

PREFACE

In Italy a great many experiences have attempted to promote reading with very young children in nurseries and infant schools. As a result, over the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, in particular, we proposed an action-research project in the nurseries and infant schools of some areas of Tuscany (Pistoia, Florence, Grosseto, Livorno, Lucca, Viareggio, Empolese area) with the purpose of presenting Eric Carle's books and investigating the levels of understanding of the stories proposed by the famous illustrator. The specific aim of the project was to introduce teachers, educators, librarians and parents to the picture books written and illustrated by Eric Carle and translated into Italian.

Eric Carle is author of many books addressed to pre-school children: they are texts that can boost the young listeners' knowledge and imagination, because they deal with typical themes and issues while accounting for the children's point of view. They are publications in which fun overlaps with irony, fantasy alternates with reality, surprise encounters rituality. Through these books, the adults can introduce the young listeners to the 'passion' and 'pleasure' of reading: children need an adult person who is patient, willing and encouraging to read stories to them.

Another important goal was to pursue a reading programme on Eric Carle's books with the children attending the nurseries and infant schools in Tuscany, check their understanding of the stories and compare the results achieved, while bearing in mind the age of the children involved, the story read to them and the context in which the reading experience took place. The results were indeed very interesting, as can be seen by reading the book we are proposing. The essays in the volume have been designed to account for the overall

experience, which proved to be highly interesting for both the children and their families.*

* Particular thanks go to the 'Bruno Ciari' Study Centre for authorizing the publication of some essays first published in the Italian volume which presented all the experiences in the project centred around Eric Carle's illustrated books.