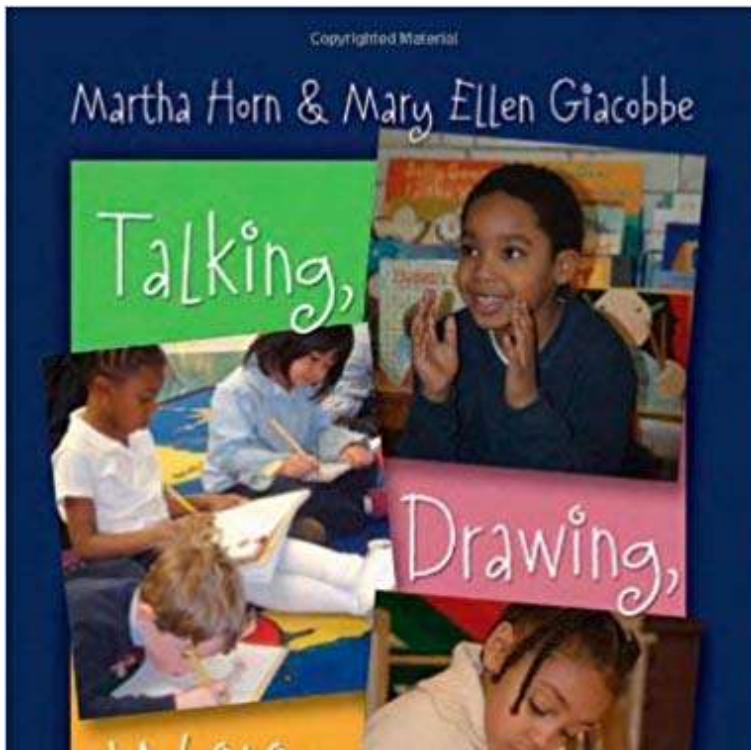
Luongo-Orlando, 2010, p.150





# Instructional Approaches: Talking Drawing, Writing

**Working with the whole group using an OLM approach**



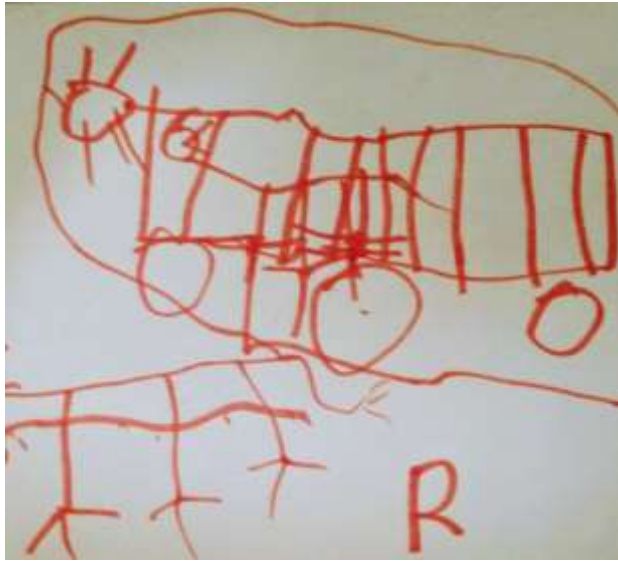
**Teach children:**

- **How to tell stories**
- **How to draw stories**
- **How text is another way of recording stories**

Children apply and extend this learning independently using their personal Drawing and Writing Books

# Instructional Approaches: Interactive Writing

- Use the picture to compose the story
- Work together to write the story allowing the child to participate in any and all ways he can



Lion go to  
jail.

