

Summary

High potential learners who have difficulty with handwriting can sometimes be misunderstood in school, especially if ability and achievement are being assessed in written work and tests. If learners have difficulty expressing their ideas, opinions and knowledge on paper, it might be assumed that they have little knowledge or have not learned from the lesson. It is important for these learners to have opportunities to also present their knowledge in other ways. This advice sheet is aimed at teachers and others in an educational setting to suggest ways that this might be addressed.

Introduction

It is not uncommon for high potential learners to have problems with their handwriting. Due to asynchronous development (see the advice sheet *S502 Asynchronous Development in High Potential Learners*) high potential learners' cognitive abilities are beyond their chronological age; yet their fine motor skills are age-appropriate or below.

High potential learners with handwriting problems are often misunderstood or overlooked since their evidenced work doesn't match their verbal and thinking abilities. It is important that such learners received appropriate handwriting support when they are young so that this area can be improved and allows them to show their abilities in their written work. However, many dislike the practice associated with improving handwriting and struggle to engage with it regularly enough to make a difference.

Another issue is that some high potential learners struggle to put their thoughts into written words. This can be for a variety of reasons: thoughts moving too fast to capture in writing; struggling to get started; the task being too open for a logical thinker; and thinking in too complex a way for the task.

As high potential learners get older, handwriting will usually improve with the development of their fine motor skills and better thought organisation. However, some of these learners have an underlying difficulty that affects their handwriting so keep in mind that if the problem persists in older learners, the possibility of dysgraphia, dyspraxia or dyslexia should be considered and discussed with the SENCo.

If the learner is starting to become anxious about writing, it is important for them not to become a big issue. In this case, try other ways for them to express themselves and demonstrate their learning. In these cases the learner may be provided with a portable word processor, laptop or tablet (see below for other suggestions).

Things to Consider in School

- Mark the learner's work for content as well as presentation; consider giving separate marks for each, so that the learner can better understand the level/quality of the content they are writing.
- Ask the learner's parent to scribe for their homework i.e. the child dictates and the parent writes the answer. The parent needs to understand the importance of doing this accurately, so that the learner's abilities can be challenged and any areas of weakness supported appropriately. Alternatively, the learner's verbal answers could be recorded.

- Ensure time spent on recording/writing information is proportionate to the time spent learning and thinking during the planned lesson.
- Allow the learner to word process some of their work at school and at home to reduce the pressure of handwriting. Provide time at school for learners to learn to touch type in a lunch time or after school club. Ask parents to encourage their child to learn to touch type at home.
- Provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate their learning through multiple choice answers and tick box work sheets at least some of the time.
- Use frames for writing to help the learner plan their work before starting on a task.
- Encourage the learner to increase the length of their answers a little at a time i.e. from one sentence to two sentences, then three. Trying to get a learner anxious about handwriting from one sentence to a whole page is likely to be seen as an unrealistic target for the learner – take it one step at a time – a little progress is a great motivator.
- Use a variety of other ways for learners to demonstrate their learning on a regular basis, for example:

Visual: Animation, brochure, cartoon, collage, photos, drawing, flow chart, Venn diagram, mindmap, graph, illustration, mural, map, story board, photo story, PowerPoint presentation, timeline, video clip.

Oral: Audio tape, debate, discussion, documentary, interview, lecture, presentation, podcast, radio report, seminar, speech, voice-over.

Kinaesthetic: Dramatisations, sculpture, model experiment, performance, presentation, demonstration, rap, recital, role play, sketch.

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In Addition:

- Provide appropriate praise whenever there is an improvement in presentation, however slight.
- Provide other opportunities to practice fine motor skills whenever possible, for example through art techniques to develop hand control without the pressure of writing. This could be during class time, or in lunch time or after school clubs.
- Allow practice by writing in pencil first, then writing on top in pen when the learner is sure it is correct (pencil can be erased).
- See if using different designs of pen and pencil makes writing easier for the learner.
- Allow the learner to produce draft work in a note taking style, and then to re-write it in neat as a final copy.
- Break down long writing tasks into more manageable chunks.
- Try to ensure that the purpose and relevance of any writing task is clearly understood by the learner (e.g. a short term goal working towards the larger goal), as this will increase motivation and willingness to produce more than just the minimum.

- If the level of the work is not sufficiently challenging (so that little effort is required by the learner), then the learner may not attribute importance to the piece of written work. Enrich the task and add more depth through differentiation, questioning, development of higher order thinking skills.
- Try to link any writing tasks to an area of particular interest for the learner whenever possible.

Further Information

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| S601 High Learning Potential and Special Educational Needs | Some learners seem to struggle with an area of their learning and yet leave you in no doubt that they understand exactly what was covered in the lesson. Others, you feel, may have a special need but just do not quite fit the classic profile and leave you wondering exactly how to support them in the classroom and beyond. You may identify still others as having a learning need but are just too bright for the usual support you can offer. Have you ever considered that these learners might be what are called Dual or Multiple Exceptional (DME) ? |
| www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing | Dance Mat Touch Typing Good for teaching children to touch type. It has fun characters and levels to work through |
| www.nha-handwriting.org.uk | National Handwriting Association It has lots of information and articles on handwriting |
| www.handwritingworksheets.com | Handwriting Worksheets Website Excellent free resource to produce worksheets with your own chosen words (great for encouraging reluctant writers) |
| www.writewell.co.uk | Write Well Website Resource supplier to aid handwriting for both left and right handers. |
| www.leftshoponline.co.uk | Left 'n' Write Useful for left-handed children as has products and resources available to help |
| http://nape.org.uk/ | National Association of Primary Education |
| www.audiblox2000.com/dysgraphia.htm | Audiblox's section on Dysgraphia |
| www.thinkbuzan.com/uk/articles/view/example-mind-maps-education | Think Buzan Examples of mind maps |
| <i>English for Gifted and Talented Students</i> by Geoff Dean | A source of ideas for those teaching ages 11-18 and includes a CD Rom with photocopiable material. |

Potential Plus UK Date of Issue: June 2018
 Potential Plus UK Planned Review Date: June 2121

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