

# DON'T STOP THE SONG AND DANCE

AN EVALUATION OF WRITE DANCE PRACTICES  
IN SCHOOLS AND EARLY YEARS SETTINGS



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the practitioners and the teachers who have provided their fully informed consent for their observations and reflections to be shared.

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## REPORT SUMMARY

This evaluation explored the significance of physical movement and dance (known as Write Dance) to teach handwriting. Specifically, teacher observation of development in young children's mark-making, handwriting, and their willingness to write and draw. Teachers and early years practitioners were asked to describe their ideas to implement Write Dance, and reflect upon the children's responses to these experiences.

Very young children have demonstrated that they have greater enthusiasm and motivation to write and draw when teachers and practitioners plan dynamic, physical (dance) activities.

Principally the message is; teachers and practitioners need to understand the importance of teaching gross-motor movements for handwriting. Furthermore, music and dance motivates children to engage with handwriting.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Nicole Barrons B.Ed Early Years. Neuro-Linguistic Programming Master Practitioner/Trainer, Educational trainer and Life Coach has extensive experience in primary education in her role as an early years leader, both here in the UK and abroad. Nicole has been teaching for 28 years and since 2007 she has focused specifically upon her work in personal development as a trainer and coach. She delivers a wide range of workshops on topics that include; effective learning, communication skills, confidence building and achieving a work life balance.

For the past eight years she has also delivered Write Dance training across the UK because Nicole has a passion for making learning fun. Click on the link to find out more about confidence building and effective learning sessions [www.positivetraining4schools.com](http://www.positivetraining4schools.com)



Diana Strauss BEd , MA Rights and Fellow to Higher Education Academy whilst at Canterbury Christ Church University. Diana has written for 'Considered', Faculty of Education blog and published chapters in edited books; Strauss, D. (2014) 'Complex and Challenging: Supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities' in Ritchie, C. (2014) (Ed) Challenge and Change for the Early Years Workforce. London: Routledge. Diana is co-author with Sacha Powell 'Human Rights and Children's Rights' (2015) in David, T. (2016) Philosophies and Theories of Early Childhood Education and Care. London: Routledge and 'Creativity: Thinking and Innovation for Learning and Teaching' in Ritchie (2017) Exploring Children's Learning 3-11 (Ed), London: Routledge.

## THE CREATOR OF WRITE DANCE RAGNHILD OUSSOREN



The pioneer of Write Dance is Ragnhild Oussoren, a Scandinavian graphologist, who introduced the approach in 1987 to Swedish primary schools. She was inspired by the work of Magdalena Heerman in the area of therapeutic writing (Schreibbewegungstherapie) support to overcome handwriting difficulties. She first published Write Dance (WD) in the UK in 1998, and since this date, there has been a steady increase in the demand from schools, nurseries/pre-school settings and local authority networks for training sessions to better understand the method. The approach teaches children the necessary physical skills for handwriting; movement is the basis for letter formation and cursive handwriting (Oussoren 2008, 2010). This small study is the first evaluation of WD to examine the actions and the practices of teachers and practitioners who are delivering handwriting sessions using dance and music-drawings.

### DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The Ethics Committee at Canterbury Christ Church University approved the methods within this evaluation.

The authors, Diana Strauss and Nicole Barrons, co-founded Write Dance Training in 2012. This interest is declared. The aim of the pilot study is to share teacher and practitioner reflective observations when implementing Write Dance (WD) as an approach for handwriting. Challenges and limitations are fully considered. The teachers have consented to being identified so that their work and that of the schools and settings can be acknowledged. Teachers who provided photographs as case studies have given permission for the images to be published. The identity of the children remains protected and confidential.

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# CHAPTER 1

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## WHAT IS WRITE DANCE (WD)?

The movement-based approach, known as Write Dance, uses music and story-themes; plus rhymes and song lyrics to stimulate imaginative drawing. Physical skills for drawing replicate the movements used in cursive handwriting. Cursive handwriting is essentially a moving line that connects shapes (letter shapes in an alphabetic system of marks) (Write Dance Training 2012). Pen and pencil lines move across the page to create rounded shapes, circles, straight lines and angles, in other words, alphabet letters and numerals. Children learn fine-motor movements from physical experiences of gross-motor and complex fine-motor skills. Handwriting: is whole body co-ordination, integration of sensory-motor skills, cross-lateral fluency, flexibility of movement and physical stamina<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, children need to practise gross motor movements when they use and refine similar fine-motor movements to control pencils/pens, and maintain a good posture when learning to write letters. Dancing these movements results in greater automaticity of handwriting movements (Write Dance Training 2012).

Increasingly, evidence supports the view that if children are not given opportunities for automatic (i.e. muscle-memory) writing movements, then there is likely to be, “a detrimental effect on the quality of their text composition”<sup>2</sup> because children expend more mental energy and cognitive attention on merely forming letters. McCarney and the team of researchers show that the age and stage at which handwriting movements become automated is not precisely known and furthermore they claim that it is not unusual for children to still be developing fluent and automated writing up until the ages of eight and nine years<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, young children (especially under-fives) may be experiencing unreasonable expectations, negatively affecting their experiences of early writing. In contrast, WD integrates the act of writing as a whole body experience. The movement promotes and improves physical coordination and rhythm. Children are more likely to experience and express this handwriting confidently because they can see the results of fluent, legible handwriting.

In Western alphabetic script, letter shapes consist of a mixture of straight and rounded movements. Over half of these are rounded and circular. A WD approach means children rehearse the movements with spoken words to describe the physical dance actions, just as they might systematically learn a structured dance. Teachers then add the music to consolidate the movements for deeper experiences of rhythm, tempo and flow.

Physical skills for handwriting follow seven WD principles (see Table 1). The adult demonstrates (role-model) so children can imitate movements using arms and bodies to make moving lines. These moving lines provide experience so children gain physical knowledge of the letters in Western alphabet. This becomes gross motor fluency for fine motor movements resulting in legible handwriting.

### Notes:

1. Hume, P. (2015) ‘Teaching fully cursive writing in Reception: a discussion document’ National Handwriting Association. Available at <http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk/NHA/media/Public/Downloads/Fully-cursive-writing-in-Reception.pdf> (Accessed on 03.05.2016).
2. McCarney et al, (2013, p106) McCarney, D. Peters, L. Jackson, S. Thomas, M. and Kirby, A. (2013) ‘Does Poor Handwriting Conceal Literacy Potential in Primary School Children?’ International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, Vol:60(2), pp.105-118.