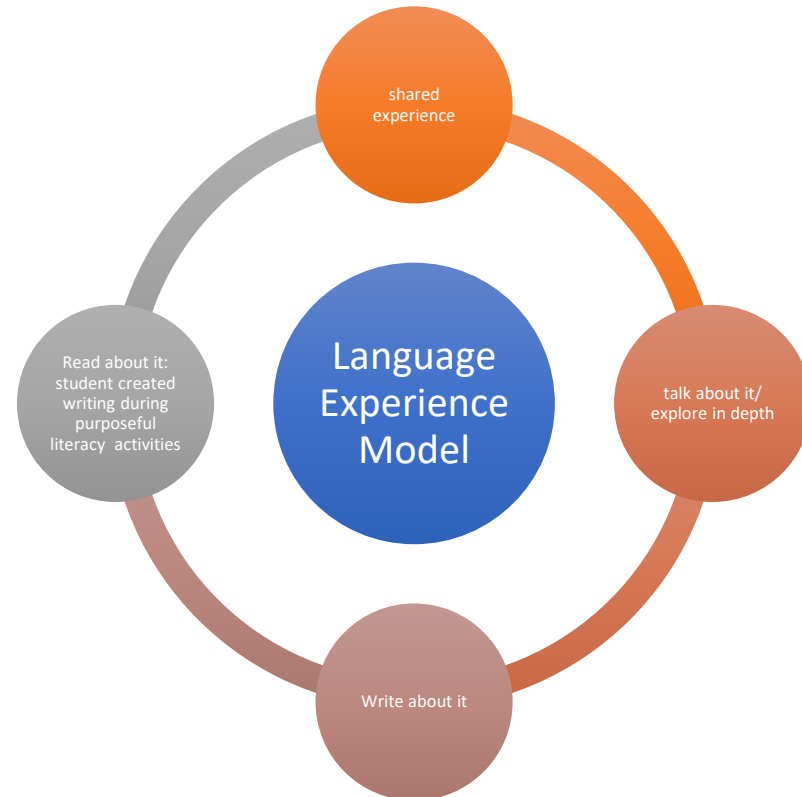
Tiger is eating Ms. Bell.  
He is eating your flesh  
and your feet and your toes  
and your belly and your face  
and your skin but not  
~~the~~ your eyelashes! nose!



