

TEACHING HANDWRITING SKILLS TO PRIMARY CHILDREN USING AN ADAPTED HANDWRITING PROGRAMMER

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ABSTRACT

The present study was carried out to assist the students of Junior Primary Section of an International Indian School in Saudi Arabia to improve upon their handwriting. Thirty- Seven students with poor handwriting were selected for the study. Interviews and their responses were analysed. Observation and evaluation of note books were also conducted to collect the information about the students' handwriting. Interventions which were put in place were firstly, monthly activities in teaching handwriting were put in place and supervised by the researcher. The work was checked and those who improved a little were given the needed practice. Moreover, it was recommended that, in teaching handwriting, teachers should employ different approaches, techniques and use varied models in teaching and learning of handwriting especially at the primary level.

KEYWORDS: *Writing, Handwriting, Evaluation, Intervention, Primary*

INTRODUCTION

Children follow elders when they are toddlers and start scribbling and drawing on surfaces like walls and floors as a first step towards presenting their ideas and thoughts. Handwriting skills develop over time. It depends on fine motor skills, memory and concentration. For developing a good handwriting at an early stage, it is important that a child masters in his ability to form letters, recognize and spell frequently used words, put spaces between words, write letters and words in a similar size and in a line and write about familiar events. Usual problems in handwriting can be recognized at this stage— if a child finds it difficult to grip a pencil correctly, frequently swaps his hands while writing, finds it difficult to form a letter correctly, has untidy handwriting and has less concentration while writing. Handwriting can be identified as untidy if letters are not closed correctly, the letter size is not uniform, and if letters are not placed properly on a line or the spacing between words is inconsistent. A lot of practice is very important to develop a good handwriting. Fun filled activities can make practice interesting.

It is a skill that is required for full participation in school activities since children spend up to half of their classroom time engaged in paper and pencil tasks daily. Thus, handwriting difficulties have a profound impact on a child's academic success and self-esteem. Proficiency in handwriting is significantly correlated with academic achievement and is a predictor of general learning abilities. Poor handwriting may also lead to lower academic attainment; children who find handwriting more difficult and effortful may become fatigued more quickly than their peers, and may be less able to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension through written assignments.

At the time of entry into primary school, children use much of their cognitive energy to control the production of letters and the graphical aspects of writing. A significant portion of their time and cognitive energy is, in fact, invested in controlling down processes (for example, correct writing of letters), while few attentive resources remain available for more complex tasks, such as generating ideas, lexical access, management of comprehensive activities, and orthographic review of the text.

Merits of Good Handwriting

In the present techno driven world, keyboarding is considered an important skill in higher education. But regular schooling still requires a lot of handwritten assignments and handwriting is one such skill that can be developed at an early stage. Some of the merits of developing good handwriting are:

- Handwriting activates the brain as it involves more complex motor and cognitive skills. It is a holistic and tactile experience which engages the eyes, hands, fingertips, arms and hand muscles.
- Handwriting contributes to reading skills because it activates visual perception of letters.
- Cursive writing helps children with dyslexia since each letter is formed differently and dyslexic children finds it more easy to differentiate than printed letters,
- Legible and impressive handwriting is still considered a mark for many qualifications.
- Good handwriting helps children in enhancing their self-esteem and confidence.
- Developing beautiful handwriting skills improves creativity.
- Children with good handwriting are good note takers, which is important in higher classes as it helps to achieve greater concentration.
- A good handwriting will be an everlasting impression well into adulthood. A beautiful handwriting is a reflection of personality.
- People with good handwriting can communicate their ideas better. A visually appealing handwriting is very inviting to a reader.

Psychological Benefits of Using Cursive Writing

- Its faster than print letter, If a child writes in cursive, he /she learn write faster than BLOCK LETTER.
- Cursive provides a flow of thoughts as well as flow of words.
- RESEARCHERS said in 1976that writing in continuous fashion promote an understanding of complete letters better than separate letters.
- Cursive gets the entire brain working. It's proven by many researchers that our right hemisphere focused more in reading cursive and understanding it rather than printed form.
- Cursive helps you retain information:When you read in cursive the memory will keep the information longer in memory.