**TABLE 1: WRITE DANCE PRINCIPLES FOR LETTER FORMATION AND CURSIVE HANDWRITING**

| WRITE DANCE PRINCIPLES (3)  | POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN DANCING   | TYPE OF MUSIC FOR DANCING AND MARK-MAKING  |
|---|---|--|
| Principle one: straight lines forming letters                                       | Move to music that has a strong rhythm and beat   | Upbeat tempo (straight music)  |
| Principle two: rounded shapes in letter formation and cursive joins for handwriting | A gentle melody is needed to stimulate slow and relaxed movements   | Melodic and moderately slow  |
| Principle three: circular movements   | Repeat the circular motion to form circles and consolidate the physical movements   | Melodic and slow   |
| Principle four: angles for capital letters and for numerals                         | Make straight movements and angle shapes with the whole body  | Mechanical and techno sounding style of music, jerky and spikey  |
| Principle five: direction   | All the basic movements that go in one direction must also be practised in the opposite direction   | Change direction during all the music tracks. Consider combining straight and round music as a way to direct children's dancing so they can hear when to change direction. This is especially relevant when moving to music for the drawing and mark making elements as it is a great opportunity to change colours of crayons, chalks and finger paints |
| Principle six: size   | This principle is fundamental for the dancing and music drawing. Start very big and then replicate the same movements on a smaller scale until all the movements are fine enough for A4 paper |  |
| Principle seven: crossing the midline (see more details below)                      | Children need time and physical experiences to consolidate this complex movement  | Melodic very slow and very gentle  |



## CROSSING THE MIDLINE IN HANDWRITING

Being able to cross this imaginary line down the centre of our bodies is essential when coordinating simple physical actions (for example tying shoelaces). Handwriting is a complex physical task and children need to be able to cross the midline when learning to write fluent sentences; for example, right-handers cross over to start writing from the left to right across a page. Whilst left-handers start writing on the left and then cross-over; this is the writing convention of left to right orientation in Western alphabetic script. When learning to form letters for handwriting, children have to learn to cross over their bodies from right to left and back again because the letter shapes are formed from these movements. Children need physical experiences to learn this physical skill so they can carry out the movements effortlessly and without consciously having to shift body position or twist the paper (at an awkward angle) to compensate for any difficulty with crossing from one side to the other ...and back again.

Essential physical experiences to develop skills for writing:

- Wrist strength and flexibility to control speed and changes in direction;
- Concentration and Coordination between the left and the right side of their body. Practise all the movements, firstly with both hands, and then with the dominant hand;
- Fluency for mark-making and writing using core body strength for good posture and control, whilst maintaining relaxed muscles in shoulders and arms;
- Spatial awareness, draw on large paper and then progress to smaller movements on A4 sheets and smaller writing surfaces.<sup>3</sup>

### Notes:

3. Oussoren, R. (2010, pp.17-18) Write Dance (2nd ed) London: Sage.

## CHAPTER 2

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### PILOT STUDY DESIGN AND METHOD

An evaluation of Write Dance (physical music drawings and dance to teach handwriting) fills a gap in the literature. We chose to use conversations that were exploratory, yet semi-structured for consistency<sup>4,5</sup> and this data provided the evidence for evaluation. The evidence was drawn from a wide range of schools and settings, with diverse families and communities included. The focus was on the the vital role of adults to evaluate physical dance and sensory mark making for teaching handwriting. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. In addition, two case studies provided some detailed some examples. Of particular interest were significant aspects of the children's responses to WD. The findings indicated the need for further development of the approach in the UK and beyond.

As WD trainers, we wanted to ensure that everyone understood the principles and the theoretical knowledge for WD. All the participants had attended training to learn the underpinning theory and WD principles. All participants implemented the approach for at least twelve weeks. The sample consisted of the twelve teachers and practitioners who sent feedback about their (WD) work, having attended the training. (see Table 2).

The study focused exclusively upon teacher and practitioner observation and reflection. The only relevant information about the children was the range of their ages. Children as young as two years of age and as old as eleven years were taught by the teachers. Schools and settings provided information about the teaching materials and the WD books they used. The sample was small (twelve in total), however a wide variety of schools and settings were represented; an inner-city nursery school, a pre-school in semi-rural market-town, a school for children with severe learning difficulties, a private nursery at an independent school and a specialist observation and assessment unit for children with speech, language and communication needs.

#### Notes:

4. Robson, C. (1993) *Real World Research A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell.

5. Coates (2004, p.24). Coates, E. (2002) 'I forgot the sky! Children's Stories Contained within Their Drawings' in Lewis, V., Kellet, M., Robinson, C., Fraser, S. and Ding, S. (2004) *The Reality of Research with Children and Young People*. London: Sage.

## DATA COLLECTED USING SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

This is the framework we used to evaluate the different ways teachers were using Write Dance in their schools and settings.

| INDICATE AGE GROUP:  | INDICATE BOOKS USED: | INDICATE THE MATERIALS AND MARK-MAKING RESOURCES: |             |                               |
|--|----------------------|---|-------------|-------------------------------|
| QUESTIONS  | Possible responses   |   |             |                               |
| HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN USING WD?   | Less than 16 weeks   | 16-40 weeks                                       | 40-52 weeks | 1 year or more – how many?    |
| HOW FREQUENT IS THE DANCING?   | daily                | 3x per week                                       | weekly      | Less than weekly – how often? |
| Try to use 4 words that sum up the children's responses to WD                                    |                      |   |             |                               |
| If you have created your own ideas based upon WD approach tell us some examples                  |                      |   |             |                               |
| What have you noticed in the children who were previously reluctant to write?<br>Any challenges? |                      |   |             |                               |
| Tell us more about how you use WD  |                      |   |             |                               |
| Any comments from teachers colleagues since implementing WD                                      |                      |   |             |                               |
| Tell us how the children respond/what they say, when they are dancing and write- drawing         |                      |   |             |                               |
| Tell us what the parents say in response to your school's approach to teach handwriting          |                      |   |             |                               |



**DANCING ENSURES CHILDREN  
LEARN THE COMPLEX  
CIRCULAR MOVEMENTS IN A  
FUN AND PHYSICAL WAY**

## CHAPTER 3

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### RESULTS ANALYSED AS CATEGORIES

Resulting data combined conversation, observation and some anonymous comments from children. Analysis identified five categories of children's responses to Write Dance. Two case studies illustrated detailed examples in practice.

1. Observable development in physical skills
2. Observable development in handwriting
3. General confidence and motivation to participate in mark-making and writing.
4. Emotional response to Write Dance sessions
5. Children say...

Table 2: Teacher/Practitioner Role and children's ages; frequency and length of time the approach implemented.

Table 3: What teachers Do! The How and Where? – Ideas and materials.