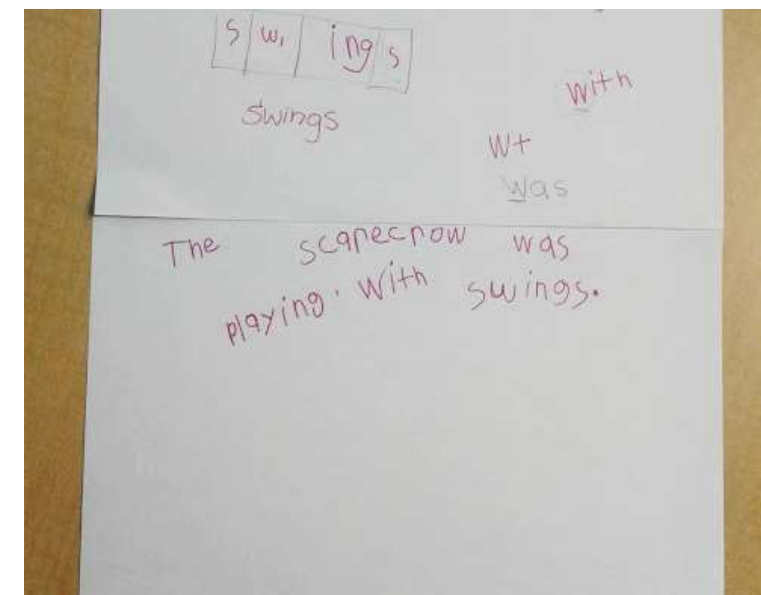
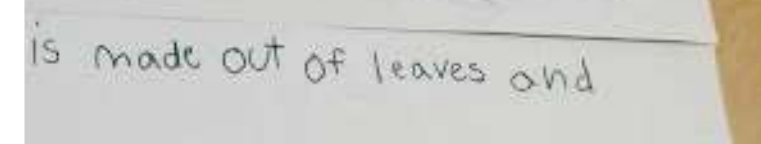
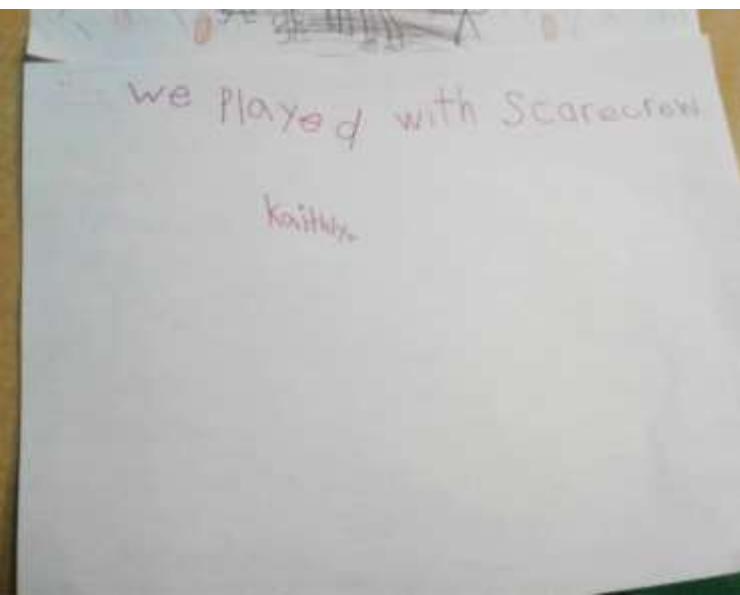