- Cursive will make a child a better speller. It helps in making a child a better speller along with having fine motor skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the World Book Encyclopedia, “writing is a system of human communication by means of visual symbols or signs”. In the world’s writing system Peter T. Daniels defines writing as “a system of more or less permanent marks used to represent an utterance in such a way that it can be recovered more or less exactly without the intervention of the utterer”.

Christensen (2005) suggests that handwriting is not just about training the hand (motor skill); but it is about how memory and orthographic processes must work together to be able to recall the letter shapes and translate these patterns onto the page automatically.

“What is writing?” In the Blackwell Encyclopaedia, Florian Coulmas defines writing as a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in systematic way with the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question and the rules by virtue of which its units are encoded in the writing system.

Morin M. F., Lavoie N and Montésinos-Gelet I (2012) explored the existing relationship between three different methods of teaching writing and writing skills development (writing speed, spelling and text production) in a sample of children attending the second grade of primary school in Canada.

Graham S and Harris R., K (2000) reviewed the evidence on the role of handwriting in children's development as writers in “The role of self-regulation and transcription skills in writing and writing development”.

Microsoft Encarta Kids 2007 defines writing as “a method of communication”. It uses marks that we see and understand, the marks we use to write English are the letters of the alphabet. They stand for sounds.

METHODS

Research Design

The study was an action research. Action research is an extended form of case study in that it studies a particular population to improve or solve the problem with an appropriate intervention. In the study, the performance of a class of students was studied and identified to be poor and an intervention of using early writing preparatory activity was designed by the researcher to assist the students to improve their performance in handwriting at Junior Primary Section of an International School.

Population and Sample Selection

The research was carried out in Junior Primary Section of an International Indian School of Saudi Arab. A sample of thirty-seven students including both boys and girls was used for the study. These sample selected from 11 sections of class 2 and 21 sections of class 1. Their ages ranged between six and eight years. A purposive sampling method was used based on the fact that, the researcher was assigned to handle that class. Since action research focused on designing an intervention to solving problems in specific situation, class 1 and class 2 is deemed appropriate for the purpose of the study. It becomes

imperative for the researcher to stick to the primary students for this study so that they could design an appropriate intervention to assist students to improve on their performance in handwriting.

Monthly Activities in Teaching Handwriting

Month 1

The chief purpose here was to stimulate keen interest among children in learning to write and prepare them to acquire the requisite technique with reasonable ease. What was essential for this stage in sensory motor control?

Step One

Here, the researcher emphasized that the students see on the arrows indicated where to begin the letters. The researcher at this point did not place too much emphasis on the letters produced by students. Students were asked to re-write these simple words or sentences in their writing books while the researcher evaluates to ensure that the words were reproduced correctly in their books. Below is the pattern of worksheet for both Class 1 and 2.

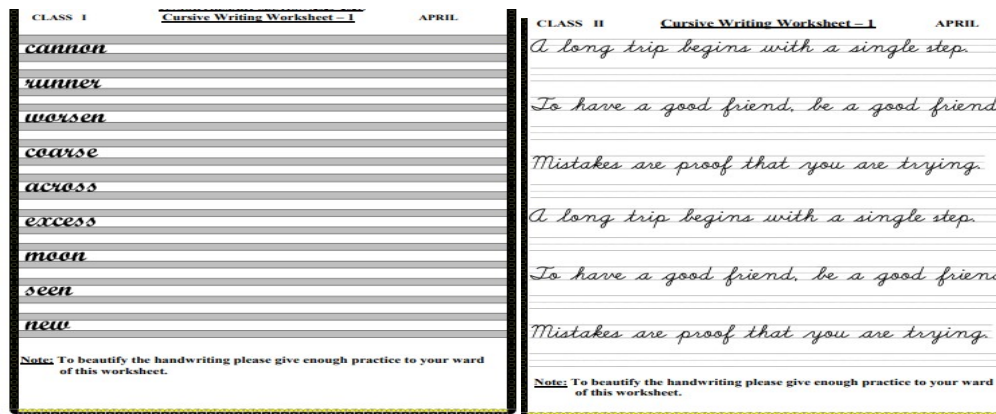


Figure 1

Step Two

The research introduced the students to other sets of words/sentences as worksheet 2 for them to copy. The researcher saw to it that these words or sentences were repeated several times in their writing books to help improve their sensory motor coordination. They gave them their books for further practice in their house.