**TABLE 2: TEACHER/PRACTITIONER ROLE AND CHILDREN'S AGES. FREQUENCY AND LENGTH OF TIME THE APPROACH WAS IMPLEMENTED**

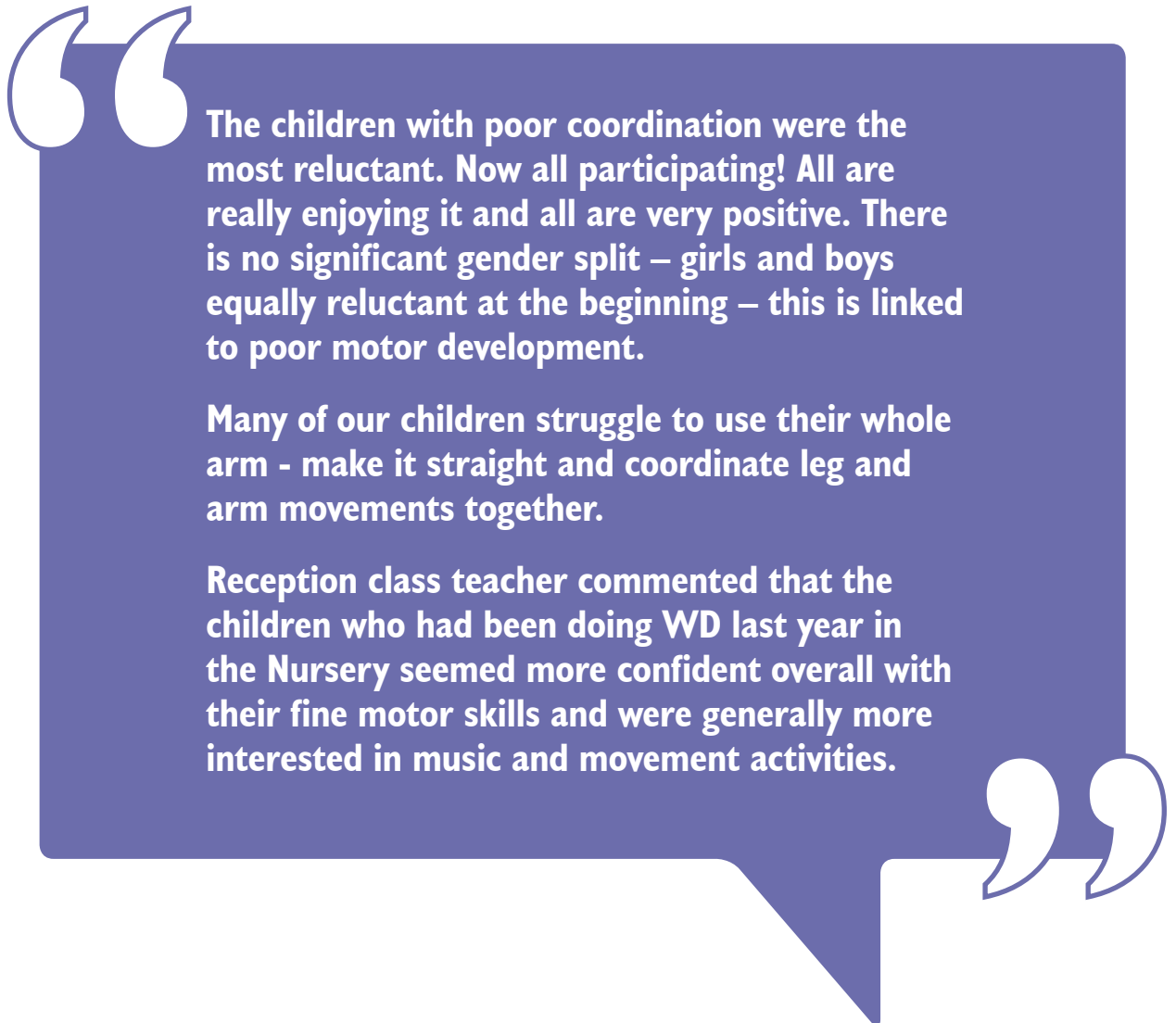
| PROFESSIONAL ROLE   | AGES OF CHILDREN AND FREQUENCY OF SESSIONS  | WD APPROACH IMPLEMENTED FOR...                                |
|---|---|---|
| <b>C.A. RECEPTION TEACHER IN MAINSTREAM, PRIMARY, BIRMINGHAM</b>                          | 4 to 5yrs Daily   | 16-40 weeks   |
| <b>C.AK. PRE-SCHOOL OWNER AND MANAGER, FAVERSHAM, KENT</b>                                | 2, 3, 4yrs: 3x per week   | Approximately 6 months  |
| <b>D.E. TEACHER IN CHARGE LANGUAGE UNIT ON PRIMARY SCH SITE, SHEFFIELD</b>                | 4-7 years; all with expressive language difficulties and associated motor difficulties.   | Approximately 8 years   |
| <b>F.Q. PRE-SCH AND RECEPTION FS CO TEACHER, ROCHESTER</b>                                | Pre-school: 3 and 4 yrs. Reception: 4 and 5 years<br><br>Try to do weekly but some weeks impossible due to pressures e.g. Christmas.  | 4 to 5 yrs approximately 16 weeks<br>3 to 4 yrs 4 weeks       |
| <b>G.R. RECEPTION TEACHER IN SCHOOL DESIGNATED AS TEACHING ALLIANCE, BLACKBURN, LANCS</b> | Three times per week with Reception children - whole class.<br>Weekly: KS1&2 targeted approach.<br><br>Daily: 20 focus children - daily outdoor session. Two focus children have extension Write Dance activities | Overall the approach has been used for approximately 10 years |

**TABLE 2.2: TEACHER/PRACTITIONER PROFESSIONAL ROLE AND CHILDREN'S AGES. FREQUENCY AND TIME-SCALE**

| PROFESSIONAL ROLE   | AGES OF CHILDREN AND FREQUENCY OF SESSIONS   | WD APPROACH IMPLEMENTED FOR...                                      |
|---|--|---|
| D.H. RECEPTION TEACHER AND SLT BRIGHTON   | 4 and 5yrs and SLT support<br>Weekly in the hall   | One year  |
| S.B. NURSERY TEACHER AND EY LEAD, HATFIELD, HERTS   | 2, 3, 4 and 5yrs<br>Three times per week, as part of wake up shake up                      | Approximately one year, WD in the Nursery book more than 12 months. |
| J.F. YR 2 TEACHER AND PREVIOUSLY YR R RESP FOR WD THROUGHOUT SCH. BRIGHTON                                  | 4 and 5 yrs and 6 and 7yrs. Three times per week. We incorporate it into wake up shake up. | Several years   |
| N. F. NURSERY TEACHER, BRENT, LONDON  | 2,3 and 4yrs   | Approximately one year, WD in the Nursery book more than 12 months. |
| W.P. HEAD OF EARLY YEARS & SPECIALIST LEADER OF EDUCATION EARLY YEARS, MAINSTREAM PRIMARY, CANTERBURY, KENT | 4 and 5 year olds. Weekly sessions.  | 15 years  |
| A. W. TEACHER, FORMERLY AT MAINSTREAM PRIMARY, YORK   | Weekly, in the hall with an extended session on a Friday.                                  | Nine months   |
| S.K. AS'T HEAD, SPECIAL SCHOOL, COVENTRY  | Daily. There are 135 primary-aged pupils and all are engaged in some form of WD.           | Four to five years  |

## THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES ARE THE RESULTS FOR THE CATEGORY 1: OBSERVABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PHYSICAL SKILLS

The quotes illustrate that teachers became more aware of the physical complexities required for handwriting.



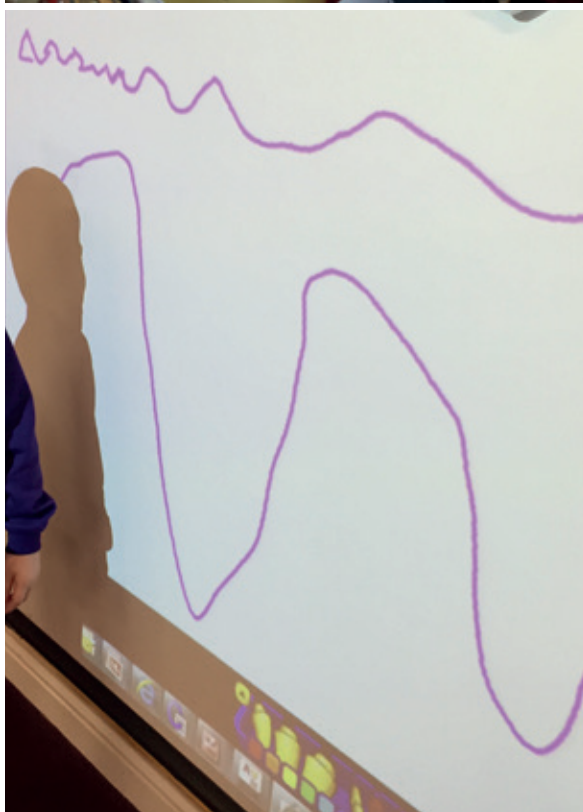
## CASE STUDY 1: PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT FOR WRITING

G.R., Reception teacher, Blackburn. "Some of these activities are linked to WD sessions – robot movements – straight lines, bending arms and legs, stepping up and down on the crates".





