

Use of Handwriting Without Tears Program to Enhance Handwriting Skills in First and Second Grade Children Living in a Homeless Shelter

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Introduction:

Homeless children often experience interruptions and inconsistencies in their educational program placing them at risk for poor academic achievement. The potential risk exists for homeless children to have handwriting problems with the high frequency of school absenteeism and changes in school due to housing instability but literature has not systematically addressed this problem. The impact of poor handwriting skills on academic performance has been discussed and continues to be an area of concern for school based occupational therapists (Amundson, 2005).

Objectives:

1. Identify manuscript skills in first and second grade children who are homeless.
2. To identify the effectiveness of the Handwriting Without Tears (HWT) (Olsen, 1999) program on improving manuscript handwriting skills in the selected population within a four week period of time.

Methods:

Quantitative pretest/posttest design with no control group

Participants: 30 children in first and second grade living in a homeless shelter

Pretest administer the Minnesota Handwriting Assessment (MHA) (Reisman, 1999) to determine status

Complete twelve 15 minute HWT sessions over a period of 4 weeks

Posttest with MHA

Results:

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 16.0 and a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. With a sample size of 30 first and second graders, 90% were assessed as needing handwriting services using the standardized instrument of the MHA. Forty four percent of these students completed the HWT intervention with over 50% demonstrating improvement on posttest measures on the MHA.

Conclusions:

These findings are consistent with results from previous literature. There is a demonstrated need for occupational therapy services, including handwriting assessment/intervention as well as program design and implementation, for young school aged children living in a homeless shelter. The use of systematic handwriting using the HWT program was found to support skill acquisition in this underserved population.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

Provides evidence of need and demonstrates effectiveness of intervention for homeless school aged children in the area of homelessness.