

Title: Handwriting or typing: occupational therapists' experiences of supporting young people with handwriting difficulties

Authors: Nightingale, R., Barnett, A.L, Sumner, E., Prunty, M.

Background: Handwriting is a primary occupation of children, and the ability to produce high quality written work is critical to academic success (McMaster and Roberts, 2016). While most children have developed effective handwriting by secondary school age, some have handwriting difficulties that hamper educational achievement and well-being. Although occupational therapists are involved in assessment and planning support, including introducing typing as an alternative (Batorowicz et al., 2012), their ability to make evidence-informed decisions is impacted by a lack of research. This study explored how occupational therapists support adolescents with handwriting difficulties, and the factors that influence their decision-making.

Methods: Online semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 occupational therapists with experience of recommending typing and analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Although there was shared practice underpinned by occupational therapy philosophy, there was also divergent practice due to different approaches. Recommending typing was a straightforward decision for some occupational therapists, whereas others experienced uncertainty around the optimum time, and whether typing or an alternative method for recording schoolwork, should be recommended. Roles and responsibilities, resources, and evidence and experience influenced practice and decision-making.

Conclusion: Findings suggest understanding the adolescent's motivation, the effect of handwriting difficulties on well-being and the need for a functional method to record schoolwork is key when making the decision to recommend typing. Closer collaboration between occupational therapists and school staff could increase understanding of roles. Evidence-based guidelines and further research examining whether, when and how to introduce typing as an alternative to handwriting would support best practice.

References

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