## CASE STUDY 1: EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE HOW DANCING IS LINKED TO FINE MOTOR MOVEMENT FOR MUSIC-DRAWINGS AND HANDWRITING DEVELOPMENT





## CATEGORY 2.1: THESE RESPONSES INDICATE OBSERVABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HANDWRITING



## THE FINDINGS INDICATED THAT CHILDREN'S SUCCESS IN WRITING LED TO GREATER PROGRESS

### CATEGORY 2.2: THESE RESPONSES INDICATE OBSERVABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HANDWRITING

“

Nursery, Reception, Yr1 & Yr2 use it and they are starting to do more patterns using other music. Nursery do mark-making to music.”

Teachers who have used Write Dance [are] noticing more consistent use of cursive handwriting and have noticed a difference. In Yr6 in particular they have worked hard on pattern making and noticed improvement in the quality of the writing.

There have been comments that the handwriting looks better, presentation is better and [there is] an improvement because children are more enthusiastic about writing, the quality of the writing is better too.

I have managed to get one parent's comments... “Z's handwriting has improved a great deal this year. I feel it is a success.”

”

## CATEGORY 2.3: THESE RESPONSES INDICATE OBSERVABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HANDWRITING



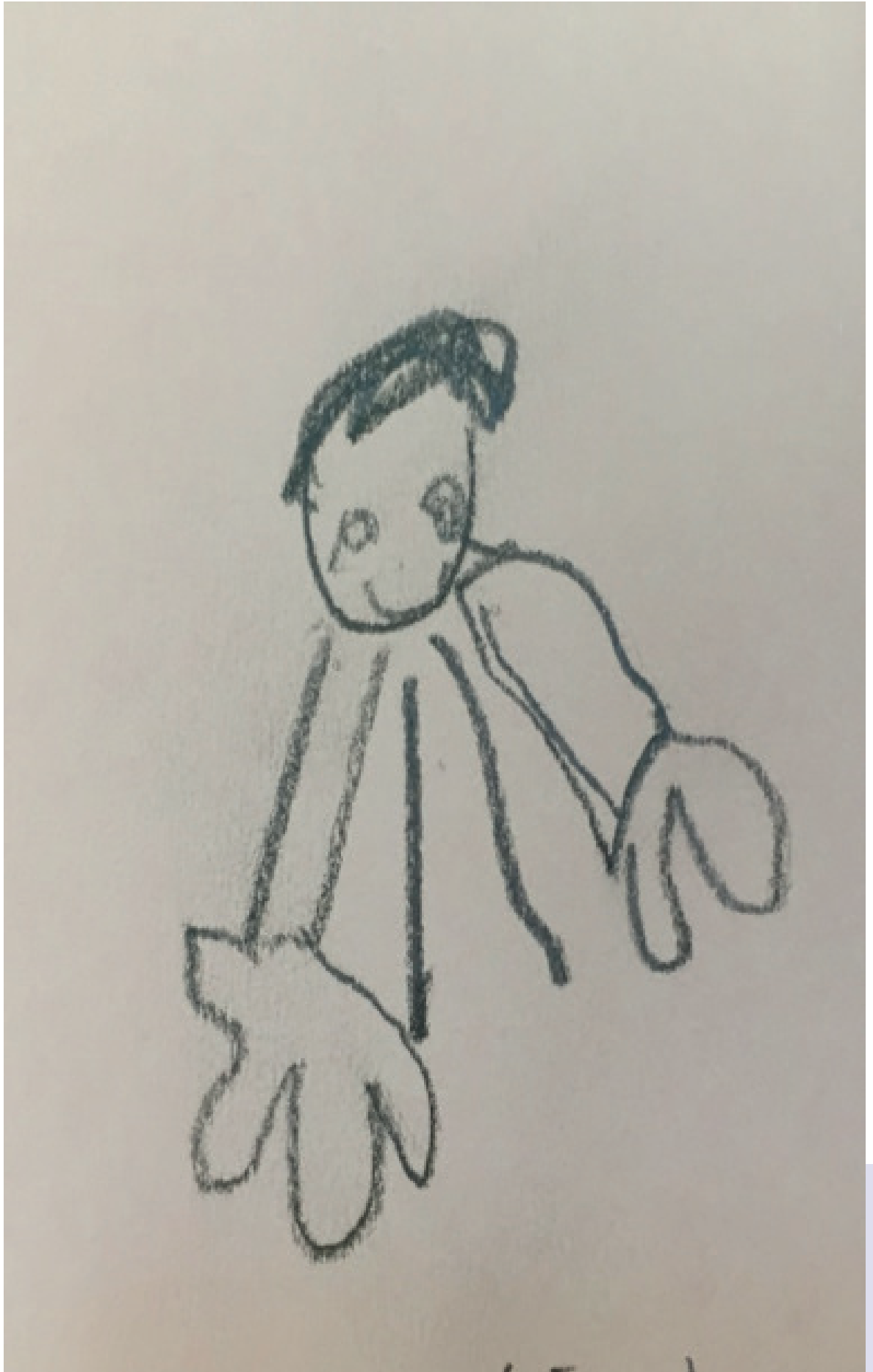
One parent has asked to visit and observe Write Dance in action because she said, I cannot believe how much his writing has come on!

Parent's observation reported by Reception class teacher, "I have noticed M's handwriting improved. Her letters are smaller as well; compared to before. I'm overall impressed with her handwriting".

I feel it has helped with pencil pressure and letter formation.

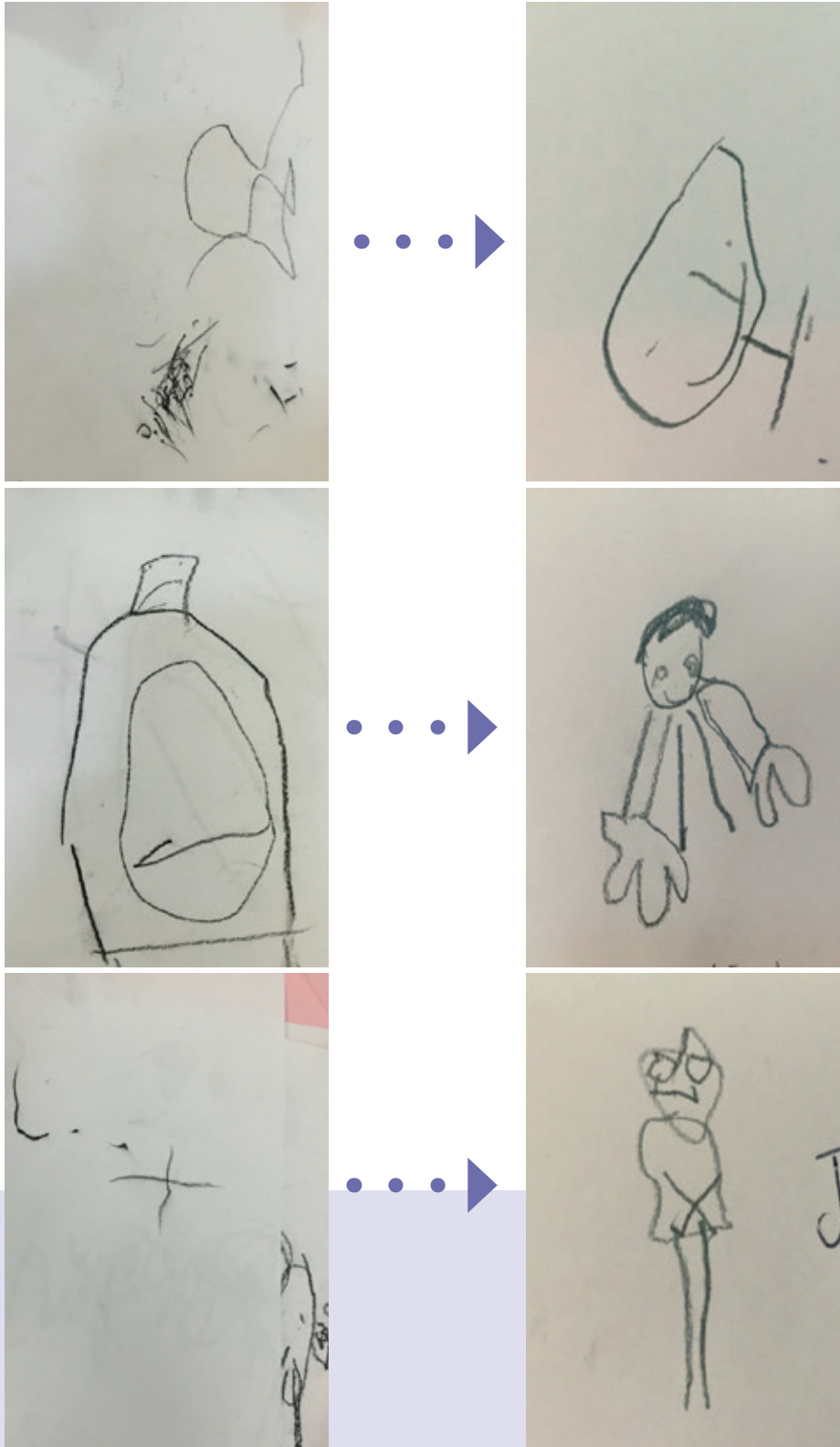
A small-scale project undertaken in the three reception classes showed all the children made outstanding progress in writing from the baseline data (based upon P scales). This was achieved in all 3 classes at the end of their 1st yr. of school and is likely to be attributed to the teacher's implementation of daily physical movement and creative approaches to mark-making and writing by the staff.