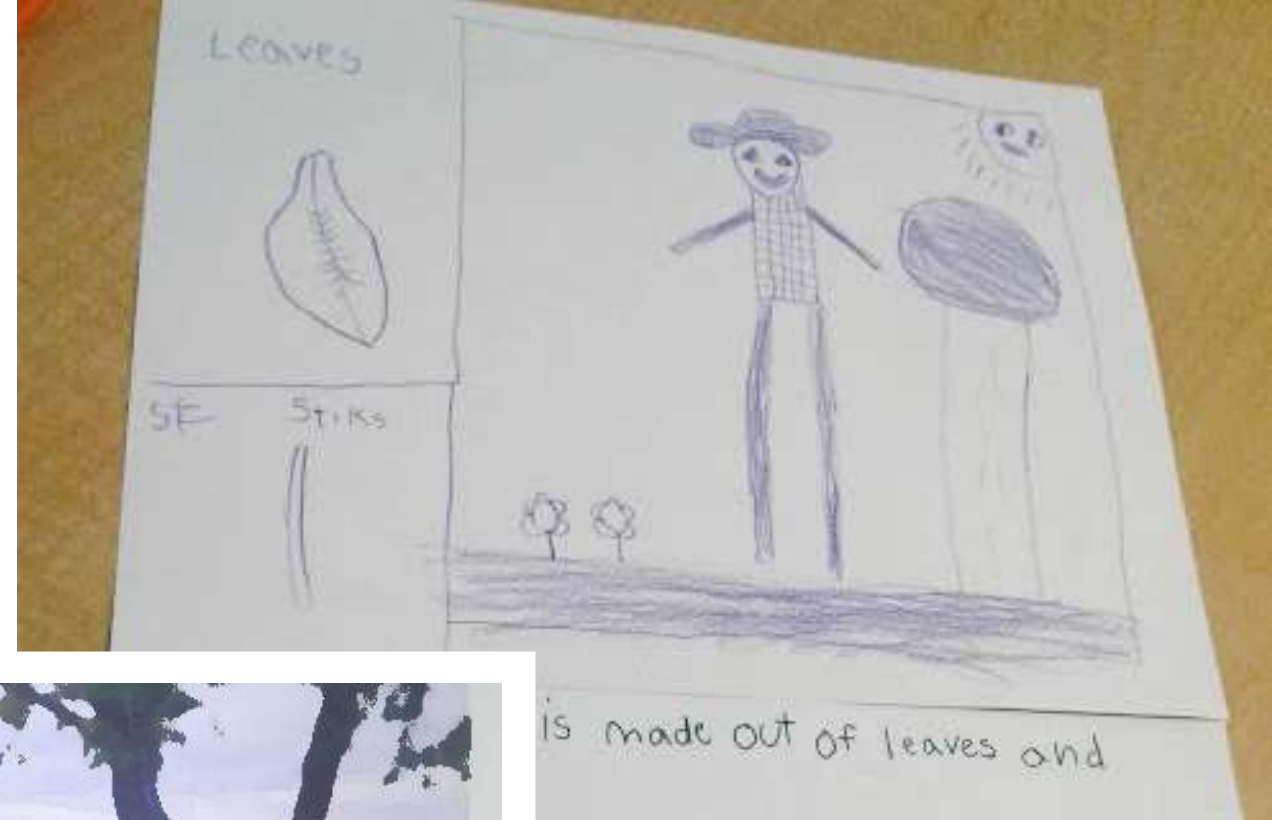
# Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4