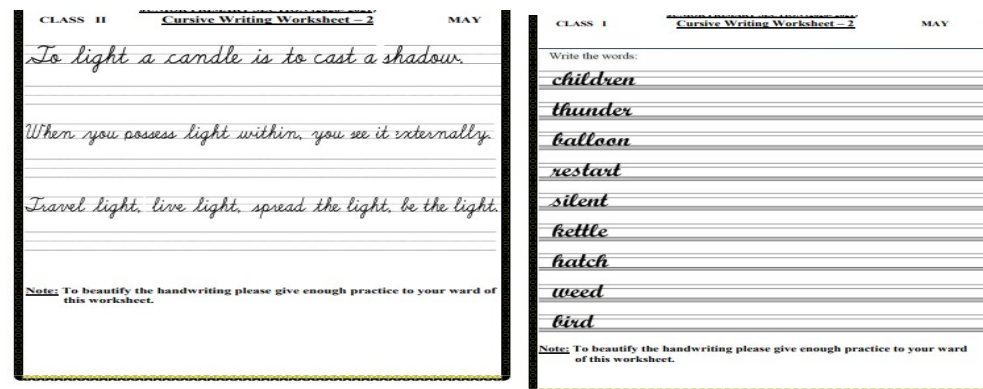


Figure 2

Step Three

At this point, the researcher introduced the students to simple sentences which brought into display what they have observed. The researcher introduced them to other new patterns of worksheet for students to practice. This time, the researcher allowed the students to do it without offering help while he went round to observe. Below is the pattern of the practice.

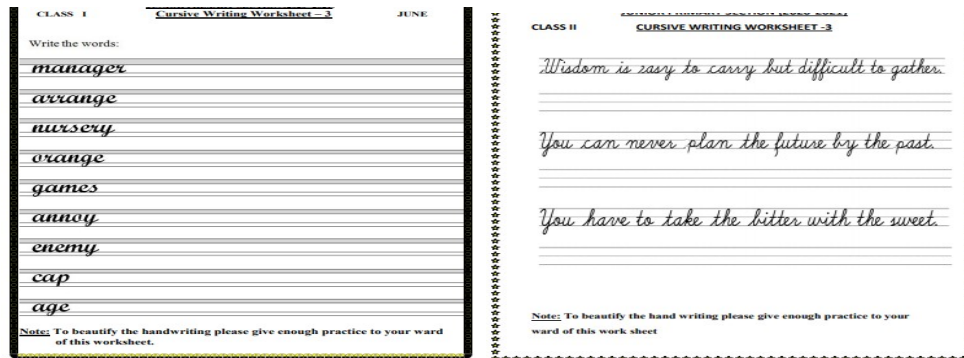


Figure 3

Month 2

At this stage, as soon as students had acquired sufficient motor control, they were introduced to learning the simple form of writing. The aim here involved the following:

- To deepen interest in writing.
- To promote the orderly development of the required attitudes and skills.
- To encourage the students in the use of handwriting for meeting needs and as an aid of learning and a means of self-expression.

The researcher supplied them with their writing books.

Here, the researcher turned his attention from words to simple sentences and sentences to harder one.

The researcher placed emphasis on improving the quality and speed of students' writing. The chief aims of the researcher teaching handwriting at this time included the following:

- To cultivate a growing interest and pride in achieving a good quality of writing
- To develop the attitude and skills required for writing clearly, legibly and with reasonable speed.
- To discover the reasons for individual's failure to make satisfactory progress in handwriting and to apply the necessary corrective.

He made them write the sentence five times in their writing books. The researcher emphasized on quality writing. He went round to observe and offered help to those who were finding it difficult. He saw that there has been an improvement.



Figure 4

The researcher collected the assignment, went through it and saw that there had been improvement. He later introduced them to the writing of complex sentences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter is concerned with subjecting all data collected from pre-test and post-test to statistical analysis, interpretation and findings.

Thirty- Seven students took part in both pre-test and post-test and their scripts were checked out by the researcher with the help of teacher.