## EXAMPLE FROM CASE STUDY 1 GOODENOUGH DRAW-A-MAN: SEPT 2015 – FEB 2016

Case study 1 G.R. provided examples of children's drawings (from their Starting point) to show progress after five months





## THE FINDINGS SHOWED THAT IMPROVED HANDWRITING CORRESPONDED WITH PROGRESS IN OTHER AREAS

### CATEGORY 3: THESE RESPONSES INDICATE ASPECTS OF GENERAL CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN MARK-MAKING AND WRITING.



3 year olds; improved language, behaviour and social skills e.g. self-regulation – most likely because they are experiencing how to do something together.

I have noticed that boys particularly have wanted to engage with mark-making activities. Boys who would not normally choose to write enjoy moving and mark-making.

I recommended the resource [WD] to another local school - she has used it and says that she has never known children's free writing to be as well developed at this point in the year compared to previous year groups.

Willing and focused when participating.

The Reception teacher commented that the children who had been doing WD last year in the Nursery were very calm [with the music from the nursery book] and it seemed to be, 'pitched right' for the children.

Children are more enthusiastic about writing and about the quality of their writing too.



## CATEGORY 4.1: THESE RESPONSES INDICATE THE EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO WRITE DANCE SESSIONS

“

All respondents unanimously used words to describe children's experiences with writing as “Fun” and “They love it”....

Children show us that they really love dancing and drawing now.

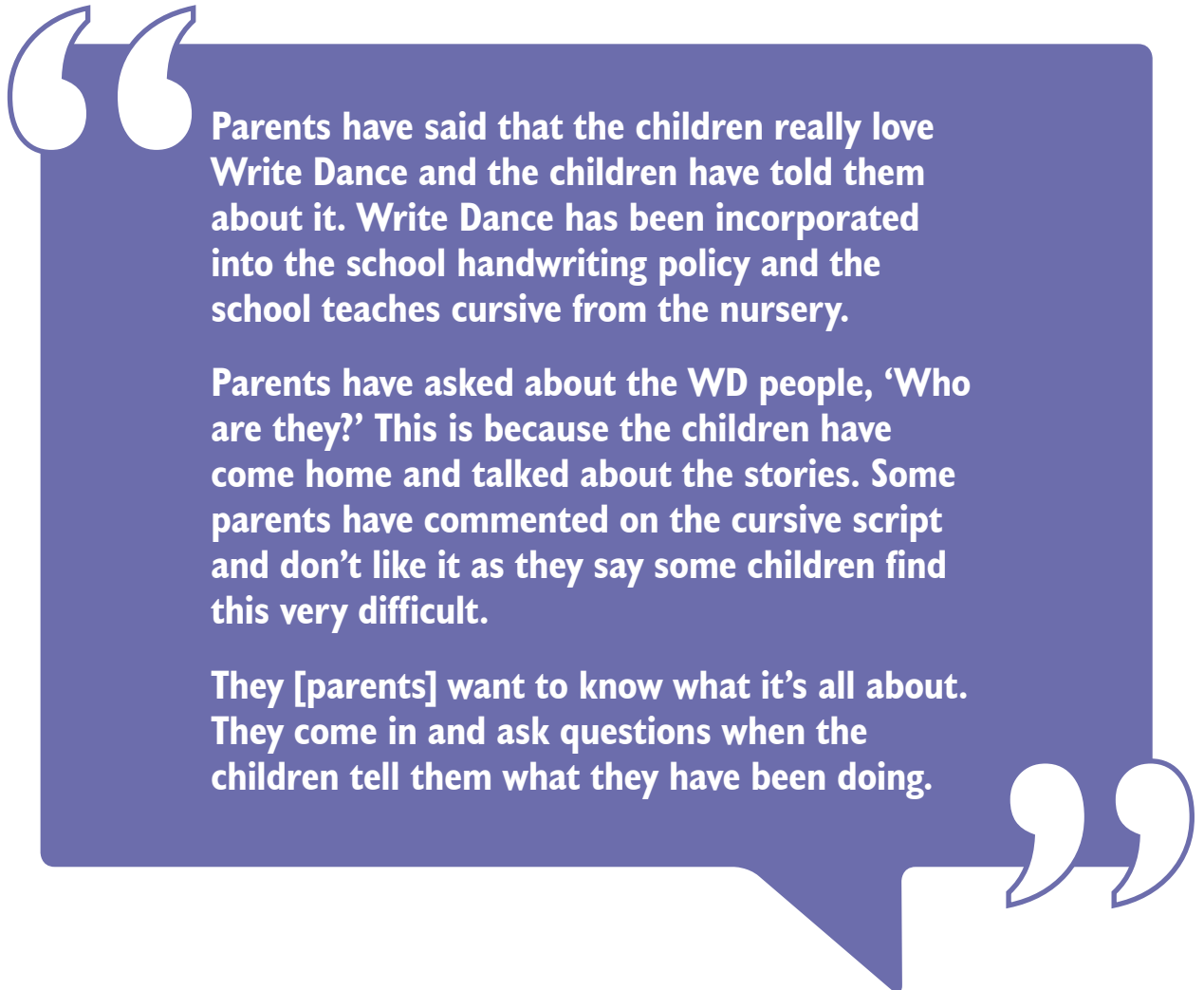
One of our children on starting school was extremely quiet and reserved, he absolutely loves the daily music, singing and dancing sessions and really comes to life, it's had a fantastic impact on his confidence in school.

They enjoy it and that seems to be what motivates them to do it [mark-making and writing].

The teacher also commented that she liked the (blue book) Early Years music and said it was very calm and seemed to be “pitched right” for the children.

