

## Handwriting Matters

### *The Benefits of Introducing a Handwriting Curriculum*

*By Stephen McDow*

If you think handwriting belongs in the past with the founding fathers and quill pens, think again. Handwriting skills are used every day and are fundamental to the development of other skills necessary for success in school.

Unfortunately, children today often are not taught handwriting in elementary school because of the pressures that weigh on teachers and administrators to fit more and more curricula into the academic day. Administrators and teachers need to understand the importance of teaching handwriting and the significant positive impact it has on education overall. They also need to be reassured that handwriting can be taught effectively in as little as 15 minutes per day!

Handwriting instruction is a vital part of a complete language arts curriculum. Writing skills begin with basic handwriting skills. The process of learning handwriting fosters letter recognition, word awareness, and sentence skills. A well-developed handwriting curriculum teaches children proper grip, letter formation, and translation of a visual or mental image of a letter into a handwritten letter.

Without appropriate instruction, children simply draw letters, but their efforts are not efficient or automatic. Consistent and correct habits are fundamental to learning letter formation. With practice, children master good habits and have the freedom to focus on content and on how they want to convey their thoughts. They no longer have to think about how to print; it's automatic.

The overwhelming benefits of handwriting instruction have been observed by educators such as Florida-based teacher Dian Hooper of Ocoee Elementary, who experienced first-hand the impact of introducing handwriting instruction to her students. Currently a Curriculum Resource Teacher, Dian Hooper was a second grade teacher when Ocoee Elementary adopted its handwriting program six years ago.



**Frog Jump Gazette:** Describe the decision-making process for choosing the Handwriting Without

Tears® curriculum.

**Mrs. Hooper:** Our principal, Sheila Johnson, observed the Handwriting Without Tears® program being implemented in another school in our district and wanted Ocoee Elementary to adopt it too.

**Frog Jump Gazette:** What was Ocoee Elementary doing with handwriting prior to adopting the curriculum?

**Mrs. Hooper:** None of the teachers were directly addressing handwriting instruction. Everyone was doing his or her own thing or nothing at all. Without a formal handwriting program, instructors and students were suffering. Poor legibility affected instructors' ability to assess students' work. Many students labored over their letters, drawing the letters rather than forming them with ease of habit. Students with the poorest handwriting skills were fatigued easily and either wrote short answers with the fewest words possible or despite their best efforts were limited in the amount of work they were able to complete.

**Frog Jump Gazette:** What prevented teachers from providing handwriting instruction?

**Mrs. Hooper:** Many felt that there was not enough time in the day to add one more requirement. They knew that handwriting was a problem, but they didn't have a solution. We clearly needed to make some changes. Teachers were pleasantly surprised to learn that handwriting instruction required only 15 minutes of class time each day.

**Frog Jump Gazette:** What has changed since the introduction of the Handwriting Without Tears® method?

**Mrs. Hooper:** We now have consistently legible handwriting across our grade levels and our students no longer reverse their letters. The program has helped students develop an automatic proficiency in handwriting and gain pride in their writing. Teachers also are amazed that the results of handwriting instruction make their jobs easier. They also appreciate the ease of instructing the program. Even without a background or training in handwriting, teachers can easily understand and teach the program.

**Frog Jump Gazette:** What is the reaction from your principal, parents, students and teachers?

**Mrs. Hooper:** Our principal is ecstatic; as the one who recommended using the program she gets credit for the wise choice. The students, especially our kindergarteners, are happy to know how to form letters properly. The teachers are surprised at how little time implementation of the method takes in the classroom for such significant results. The parents are delighted to see their students succeeding rather than struggling with writing.

Children who know how to form letters and numbers correctly will have greater success throughout school. Dian Hooper's experience at Ocoee Elementary demonstrates the process a school can use to select and implement a handwriting curriculum.