SUMMARY

This research looked at engaging pupils in early preparatory writing activities in order to improve their handwriting. It involved thirty- seven students in basic two from Junior Primary School international Indian school, Al-Jubail Saudi Arabia; the thirty- seven students were taken through series of preparatory writing activities. The pre-test and the post-test comparison group design were used. There was a pre-test followed by two months of intervention. The researcher met the students two times a month for the intervention, each lasting forty minutes. The students were helped to improve their handwriting and this reflected in the marks they obtained in the post – test.

CONCLUSIONS

This study presents an adaptation of the HWT programme for Primary children. It describes in detail how the standard HWT procedure can be adapted to become a comprehensive handwriting curriculum that is effective at improving the handwriting skills for children with intellectual disabilities.

A critical analysis of the results obtained from the pre-test and post-test revealed that the mean score of the post-test scored is significantly higher at 5.80 than the mean score of the pre-test score which is 2.88. This shows that students performed better when they were introduced to a variety of handwriting techniques. The students were helped to improve their handwriting and this reflected in their marks they obtained in the post-test. To conclude, the researcher would like to encourage individuals who want to research into this field to do well so that poor handwriting among pupils in basic schools will be reduced to the barest minimum.

Suggested Mechanism to Improve Handwriting of Little Geniuses

- First the few months, pay attention to the size of the letters;
You have to check from time to time whether your child writing small or big letters or leaving more space or less after every word.
- Look at the spacing;
Always leave enough space between 2 words.
There should be scientifically gap between 2 word that much to fit a small size 'o' and guardian should monitor this from time to time.
- Look for a slant;
A slight slant is not a problem but if child bends the letter too much, it causes problem in reading and identifying letters properly.
- Check your alignment;
From time to time, check every word individually angled of your ward. Slowly and gradually the child will adopt this habit, we need to have patience.
- Check flaws;
Check the mistake of the child and if any word mistake is there, tell the child to repeat at least 10 times.
- Look other handwriting styles for motivation;
When the child have a good grip on handwriting give other types of worksheets to the child for practice.
- Give more printable worksheets for practice;
Use and keep printable worksheets for your child. It helps them to focus and achieve the desired success in handwriting.
- Give them PANGRAM phrase to practice;
By giving them PANGRAM our child can use all alphabets in a sentence at least once. Some of the pangrams in ENGLISH language are;
 - a. Brown jars prevented the mixture from freezing too quickly.
 - b. Five boxing wizards jump quickly.
 - c. Intoxicated queen Elizabeth vows Mick Jagger is perfection.

Some Useful Tips for Left Handers

- Encourage use of the tripod grip.
- Teach left handers child to hold the pencil in the tripod grasp about 1 to 1.5 inches above the tip of the pencil.
- Teach left handed writers to place the paper on the left side of the body, so they can see what they are writing and also for smudge free writing.
- provide them EASEL, so that they can colour, draw and write properly.

Strategies to Improve Handwriting of Our Little Geniuses

- Let the child write slowly;
Let them write slowly in his/her leisure time. Do not pressurize to write fast when they write slowly the best shaped handwritten letters in a result you will get.

- Let child use cursive writing worksheets regularly;
Inculcate the habit of cursive writing worksheets.
- Provide child best pencil to write;
Provide them best quality pencils for hassle free writing.
- Usage of pangrams;
Give them pangrams to write in 4 lined notebooks.
- Give them comfortable chair
Choose them comfortable table & chair which is of right height and also of proper light facility.
- Furniture should be of free of vibration
The table and chair of children must be free of vibrations.
- Utilize their leisure time;
Utilize the leisure time of the children and provide them worksheets to write.
- Parents & facilitators guide child from time to time;
Parental guidance is must to attain the desired result. No matter in which class they are, check their handwriting styles and guide and mentor them from time to time.

To conclude I must say that our little geniuses needs our guidance, mentorship, time, attention etc. JOHN LOCK rightly compared the mind of the child with TABULA RASA: BLANK SLATE in which we have to put inside good memories, apt knowledge, proper information, ideas etc. We need to make them aware about good handwriting skills and practice them for the best possible result.

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