”

## CATEGORY 4.2: THESE RESPONSES INDICATE THE EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO WRITE DANCE SESSIONS



## CATEGORY 5: THESE QUOTES ARE EXAMPLE OF WHAT CHILDREN SAY...



The children use specific vocabulary that describes movements and vocabulary from the resources. For example, one child told the teacher that she had put up the wrong movement- drawing for the music being played.

“I can use my movements to make pictures.”

“It’s fun drawing with my arms.”

“I can do that.”

“The children say that it’s fun and link it to their feelings, they enjoy the sessions.”

“The children love the Puffa train song/”

“The children love making the pictures”.

“The children [pay each other] compliments, on each other’s work and talk about who has followed the instructions well.”

“It hurts.”

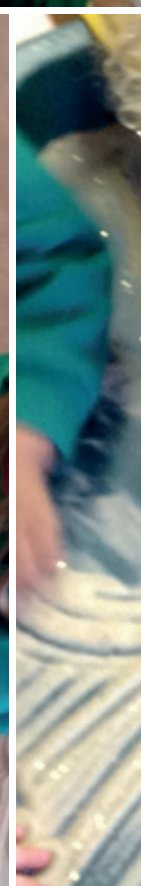
“I like this music because...”

The robot always makes them smile.

They like the train when the music changes and they have to move faster.



## CASE STUDY 2: COLLEGE GREEN NURSERY, LONDON, BRENT. NAWAL FILALI USES DANCE WITH MARK-MAKING OPPORTUNITIES INSPIRED BY A SONG FROM WD IN THE NURSERY MATERIALS







**SANDY HILL PHOTOS**

## CASE STUDY 2: NAWAL TAKING THE DANCE ACTION OUTSIDE



### DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

Draws lines and circles using gross motor movements. 30-50 months Physical Development  
Sometimes gives meaning to marks as they draw and paint. 30-50 months Writing





## CASE STUDY 2: NAWAL'S PHOTO SHOWS HOW THE SONG INSPIRES THE CHILDREN TO EXTEND THE PLAY ACTION AND INVENT THEIR OWN EXTENSION-LANGUAGE GAMES



### THE TICKLE TREE LS1

ON FRIDAY 6TH NOVEMBER, D. BROUGHT IN A BIG LEAF HE FOUND ON HIS WAY TO SCHOOL. HE WAVED IT AROUND PROUDLY AND SHOWED HIS FRIEND E. HOW BIG IT WAS. D. PLAYED PEEK-A-BOO BEHIND THE LEAF. THE LEAF WAS THAT BIG E. COULDN'T SEE D.'S FACE BEHIND IT. D YOU SAID IT WAS A TICKLY LEAF JUST LIKE OUR TICKLE TREE WRITE DANCE AND YOU WENT TO TICKLE E. WITH YOUR LEAF. HE THOUGHT IT WAS SO FUNNY.



## CASE STUDY 2: AN EXAMPLE OF NAWAL'S REFLECTION, PLANNING AND NEXT STEPS

### WHAT LEARNING HAPPENED HERE

A lot of learning was happening here. You were displaying your development in writing in three stages. First you were exploring and showing interest in the leaf you collected. You made links with your interest to the learning that was happening at school. Then you explored shape formation through music and movement which you then transferred those movements into mark making. You are beginning to understand that we learn with Write Dance because it helps us to get our bodies ready for drawing and writing letters and numbers.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR NEXT STEPS

I will provide you the opportunity to revisit this learning and to explore other movements and link it to letters. We can start with the letters in your name

### PARENT SHARING

Can you show your mummy and daddy with old bit of fabric or even your mummy's scarf how you move in Write Dance. Maybe you can move to your own music you have at home. Can you share it with us in your Learning Journey?

**CASE STUDY 2: NAWAL PROVIDES A VISUAL STIMULUS USING VAN GOGH STARRY NIGHT PAINTING. SHE CREATED NEW LYRICS TO THE TUNE TWINKLE TWINKLE LITTLE STAR. THE LYRICS PROVIDE THE DIRECTION FOR THE ROUNDED LOOPS AND CIRCULAR MOVEMENT**



S. is here enjoying messy gloopy paint. "It's stars making spirals"

# TIME TO SCRIMBLE



## CASE STUDY 2: THE WHITE-BOARD IS USED TO SHOW VISUAL STIMULUS AND PLAY THE SONG AND MUSIC WHILST THE CHILDREN SCRIMBLE (WHICH MEANS MOVING WHILST DRAWING TO MAKE MUSIC DRAWINGS)



Scribbling with chalk after another Starry Night Write Dance session



## CASE STUDY 2: SMALL GROUP COLLABORATIVE MUSIC-DRAWING COLLAGE FOR IMPROVED FINE-MOTOR DEXTERITY



While we listened to the music we added details to our night time picture to create our very own Starry Night stars. We thought about all the movements we learnt in Write Dance and scrambled them.

We then collaged over our painting to make it shiny "Like real stars" M.

## CHAPTER 4

### TABLE 3.1: WHAT TEACHERS DO! THE HOW AND WHERE? – IDEAS AND MATERIALS

The findings here show the changes the teachers made in their teaching and their planning

| RESPONDENT  | EXAMPLES OF IMPACT UPON PEDAGOGY  | EXAMPLES OF WHERE AND HOW WD IS USED  | RESOURCES FOR WD  |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>C. A.,<br/>RECEPTION TEACHER<br/>GREET PRIMARY<br/>MAINSTREAM<br/>BIRMINGHAM</b> | <p>Daily physical aspects of dancing</p> <p>As guidance for each of the teachers (there are 4 classes in our Reception year group) we created a document for each dance that gives a simple overview of the types of movements and shapes.</p> <p>Middle and lower ability children enjoyed the weekly (sometimes fortnightly) focus on a particular shape/pattern and they were keen to show shapes/patterns they had learnt e.g. drawing lots of zigzag patterns. [Children] Often comment upon relevant to shape/ movement theme.</p>  | <p>Introduce movement on a Monday. Practise Tues, Wed and Thurs. Scrimbling on a Friday. Generally, a new movement/shape each week. Although some weeks we repeated a movement/shape if children were finding it tricky.</p> <p>Teaching assistant introduced squeezezy or squirty bottles for use outside as sparkly sand-pourers to encourage the children to make large-scale movements.</p> | <p>Crayons</p> <p>Photographs illustrate activities linked to the WD session, Robot movements. Straight lines, bending arms and legs, stepping up and down on the crates.</p>                                       |
| <b>C.A.,<br/>PRE-SCHOOL OWNER<br/>AND MANAGER,<br/>FAVERSHAM KENT.</b>              | <p>Mud! – two big muddy puddles in our garden, we use sticks a lot.</p> <p>Since introduction WD, we think more widely about the marks that the children can make.</p> <p>Chalking outside.</p> <p>Introduced our own songs and music – e.g. We Will Rock You – by Queen.</p> <p>More focused [because] we are incorporating movement with listening</p> <p>In general, we have been more aware of facilitating and promoting mark-making and therefore we are now offering more opportunities to the children.</p> <p><b>WE</b> observe that we can capture a wider and more extensive group of children and we are more creative in our approach.</p> | <p>Outside and indoors. We use rolls of paper on floor – children lie down and use cars to make zig zags along the music drawing of a road-track - we bought new hot wheels cars and one child J. encouraged other children to draw zig zags and follow these as tyre tracks – an adult joined in but it was child-led.</p> <p>Use pictures as a starting point to help children visualise.</p> | <p>Chalks, paints, crayons, mud and sticks.</p> <p>J. had seen zig zag tyre marks on pin-interest app. Team now bring in their own ideas and we use white boards – boys in particular liked using write boards.</p> |

