

# ENHANCING WRITING SKILLS IN CHILDREN

Handwriting and Spelling in Primary and Secondary  
school

Introduction

Professor Vince Connelly  
Psychology



# Writing Research Programme.

## Recent milestones:

2007 Current Trends in Writing Conference for Teachers

2009 “Profiling writing in children with specific language impairment.”  
project funded by Leverhulme Trust

2010 “Writing difficulties encountered by children with dyslexia.”  
project funded by Waterloo Foundation

2011 “Developing evidence-based practice through use of a  
developmental model of writing.” funded by the ESRC

2012 Teachers Workshops and Conference Programme

Development of Curriculum Based Measurement Writing  
Assessment

# Writing Research Programme.

Recent milestones:

SLI project: Working with 25 Schools across SE England

ESRC project: Working with 18 Schools in partnership.

3 x Twilight Conference sessions at Brookes.

Presentations on our work to

British Dyslexia Association International Conference

'Assessing writing difficulties' European Training School, Padova, Italy.

EARLI SIG Writing Conference in Portugal

COST EU Conference on Writing in Macedonia and in France

Child Language Disorders Symposium in USA

Handwriting Conference UK

9 x Oxfordshire Schools & Oxfordshire LACAT

# Research on writing difficulties

- Significant minority of children struggle to acquire basic competence in text production
- Majority of children with writing difficulties are in mainstream classes
- Many different experiences/problems in writing that lead to the poor writing and poor composition
- Single behavioural outcome but different pathways
- Interventions based on single models not necessarily effective

# Writing difficulties: Teacher knowledge and needs

Considerable variation in the time teachers allocate to writing instruction  
(Cutler & Graham, 2008)

40% make no adaptations for struggling writers (Graham, Murphy et al.,  
2008)

Limited handwriting & spelling instruction after early Primary schooling  
(Barnett et al, 2006; Graham et al, 2008)

Teachers report being inadequately prepared to teach writing

# Spelling & Handwriting skills

- Recognised as a key issue for pupils struggling with literacy (Rose, 2009)
- Pupils with poor handwriting and spelling seldom very rarely produce good quality compositions (Connelly, Dockrell & Barnett, 2011, Connelly et al, 2006, Dockrell et al, 2009).
- Problems with basic skills in writing (spelling & handwriting) remain a key predictor of compositional quality through adolescence and into adulthood (Richardson & Wydell, 2009; Suddarth et al, 2012).
- Lack of fluency in transcription skills associated with avoidance of writing (Berninger et al, 1991)
- Pupils with lower initial attainments in writing are less likely to benefit from interventions in secondary school (Myhill et al, 2012)

Dear Sir,  
I would like a detached house.  
With two bath rooms. One 100m by 50m  
living room. Also a kitchen 80m by 20m with  
six cupboards made by hard thick wood.  
Five Bedrooms. Four of them with double  
beds and one with a single bed. In every  
bed room I would like a door on every  
room and a cupboard in every bedroom.  
In the kitchen also a double cooker with  
a grill (a electric cooker please.) Down stairs  
I want my kitchen and three bedrooms with  
my living. Upstairs I would like one bathroom  
and the other three bedrooms and my  
one of bowling room.  
my  
bath - I hope to see you in it - far further  
rooms.

WOLD RESPONSE BOOKLET

67

Written Expression

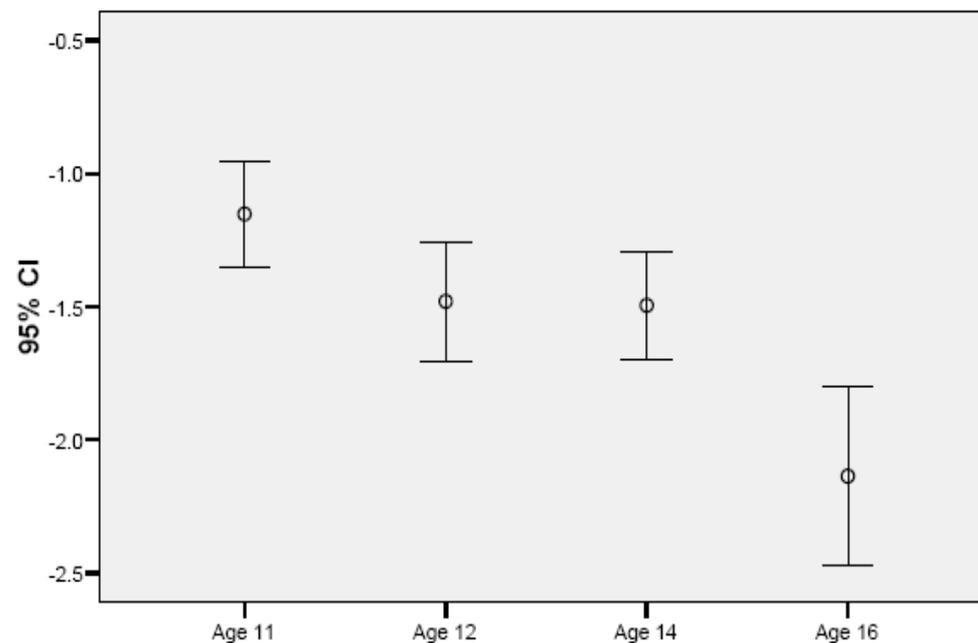
Prompt 1 or 2  
(Circle one.)