## Instructional Approaches: Guided Writing









# Instructional Approaches: Play



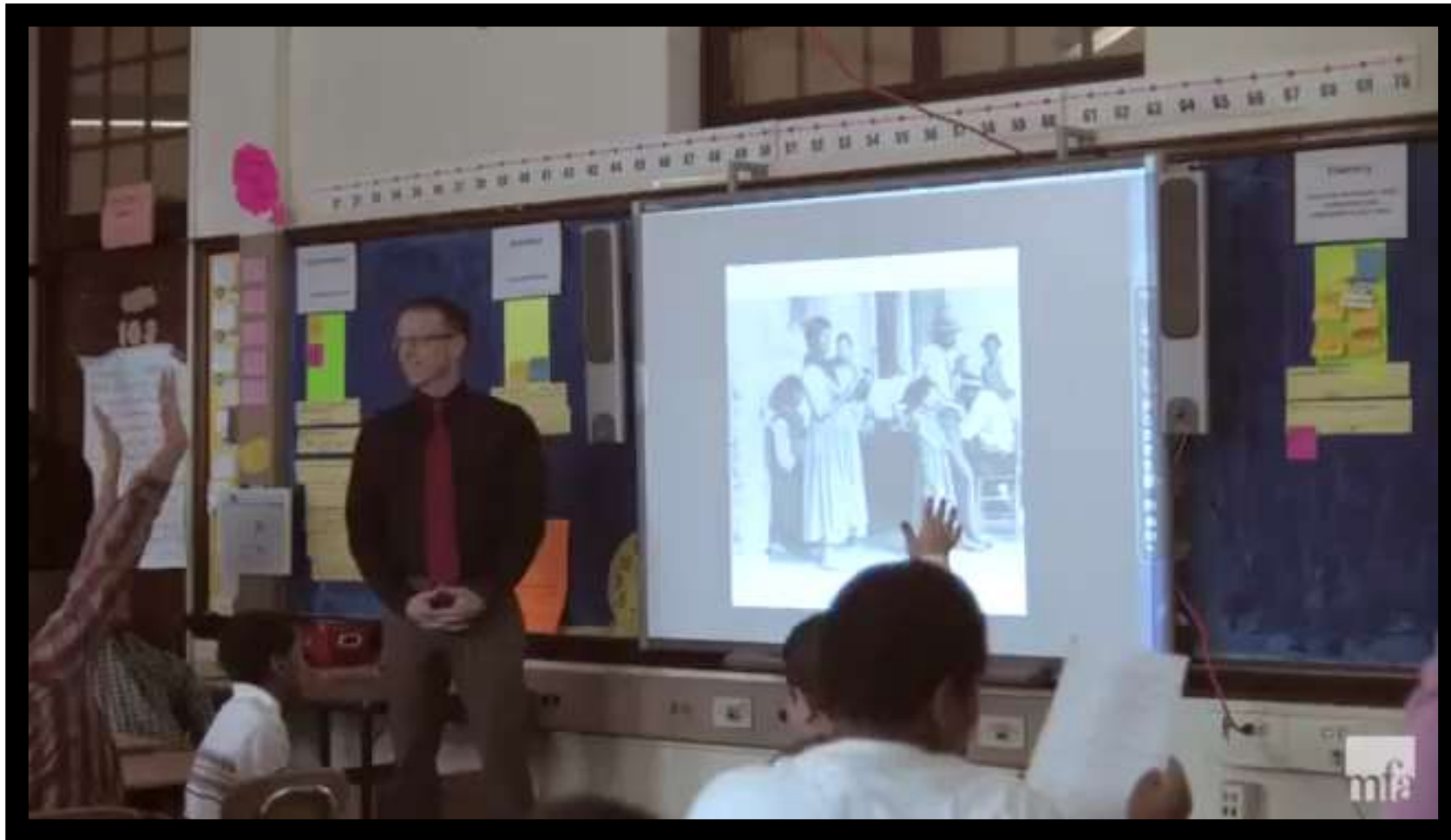
Learning Centers: Adding Meaningful Writing Materials and Literacy Props	
Center	Emergent writing materials and literacy props
Discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide clipboards with paper and pencils to record observations and collect data</li> <li>■ Add paper and craft sticks for children to create seed packet labels for growing plants</li> <li>■ Turn the area into a national weather station or scientific research center, and have the children paint signs labeling the center and record their observations in a scientific journal or observation log</li> </ul>
Blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Add a graph paper notebook labeled "Blueprints," and provide real blueprints</li> <li>■ Attach Velcro to clipboards and rulers for drawing blueprints or designs for building structures, and secure them to the back of shelves in the block area for easy access</li> <li>■ Provide craft sticks, index cards, and tape to create road signs</li> <li>■ Include receipt books and pads of paper to create work orders</li> <li>■ Add house plan magazines, pictures of buildings, and nonfiction books about construction to spark building ideas</li> </ul> 
Dramatic play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Add notepads and pencils to encourage children to write prescriptions, take food orders, create grocery lists, or compose phone messages</li> <li>■ Add restaurant menus and cookbooks</li> <li>■ Place a large piece of paper or chalkboard on the wall for children to write signs and announcements</li> <li>■ Encourage children to turn the dramatic play area into a post office, dentist office, beauty salon, airport, police station, fire station, or doctor's office by decorating the area with pictures and writing words to describe their community center</li> <li>■ Create a veterinary pet clinic, and provide children with office file folders to record information on a pet's health and small notebooks to record instructions about the pet's future care</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Promote interest in your writing center by changing its function: one month, create an insect and arachnid research station and add books, pictures, and words about insects and spiders; another month, add props and turn the writing center into an office, beauty parlor, post office, or newsroom</li> <li>■ Add different types of tools, such as stencils, hole punches, and stamps</li> <li>■ Add sandpaper letters, magnetic letters, and other types of letters to promote alphabet knowledge</li> </ul> 
Outdoor play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Put writing materials in baskets, and place the baskets around the playground</li> <li>■ Give children index cards to write "speeding tickets"; have children write in sand trays</li> <li>■ Provide children with magnifying glasses and small notebooks to write observations about discoveries, such as an insect crawling on a plant or a butterfly landing on a flower</li> <li>■ Allow the children to use sidewalk chalk or to paint letters with water on the cement</li> </ul>