**TABLE 3.2: WHAT TEACHERS DO! THE HOW AND WHERE? – IDEAS AND MATERIALS**

| RESPONDENT   | EXAMPLES OF IMPACT UPON PEDAGOGY   | EXAMPLES OF WHERE AND HOW WD IS USED  | RESOURCES FOR WD  |
|--|--|---|---|
| <b>D.E.,<br/>TEACHER IN CHARGE<br/>LANGUAGE UNIT ON<br/>PRIMARY SCHOOL<br/>SITE, SHEFFIELD</b> | [Understanding that] there are so many aspects that make writing difficult (e.g. cannot sound out or think of ideas). Focus on physical development supports the physical skills needed for handwriting. |   | Now we generally use A3 A2 paper and crayons. We used to use paper and finger-drawing on the floor. Space and time is an issue so mark-making is on tables now.                             |
| <b>F.Q.,<br/>PRE-SCH AND<br/>RECEPTION FS CO.<br/>ROCHESTER</b>                                | Now all participating! All are really enjoying it and all are very positive.   |   | Paint, chalks and crayons.  |
| <b>G.R., RECEPTION<br/>TEACHER.<br/>BLACKBURN,<br/>LANCASHIRE</b>                              | Mark-making tools are everywhere and promoted for everything. We encourage the children to match larger scale movements to the writing movements. Also to encourage whole scale arm and knee movements.  | We daily have an outdoor session for the children that need further gross motor skill activities. We incorporate crates, hoops, planks etc. | Chalks, paints, crayons wallpaper that is hanging up everywhere around the room, chunky crayons in small pots are all over the environment. Metal roller-ball pens and white board markers. |

**TABLE 3.3: WHAT TEACHERS DO! THE HOW AND WHERE? – IDEAS AND MATERIALS**

| RESPONDENT  | EXAMPLES OF IMPACT UPON PEDAGOGY  | EXAMPLES OF WHERE AND HOW WD IS USED  | RESOURCES FOR WD   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>D.H., RECEPTION TEACHER AND SLT BRIGHTON</b>   | We use the WD stories in the Autumn term and then we then we choose [to consolidate the rest of the year] more themes and make links to the handwriting we are doing. We have a weekly focus learning the movements in the hall. We dance and then return to the class to do mark-making. After introducing a dance we put out scrambling materials in the learning environment and the children can access the music [themselves] too. | Daily mark-making using sensory materials in all areas of the learning environment.   |  |
| <b>S.B., NURSERY TEACHER AND EY LEAD HATFIELD HERTS.</b>  | In the Nursery the dance/story is introduced weekly. [The children] learn songs and actions. Once children are secure with song/actions they repeat the singing and the movements [whilst scrambling] and consolidate. We are extending the practice into Reception classes. We have organised parent workshops and WD activities are [now] in our handwriting policy.  | Nursery children do mark-making to music daily. Year 2 children do some movements to warm-up for handwriting. Year 2 children decorate pictures and make patterned-borders. | Sensory mark-making materials. Chalk boards are always available and other scrambling materials in the learning environment. Year 2 use pens for patterns. |
| <b>J.F., YR. 2 TEACHER AND PREVIOUSLY YR. R RESPONSIBLE FOR WD THROUGHOUT SCHOOL, BRIGHTON.</b> | I use other music that I choose and music that the children suggest. We link to round and straight capital letters. I create my own musical drawings with the children to fit the music and the topics we are doing. I can do this having confidently used the WD book for primary and I know all the themes [dances] so I can develop these with other music. WD has been incorporated into the school handwriting policy.             |   |  |

**TABLE 3.4: WHAT TEACHERS DO! THE HOW AND WHERE? – IDEAS AND MATERIALS**

| RESPONDENT  | EXAMPLES OF IMPACT UPON PEDAGOGY   | EXAMPLES OF WHERE AND HOW WD IS USED   | RESOURCES FOR WD   |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>N.F.,<br/>NURSERY TEACHER,<br/>LONDON, BRENT.</b>  | Click on the hyperlink for further details   | <a href="https://writedancetraining.com/pdf-display/c-g-school-write-dance-evidence-dec-2015/">writedancetraining.com/pdf-display/c-g-school-write-dance-evidence-dec-2015/</a><br><br><a href="https://writedancetraining.com/pdf-display/c-g-school-starry-night-write-dance-dec-2015/">writedancetraining.com/pdf-display/c-g-school-starry-night-write-dance-dec-2015/</a> | Tough-spot tray with sand, glitter, foam and paint. Crayons, chalks large sheets of paper, dancing with scarves. Leaves, sticks, scarves and crayons outside.                              |
| <b>W.P.,<br/>HEAD OF EARLY YEARS &amp; SPECIALIST LEADER OF EDUCATION EARLY YEARS. THE CANTERBURY PRIMARY SCHOOL, KENT.</b> | We have the original pack [2000] and we always work through the book starting with the volcano. We find that the children find the straighter movements easier and so we will often revisit some of the more curved dances i.e. circles and eights more often. We always start with gross movements, sometimes we use ribbon sticks and scarves. The teacher demonstrates on the big board and the children always respond with crayons and paper. | Some children find it tricky to move from big movements to smaller ones when mark making. We often continue to use write dance with these children as an intervention in year 1.   | Newspaper print and crayons. Ribbon sticks and scarves   |
| <b>A.W.,<br/>RECEPTION TEACHER, FORMERLY AT ST GEORGES RC SCHOOL, YORK.</b>   | Weekly, in the hall with an extended session on a Friday. Everyone has a go during the week. At least with a more extended session. We do regular sessions and on a Friday we have a longer session with all the children together. We use other music and link to our topics "wheels on the train"  | Marching outside. Dragon theme making potions and dragons teeth with straight lines and zig zags. Using outdoor play and extending stories.  | Using fabrics to dance. Crayons and occasionally felt tips. We link to topics and use a variety of resources; sensory mark-making, sand in trays. Parachute, scarves and chalks on boards. |



TABLE 3.6: WHAT TEACHERS DO! THE HOW AND WHERE? – IDEAS AND MATERIALS

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|---|
| <p><b>S.K., ASST HEAD, CASTLE WOOD SPECIAL SCHOOL COVENTRY.</b></p>   |
| <p>We use it because it's great. The approach is individualised for the children. Teachers take into account the children's physical and sensory needs. Teachers assess where the children are currently in their development and where they would like the children to be when they leave and transition to secondary. E.g. writing their name, consistently making a meaningful mark and so forth. Teachers think v critically about writing now. Not able to single WD out from the combined approaches. Having said that, a small-scale project undertaken in the three reception classes showed all the children made outstanding progress in writing from the baseline data (based upon P scales). This was achieved in all 3 classes at the end of their 1st yr. of school and is likely to be attributed to the teacher's implementation of daily physical movement and creative approaches to mark-making and writing by the staff.</p>  |
| <p>WD takes place indoors and outdoors, in all available spaces – such as the corridors. Trialled it and got parents on board. Combined WD with Reading Recovery and Fisher Family Trust wave 3. The holistic approach that the school is taking is necessary because it is imperative that the children learn to generalise beyond 1:1 and WD is just one of the approaches that help the teachers to deliver many strategies and learning experiences. Try to use the skills they have learnt in WD session – have got to mean the same in everyday school. Reinforcing the meaning assigned to the marks throughout the curriculum throughout the week. WD is important because we want children to make meaningful marks consistently. WD is used alongside Sherborne developmental dance and movement, body boards, sensory circuits.</p> <p><b>CHALLENGES?</b></p> <p>Making sure that all the staff appreciate the connection between the movement and making the marks – revisiting frequently.</p> |
| <p>Individualised packs for children who have tactile defensiveness, make zippy bags containing multi-sensory materials without needing to touch. Tough-spot for containing designated mark-making. Shaving foam, paint, glitter, pulses and seeds. Teachers use water, different brushes and mark-making surfaces include fences and walls. Children who are able – use pens and highlighters. The mark-making is very popular, for example one child wanted to carry on and take with him the 3 highlighter pens that he had been using for WD.</p>   |



## CHAPTER 5

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### WHAT WE FOUND OUT: THE DISCUSSION

Teachers and practitioners reported an observable trend in young children's reluctance to paint and draw on entry to reception classes. This tendency was evident in both boys and girls and attributed to children's under-developed physical skills. Implementing WD contributed to an observable improvement in children's confidence and motivation to participate in mark-making/writing.

