



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

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Public Summary:

Introduction. Handwriting difficulties are estimated to affect between 10 and 30 per cent of children and have been found to negatively impact children's emotional wellbeing and academic performance. This study aims to understand what one cohort of early career Primary school teachers know about handwriting readiness from their training and looks at how to help teachers better support children who are delayed in their readiness to write.

Participants and methods. Phase one of the study utilised a purposive sampling strategy to send an online questionnaire to all newly qualified teachers in Kent, UK. Results from phase one informed the development of phase two, which consisted of a handwriting training session and focus group with 6 newly qualified teachers. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data from both phases.

Results. 124 out of 323 questionnaires sent were completed. 82 per cent of respondents reported no training in handwriting development and 90 per cent were not taught how to identify children with handwriting difficulties. Themes arising from focus group data included a lack of confidence in teaching handwriting, uncertainty about how to support children with handwriting difficulties and a need to understand handwriting prerequisites.

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. The findings suggest there is huge potential for further research in this area, both to benefit children and young people and to build workforce skills.



Public and Community Involvement:

The project was completed with a working party consisting of parents of children with handwriting difficulties and a member of education's specialist teaching service. The group informed all stages of the project including recruitment, data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Dissemination:

I have presented the findings at national and international conferences including the British Education Research Association conference and the Royal College of Occupational Therapists' children and young people's conference. I have also submitted an article to the British Journal of Occupational Therapy.

Impact and Implementation:

6 early careers teachers have received a workshop addressing their knowledge gap and they plan to share these insights with their schools.

I have attended a Kent-wide Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) forum to talk about the findings of the project and discuss how SENCos can better support their early years teachers.

I have appeared in the specialist teacher service's newsletter discussing the findings of my project and plans to continue the research.

Publications:

(2024) 'Special Issue: Abstracts from the 36th Annual Meeting of the European Academy of Childhood Disability (EACD), Bruges, Belgium, 29 May-1 June 2024.' *Developmental medicine and child neurology*, 66, Suppl 2.

What next?

I hope to continue the project through the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) Doctoral Clinical and Practitioner Academic Fellowship (DCAF) award to develop the screening tool and test the intervention in schools.