

Enhancing Handwriting: Practical and Positive Strategies

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- What is handwriting?
- Is it still important that we teach it?
- If it is, how can it be enhanced?
- And, how do we assess progress?

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Donald Graves (1983)

- ‘Handwriting, like skin, shows the outside of the person. But beneath the skin are the ideas and the information’
- ‘Handwriting is the vehicle carrying information on its way to a destination. If it is illegible the journey may not be completed.’

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Handwriting is...

- ‘Language by hand’
- ‘Automatic letter writing’
- ‘the backbone of written language’

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What’s involved?

- Ability to recall patterns and letter shapes
 - Leading to **automaticity**
- Fine motor skills

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- ‘the ability to recall patterns and letter shapes contribute more to handwriting than do motor skills’
 - Beringer & Autmann, 2004
- ‘Lack of automaticity will hinder the ability of young children to express their ideas’
 - (Medwell & Wray, 2009)

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- 'The aim of handwriting is to allow maximum use of motor memory for words and letter strings with minimal visual control'

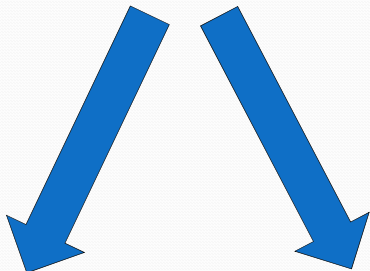
- Brown 1990

Assessment?

- Neatness?
- Style?
- Efficiency?
 - speed

- Does the focus on neatness inhibit automaticity?

Writing



Penmanship

Creativity

- 'Children can write meaningful texts before they have mastered the writing system'
 - Teale & Sulzby, 1986
- **Emergent Writing**
- Children's emergent writing should be developed from the earliest stages and they should be taught early writing skills as early as possible

- Children need to be immersed in written language just as they were immersed in talk when learning to speak.

Working Memory (Wray & Medwell)

- Short term memory
- Only capable of one step at a time
 - **Writing process**

- If children are to develop as writers, they need to experiment and take risks in their writing.
- Success at writing encourages further writing.
- 'Getting it right' may be important, but it is not the reason why writers write!

Enhancing writing

- Children need demonstrations of how writing works.
- We must provide the **time** and **opportunity** for children to practise.
- How does the curriculum assist teachers?

What the Curriculum advises

- 'From earliest school experience, children should be encouraged to learn to **grip** the pencil appropriately and to adopt a comfortable writing **posture** as a matter of habit' (p.14)



- 'the early style of handwriting that is most accessible to children will be based on the print style of their reading material.' (p.14)
- However, from the start they should be encouraged to form letters in a way that will facilitate the introduction of a cursive script later on.' (p.15)

- The child will be enabled to 'write in a legible joined script with confidence and fluency'
(p. 40, Third and Fourth class)

The skills along the path to writing are:

- Scribbling
- Making basic shapes.
- Gaining more control of small muscles through...
- Beginning to make drawings of real people, objects, and events.
- Beginning to recognise letters.
- Beginning to recognise written names and some words.
- Realising the permanency of words (r-u-n always spells run).
- Beginning to imitate letters in writing.
- Attempting to write their name.
- Beginning to write other words.
- Improving through practice and positive feedback.

Pre-writing activities

- Develop FMS
- Practise basic movements
 - Print
 - Cursive
- Practise patterns
 - Channelling
 - Tracing
 - Copying

Patterns

- Fundamental to correctly made letter forms
- Taught before letters are formally introduced
- Must be seen alongside letter families

Motor Skills

- Strengthen muscles
- Release tension in fingers / hands
- Loosen up arm muscles
- (Practise basic movements)

Factors that may hinder automatic handwriting

1. Pencil control/grip



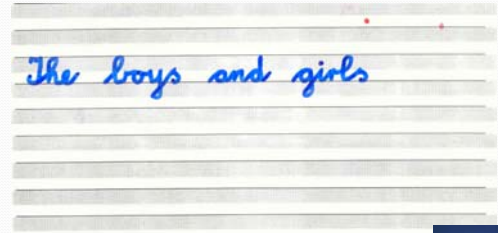
- Correct posture
- Correct starting point
- Reversals
- Keeping letters on line
- Maintaining size & spacing
- Directionality/mirror writing

Reasons why children should learn to write well

1. Fluency and speed
2. Aid to good spelling
3. Incentive, pride, self-esteem

Teaching letter formation

- Letter families (c,o,a,g,d)
- Alphabetically
- Frequency (e,t,a,o,i,n)



Cursive from the beginning?

Why cursive??

- All letters begin at the same point
- Letter formation is supported since the ligatures lead naturally into the starting point of the following letter.
- Creating a 'running hand/flowing pen movement is a more natural process
- There is scope for revising flowing patterns in pre-writing and directly associating them with correct letter formations

- Confusion between letters (b/d) is prevented
- It makes more sense that children begin with a writing scheme that will not have to be changed later on in their schooling
- In many European countries, print is seen as an unnecessary step in handwriting development

- It helps to prevent interspersing of capital letters among lower case letters.
- Teaching children print script or always allowing them to write in capital letters, delays their orthographical development (Brown 1990)
- It assists left to right movement through each word

Why Print?????????

- Cursive is too difficult
- Cursive is too confusing
 - (books vs. writing)
- Print is easier to teach
- Plenty of materials available
- (Tradition)

Left handers

- Write towards the body
- **Should hold pencil differently**
- **Paper should be angled**

Left-hander



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