This in turn led to observable progress in physical skills and in handwriting. Children's physical, social and emotional development supported them to learn handwriting. The findings indicated that because children experienced progress, they showed greater enthusiasm for writing. The knowledge of their own progress motivated them further. These positive factors contributed to overall improvement in the quality of handwriting, observed by children and teachers alike.

In one case children aged as young as three and four years, surprised the adults by completing writing movements requiring considerable physical complexity, which seemed beyond the average development for such a young age.

The findings indicate that teachers and practitioners changed their teaching practices as they understood the physical complexities for young children. The change was needed as some parents had told the teachers, "Some parents have commented on the cursive script and don't like it as they say some children find this very difficult."

Teachers and practitioners implemented changes to enhance the learning environment, both outdoors and inside classrooms.

The improved handwriting corresponded with reported progress in other aspects of learning as well as handwriting. This success increased the children's motivation to write and draw. All the respondents used positive descriptors to sum up their experiences of implementing WD. This may explain why the children (and in one or two scenarios, the boys in particular) showed high levels of motivation and engagement.

Some practical considerations were challenging, such as the need for regular consolidation of teacher and practitioner knowledge regarding the underlying principles of the approach. However, meeting this challenge brought positive outcomes, namely teacher and (some) parental enhanced knowledge/understanding of the movement principles for handwriting.

These gains in understanding appear to outweigh the practical issues faced by teachers, for example the requirement for sufficient physical space for the dancing and sensory mark making. All the respondents found ways to integrate WD into the busy timetable and environment. Overwhelmingly the results showed that the approach supported teachers to make opportunities for physical and social activities that stimulated the children and facilitated their development in physical and handwriting skills. This promoted greater task engagement and provided opportunities for teachers to help children make even more progress.

The greatest limitation within the study is the small sample of self-selecting respondents. Therefore, the results may not be transferable. Despite this, the results do demonstrate that the progress observed in children's writing did correlate with gains in teacher knowledge of the principles that underpin WD. The evaluation demonstrates the importance of these underlying theoretical principles for success.

## WHAT WE FOUND OUT FROM THE LITERATURE: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

It is significant that Ragnhild Oussoren writes from a perspective of international heritage (Norwegian, Swedish and working in the Netherlands). Her background as a graphologist, means that her theories are derived from psychoanalysis and links are made between a person's handwriting and their personality traits. It is not necessary to agree with this underlying concept because essentially the key message tells us that teaching handwriting is more effective when teachers follow an integrated, holistic approach. In other words, whole-class, across all areas of development, rather than intervention programmes that isolate children and remove them from the centre of the learning and classroom action. Reports in literature show that children often labour at decontextualized skills-based, functional tasks, causing a detrimental impact upon their self-belief<sup>6</sup>. Studies in the United States of America indicate that a number of authors are researching intervention programmes for children who have difficulties with handwriting. A good example is Datchuk<sup>7</sup> quoting Graham et al (2008). Graham and team conducted a national survey in America, and found that 95% of teachers in elementary classes observed that handwriting difficulties were likely to be because of motor problems. Write Dance makes the case for a whole class approach, using gross motor and dance experiences for all children. This can, "Aid in the prevention of future problems such as poor attention, poor handwriting skills, reduced co-ordination and lack of participation"<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, the main finding is, what matters most to children's development in handwriting is what the adults do. The planned and purposeful physical activity for handwriting is very effective. The physical experiences motivate children when drawing and writing. Their motivation facilitates greater progress and the children are aware of their own progress. This motivates them still further, and they continue to develop their handwriting.

### Notes:

6. Peens, A., Pienaar, A. and Nienaber, A. (2008) 'The effect of different intervention programmes on the self-concept and motor proficiency of 7- to 9-year-old children with DCD', *Child Care, Health and Development*, 34(3), pp.316-328.

7. Datchuk, S. (2015, p.24) 'Teaching Handwriting to Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities: A Problem-Solving Approach', *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, Vol: 48(1), pp.19-27.

8. Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Partnership Trust (2016) 'BEAM' Children and Young People's Physiotherapy Service in Coventry. Available at <https://www.covkidsphysio.co.uk/pages/beam.html> (Accessed on 11.08.2016).

## CHAPTER 6

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### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation is the first analysis in the UK of the music-based, physical approach to teaching handwriting, known as Write Dance. Perhaps it is not surprising that very young children have demonstrated that they have greater enthusiasm and motivation to write and draw when teachers and practitioners plan dynamic, physical (dance) activities to incorporate sensory mark-making and music-drawing.

It is significant that this high level of teacher engagement (to understand the physical development principles that underpin WD) has contributed to children's progress in handwriting skills. Observable progress and development is convincing because participants presented examples showing significant gains made by very young children. Furthermore, children were more motivated and confident to write and draw, which encouraged them to do more of it. It is also significant that the participants described holistic and active approaches to teaching because a range of complimentary activities facilitated positive outcomes. Therefore, singling out WD as the sole factor in the children's progress could be problematic. Despite this, there can be little doubt that teachers reported they were thinking more critically about how to teach handwriting more effectively.

Based on our evaluation we recommend:

- Teachers and practitioners need to understand the importance of teaching gross motor movements for handwriting.
- Teachers and practitioners need to incorporate music-drawings and mark making activities for handwriting.
- Teachers and practitioners need to provide a *well-resourced movement for writing environment* both indoors and outside.
- Teachers and practitioners need to inform parents, and invite them to attend child-led demonstration sessions.
- We recommend that children, teachers and practitioners keep on moving with the song and dance!

### REPORT SUMMARY

This evaluation explored the significance of physical movement and dance (known as Write Dance) to teach handwriting. Specifically, teacher observation of development in young children's mark-making, handwriting, and their willingness to write and draw. Teachers and early years practitioners were asked to describe their ideas to implement Write Dance, and reflect upon the children's responses to these experiences.

THIS TIMELY EVALUATION PROJECT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED WITHOUT THE COMMITMENT AND THE DEDICATED PRACTICE OF ALL THE PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE NAMED AS PARTICIPANTS IN THIS EVALUATION.

“CHILDREN ARE MORE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT WRITING, AND ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THEIR WRITING TOO.”

“I RECOMMENDED THE RESOURCE [WD] TO ANOTHER LOCAL SCHOOL - SHE HAS USED IT AND SAYS THAT SHE HAS NEVER KNOWN CHILDREN'S FREE WRITING TO BE AS WELL DEVELOPED AT THIS POINT IN THE YEAR COMPARED TO PREVIOUS YEAR GROUPS.”

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