

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH HANDWRITING DIFFICULTIES IN THE CLASSROOM

An action research project about how to improve the support by primary school teachers of children who are delayed in their readiness to write



WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- Handwriting difficulties affect between 10 and 30 per cent of children
- Such difficulties negatively impact children's emotional wellbeing and academic performance
- To date there is no research looking at teacher training and handwriting readiness (a key indicator for children to start handwriting) in the UK
- The issue is especially pertinent in light of the problems with reading and accessing learning that children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs (SEN) are experiencing post covid-19

WHAT DID I WANT TO KNOW?

1. What do one cohort of early career primary school teachers know about the handwriting readiness of children from their training?
2. How can collaboration between a small group of primary school teachers and me as a paediatric occupational therapist improve the support children who are delayed in their readiness to write get in class?

"I'm still sad that I didn't get my pen licence in primary school"
16 YEARS OLD

COPRODUCTION

The study was developed and shaped with input from a Public and Community Involvement and Engagement (PCIE) working group

"I couldn't read what I was writing, nor could my teachers"
12 YEARS OLD

ACTION RESEARCH

DATA FROM THE TEACHERS' SURVEY USED TO SHAPE THE WORKSHOP

WHAT DID I DO?

Phase one: what do teachers know?

- Online questionnaire sent using purposive sampling to all 323 early career teachers (ECTs) in Kent
- Explored ECTs' training in handwriting prerequisites and readiness

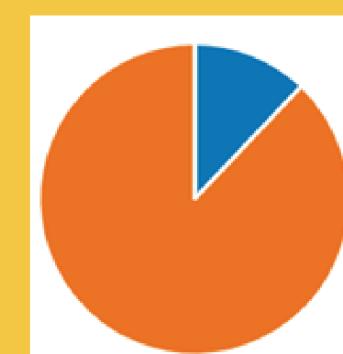
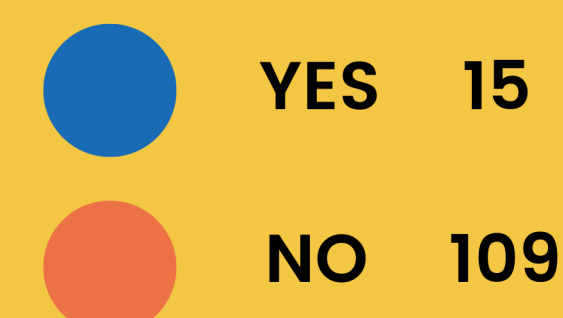
Phase two: what can we do to help?

- A handwriting training session, shaped by data from phase one, was trialled with six ECTs
- A focus group gathered the ECTs' thoughts and ideas about it
- Focus group data analysed using thematic analysis

