Classroom Strategies

Occupational therapy has proven to be effective in improving handwriting deficits in the school system (Case Smith, 2002). Occupational therapists use a variety of activities, occupations, and techniques to address handwriting deficits. The use of sensorimotor techniques is a common intervention strategy OT's use while working on improving handwriting. Sensorimotor activities are those that use the body's basic sensory systems (tactile, vision, auditory, proprioception and vestibular) coupled with motor skills to promote learning in a variety of ways. Research and evidence supports the use of sensorimotor techniques in improving handwriting skills in children. Evidence tables that address handwriting in the school system have been compiled for your convenience and as a resource. To see evidence tables, see link.

Below is a list of sensorimotor strategies that can be used in the classroom that are both engaging to children and promote development of handwriting skills.

**Pencil/Finger Control**

1. Color by number, mazes

2. Pencil races - draw 10 dots in a circle around a piece of paper. Circle the first dot and then erase the next. Continue this pattern all the way around the paper.

3. Using a coin or small object to rub a scratch and sniff sticker, or a rub on sticker (transfers to another surface when you rub it).
**Letter Formation**

1. Sponge writing - draw letter on chalkboard and let child trace the letter with a wet sponge. Then give them a paper towel to trace the letter repeatedly until it is dry.

2. Fill a ziplock bag with colored hair gel and let child practice making letters with their index finger. Or fill a tray with sand and let them make letters in the sand with their index finger.

3. Write on paper over top of a textured material

4. Have students form a single file line. The last person in line draws a letter on the back of the person in front of them with their index finger. That person then guesses the letter, and continues on to the person in front of them. Play until everyone has a turn.

5. Use wikki stix to form letters on index cards and then trace with finger. You can also use cut up pipe cleaners or rolled out play-doh.

**Fine Motor Development**

1. Roll out play-doh or clay (clay is more of a challenge) into a ball using just the tips of their fingers. For a fun craft project using this concept - have the children ball up colored tissue paper and then glue it onto a holiday-theme shaped paper. (ex - heart, turkey, etc.)

2. Putting coins into a piggy bank one at a time. To make this more of a challenge, have them pick up the coins one at a time using tweezers.

3. Popping bubble wrap.
4. Pinching clothespins. A fun math game to play using clothespins: Paint clothespins two different colors. In partners, have one student create a math problem by attaching the different colored clothespins onto a clothes hanger. The second student should write down and solve the math problem. (Ex. 3 red pins and 3 blue pins equals 6 pins.)

5. Stringing beads or buttons. For holiday decoration - string popcorn or candy.

6. Use an eyedropper filled with colored water to drop one drop of water at a time to make designs on coffee filters.

**In Hand Manipulation**

1. Rotate two small balls in the palm of the hand. Work towards not looking at the balls.

2. Tear off small pieces of paper, and crumple the paper from your fingertips to your palm using just one hand. Throw it into the trash can.

3. Pencil Inch - walk up and down pencil using fingertips.
4. Move small objects from fingertips to palm. Pick up coins one at a time with one hand, and move from fingertips to palm. Holding all the coins, release them into a jar one at a time.

5. Twirl pencil between fingers like a baton.

Wrist Development

1. Rope Turning or Jump Rope

2. Writing on vertical surfaces such as the chalkboard, whiteboard, or easel. You could also do other activities on a vertical surface - such as a peg board or lite brite.

3. Doing activities on the floor, such as coloring a large mural.

4. Animal Walks (bear walk, crab walk, kangaroo hop, inchworm)
Right/Left Discrimination

1. Play the hokey pokey.

2. Playing with a slinky.

3. Have child connect dots at the chalkboard using left to right strokes.

4. Toss beanbags alternating hands. Use a Twister board or cornhole set to aim at.

5. Play balloon volleyball. Have child play with palm up, and alternate hitting with right hand, then left hand.

Note: For children who continue to display handwriting problems after a variety of interventions and strategies, the use of computer programs (Keyboarding, Word Prediction, Speech Recognition) may be a useful tool. For evidence related to this topic see evidence tables.