

INFORMED SOURCES SAMPLE FEBRUARY 2018

Why we still focus on handwriting

In an era when so much of our communication is done via computer or other screens, it may seem strange that so much focus is still placed on handwriting.

In your day-to-day life, you may very seldom need to handwrite anything; and so you wonder: if the world has moved so far from handwriting, why does it matter if my child is practising theirs?

Associate Professor Noella Mackenzie of Charles Sturt University has been researching this very thing, and has found that there are a lot of reasons why handwriting remains important.

“If our handwriting is automatic and fast, we can concentrate on other elements of writing, such as composing the message,” Assoc Prof Mackenzie said. “But handwriting and keyboarding skills both require complex sensory, motor, perceptual and cognitive skills, and we are not giving students the instruction or the time to develop and practise these skills so they become efficient and automatic practitioners.

“If we expect a child to produce a piece of writing, we need to teach them how, so they can choose the best tools for the task and use them efficiently so they don’t interfere with the task itself.

“Handwriting skills remain essential for students at all levels of schooling, and support the development of reading, spelling, vocabulary and other cognitive abilities, as well as fine motor skills.”

In Assoc Prof Mackenzie’s survey of 336 parents, 434 teachers, 79 retired teachers and 17 parents whose children were home-schooled, more than 90 per cent of each group believed handwriting was still important, and most thought it should be taught throughout primary school.

Most of the teachers surveyed (87.5 per cent) and retired teachers (90.5 per cent) agreed that efficient handwriting frees up working memory so children can concentrate on their composition rather than on the task of writing itself.

For further information, see Mackenzie, N.M., & Spokes, R. (2017). Handwriting and keyboard skills, in N.M. Mackenzie & J.A. Scull (eds), *Understanding and supporting young writers*, Routledge, UK: Oxfordshire.

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