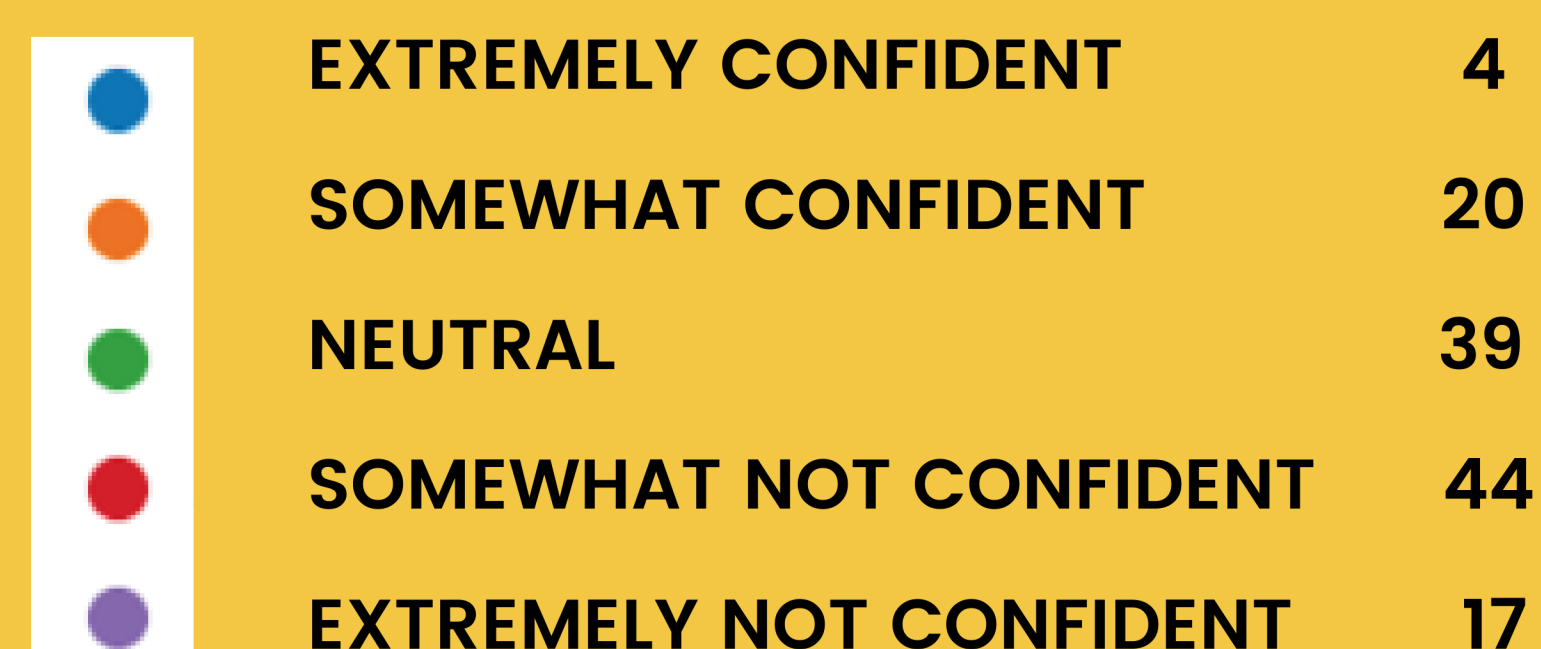
WHAT DID I FIND OUT: PHASE ONE

- 124 responses received (38% response rate)
- 82% reported no training in handwriting development
- 88% reported no training on handwriting prerequisites
- Of those who didn't, 79% would have found this either extremely or somewhat useful
- 90% were not taught how to identify children with handwriting difficulties
- 49% report feeling not confident with handwriting and handwriting difficulties

DID YOU RECEIVE TRAINING ON HANDWRITING PREREQUISITES?



OVERALL, HOW CONFIDENT DO YOU FEEL WITH HANDWRITING AND HANDWRITING DIFFICULTIES FROM YOUR TRAINING?



WHAT DID I FIND OUT: PHASE TWO

1. 'Mind the gap' – an awareness of the gap in their knowledge on handwriting from their training
2. A realisation – of handwriting prerequisites and why they are important
3. Problems and solutions – a more in-depth understanding of the hows and whys of handwriting difficulties and interventions
4. Changes – the broader impact of the training and plans for dissemination in their schools
5. Practical and relatable – thoughts on how the workshop can be modified

"I have no idea where to start with handwriting"
RECEPTION TEACHER

"If we were training now and had that training, we would be walking into the job equipped"

IMPACT

- Six ECTs from different schools have received training in handwriting prerequisites and plan to share key insights with their colleagues
- Findings shared at a Kent-wide SENCo forum
- Strengthened links between health and education
- Article/interview to go in STLS newsletter
- Strong links established with Canterbury Christ Church University

CONCLUSION

Findings from the study demonstrate a gap in teachers' knowledge of handwriting instruction from their training and lack of confidence with handwriting and identifying handwriting difficulties. A workshop has been developed, in collaboration with teachers, to address this gap, and its feasibility tested. Findings suggest there is huge potential for further research in this area, both to benefit children and young people and to build workforce skills.

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