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# The relationship between primary agony and the reading processes of children

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## Methodology and hypothesis :

This presentation is a clinical research based on practice with sessions of children in the age of 6, when children learn how to read. I believe this age is a critical period when primary anxieties are reactivated. Learning to read and write requests a deep identity reorganization. Children with narcissistic disorders , autistic aspects have difficulties. Letters can be overvalued to protect from feelings. In psychotherapy , the transference relationship enables innovative approaches to the use of words, to their symbolic meaning.

Why some children know how to write and read but still have issues with symbolization?  
Why are they frightened by the feelings?

## Transform primary agony and build a sense of being :

### Abstract thinking relies on sensory connections : Primary symbolization

For children, thoughts are first experienced as sensations, concrete objects. The psychic job is to transform these sensations in thoughts. Abstract spoken words are acquired but their relationship to reality is still sometimes very narrow. Thus puns are only accessible after a certain period, usually after 6 years. What happened during that period? Neuroscience studies tend to show that there is a sensitive period conducive to the development of new knowledge. The handwriting recognition is processed by the "primitive brain". For them when a children is asked to read, specific brain function are required and one of them is the rhythmic adjustment and the awareness of the environment.

### The ego as a bodily projection ; a container for an inner world

The body is our first experiment space, our skin the first limit, the shape of the letters another one. What a joy to create the world through writing , but a terror if the primary anxiety become true ! That's why, for a while, the adult share with the children his « container » ability.

### Reading is first and foremost being read then reading emotions

Face recognition incorporates a host of other data, including emotional. Winnicott has shown that it is through the emotional game, read on the face of the mother, the baby made a first experience, mirror understanding their emotional states.



During the early stages of learning to read and write, the child uses this feature mirrored. That is why we see mirrored in the early writings of learning. (S. Dehaene)

Max : Skin: communication and defense interface

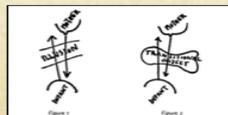


### The words : a new possession that reactivates the first : birth of the object

Neurosciences studies show the complexity of the integration of children's life experiences in learning new skills. In the clinic, the psychic processes arise in somatic activity, motor sensory, emotional primary. The first sensory-affective-proven engines to the most elaborate performances. The shape emerges from an initial undifferentiated matrix so the learning process is a construction of a separate objet. What Bion calls the « proto-space».

Transitional area : the first possession

This is what Winnicott calls the « transitional area », this area neither I nor external, neither inside nor outside which is the playground. It leads to symbolization.



### Learning how to read : discovery and tolerate the unknown

The desire to know is related to the feeling of helplessness, to the infant's distress, the Hilflosigkeit (S. Freud). The epistemophilic impulse is linked with the sadistic fantasies. The sense of being of the infant might be fragilized by them. So, the shapes of letters are rigid, without symbolism.

## Clinical vignette : Sam, 5 years old : a concrete use of letters to symbolism

Sam, a geometric world to support the inner structure. He is obsessed with two things:

- the cross on churches
- the signs of words, their shape

He can not read. What is he looking for?

The assumption is that the structure of the cross is found in the words. It is a search for an internal skeleton , a primary psychic organization . Vertical / horizontal , clear and repetitive , these signs reassure Sam. He reads the world by projecting his body image and its flaws. It's a very concrete way of reading, full of fears because it does not open to imagination.

The straight forms, clearly distinguished as are the crosses of the churches, are representations of his attempt internal structure. The rigid shapes of the letters could support projections Sam fantasies. Within the transference relationship, he relied on me to play.



### First step : play with the shapes of the letters. Neither his nor mine, opening a transitional space

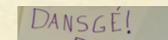
Sam expresses primary anxieties when he threaten me to start his sentence from the beginning if i speak, or do something wrong. He needs to control my voice and my inner world. Reading loudly is a concrete experience of penetration. His sense of being is attacked. After the interpretation of his fantaisie to be devoured while i speak, he drew.

### Drawing n°2: Two teeth : Recognize and tolerate the projection of his inner world

The shapes of its design are geometric and have minimal contacts. The two teeth are represented with, inside, the letters. The letters are all uppercase, they do not touch. The fantasy of eating the words is represented here in a concrete way. Playing with the meaning of words is a new experience for him.

### Drawing n°3 : Access symbolism : word games « DansGE (Danger means In -I Have) »

There is meaning with danger and inside. The danger is inside of it, these are fathers and male identifications. Here that the letters are not represented. The interior of man is hidden : Sam has internalized the concept of secrecy. He can think without disrupting, the other is hiding things, that there are puzzles. Opening possible sense shows that Sam elaborates mentally some fantasies. The letters tell a conscious and repressed history. There is a veil that gives its symbolic content of the word.



## Conclusion

Learning to read is a time of significant change for the child. Psychic work which is requested mobilizes primary aspects of his identity. So deep anxieties can create symptoms. We have seen that the use of the letters may be a defence against the emotional impact of the discovery of symbolic meaning.

The shapes of the letters are seen only by their visual surface. Reading aloud, tolerating differences between the visual and auditory percept can refer to early anxieties about identity continuity. In therapy, we have shown that the game is a way for the rigid defences, paranoid or schizoid subside. So that the child accesses a creative use of words, there would be a necessary step in our where the letters have to be integrated with their sensory perception and therefore also the emotional impact.

The psychoanalytic models of primary symbolization allowed us to understand differently the learning process of letters for children with primary anxiety. We saw that this very specific period of 6 years old asks the child to mobilize both verbal symbolization capabilities but also nonverbal, more connected to the body sensations.

We came to the conclusion that the rigid use of words is a defensive reaction and may be related to anxiety regarding the integrity of the self. The surface of words is the projection of the self and primary agony excluded the capacity of inner integration. The surface is higher invested for avoiding the inner changes because such changes might destroy their sense of being. Through play, through play, sensory letters can become metaphors.

In other words, for some children, you need to play with the letters as sensory signs. This process activates the primary sensory connection and allows to contain fantasms , especially those agressif. Then the infant can deconstruct his defenses and will play with words as metaphor of his inner world.

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