# But Scribbling is all I see!

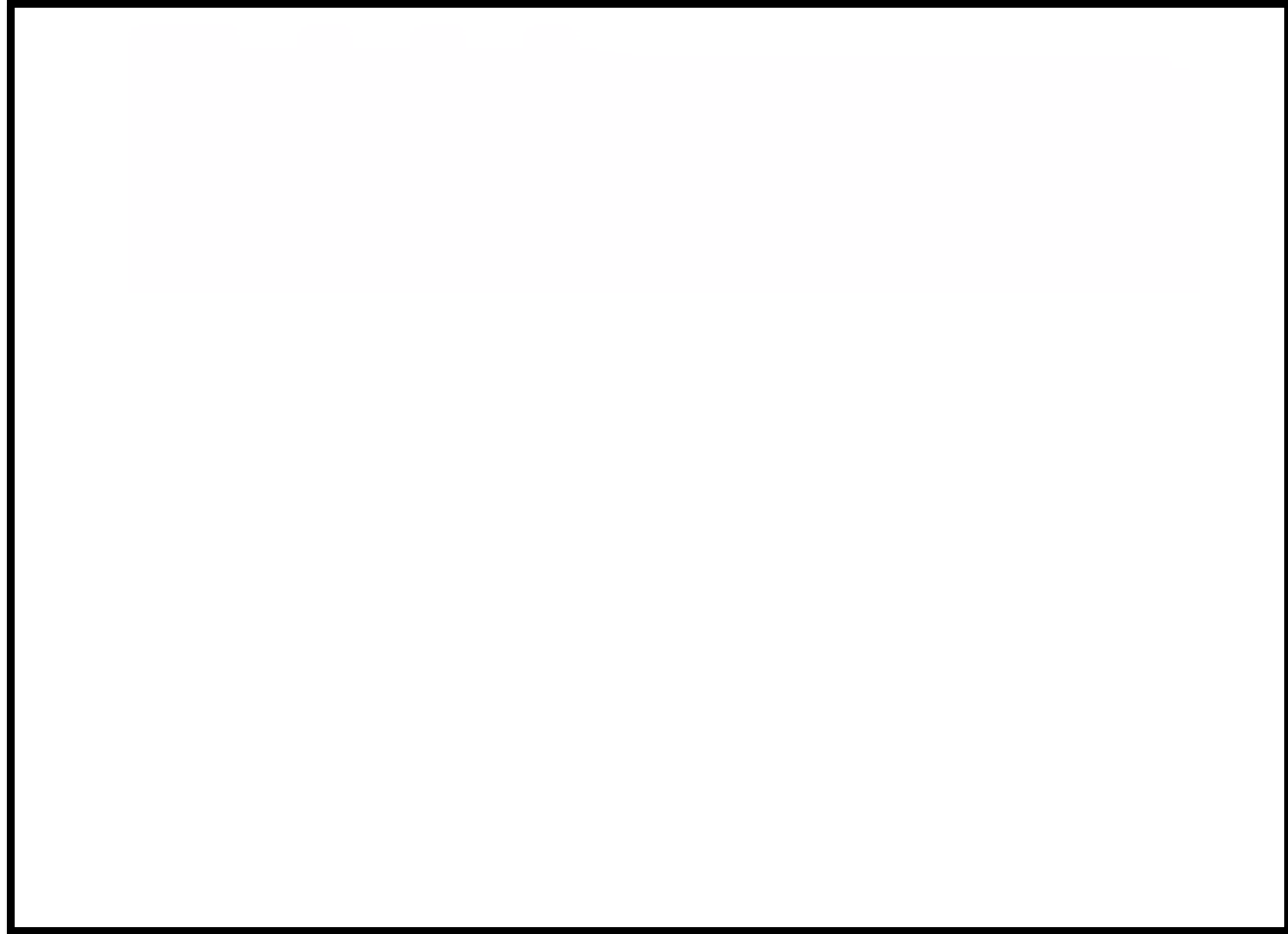
Possible Reasons for Scribbling		What to Look for	Ways to Support
Emergent Writing	The writer is in the scribbling stage of emergent writing and not yet able to independently produce representational drawings.	The writer is imitating print with scribbles in linear patterns, identifies print with intent, shows difficulty drawing shapes and lines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Small group interactive drawing (share the pen), focusing on lines and shapes</li> <li>•Visual and kinesthetic reinforcement of handwriting</li> </ul>
Planning	The writer has not generated an idea before writing, or has not planned across all pages.	The writer does not express intention when asked about work. Writing includes representational drawings on some pages and scribbles on others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Small group shared writing (with a focus on planning)</li> <li>•An individualized chart for planning (i.e. idea generation lists, visuals for “touch and tell” or planning across fingers)</li> </ul>
Elaboration	The writer began with a representational drawing and used scribbles as an attempt to convey action or moments of big feelings.	Identifiable pictures are present, with scribbles on top of pictures or surrounding. Child adds scribbles with excitement and imagination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Study a mentor text together (i.e. books by Mo Willems).</li> <li>•Small group interactive drawing, focusing on ways to show action with words and pictures</li> </ul>
Motor-Sensory	Scribbling is a form of motor activity. Children are gratified by the visual sign of the release of emotional, physical, mental, and/or physical energy.	The writer is focusing intently on work, applying pressure with drawing tool on paper, and may be repeating movements in a circular or linear shape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The child can warm up with scribbles on a single sheet of paper or by using a sand tray for two-three minutes (using a visual timer)</li> </ul>



# Instructional Approaches: Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)



Other ways to harness the potential of drawing as a thinking tool...



A picture really is worth 1000 words and so much more!