Dear Roxweeone  
I want a hours with 4 bedrooms  
and 2 ceing and in west green  
and 3 mat's and a G.  
From [redacted]

# Evidence of lack of progress at school...

Dockrell, Lindsay & Connelly (2009)

## WOLD Composition Z Scores Age 11- 16

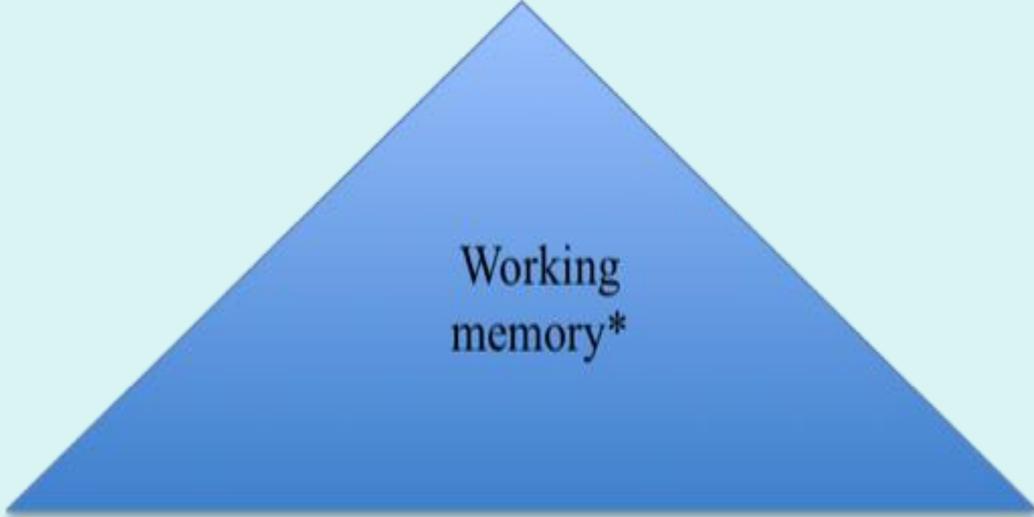


Handwriting fluency scores on the alphabet task at age 16 predicted the decrease in WOLD composition scores.

The less fluent the handwriting then the more likely to show a decrease in composition over time.

# A Developmental framework

Text generation: *words, sentences and discourse*



Working  
memory\*

Transcription: *handwriting/typing  
and spelling*

Executive functions: *planning,  
reviewing and revising*

**Simple view of writing derived from Berninger and Amtmann (2003: 350)**

# Improving Handwriting

Christensen (2005) Intervention to improve the speed of handwriting in secondary school students

- One group received handwriting speed instruction
- One group received equivalent time writing in a journal

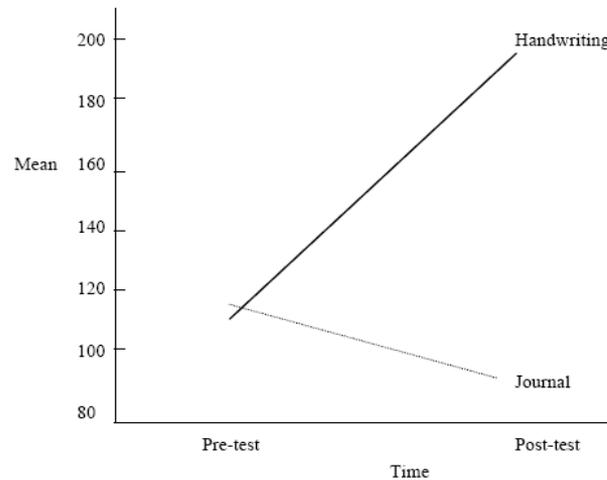


Figure 2. Means for both groups at pre- and post-test on length of written text

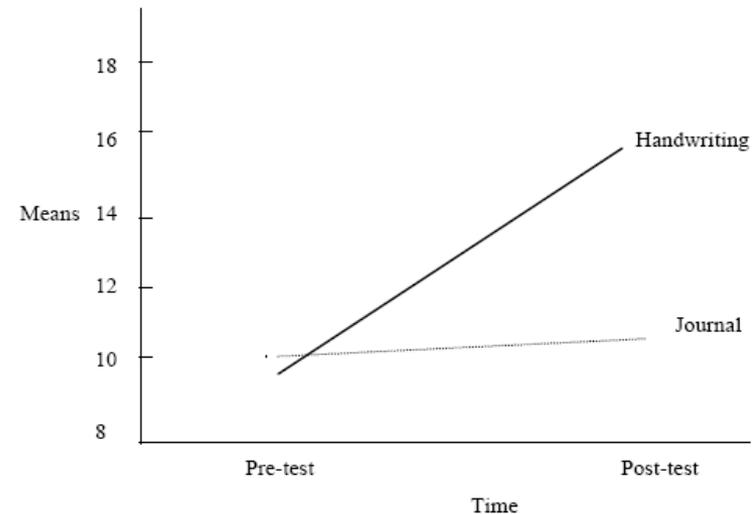


Figure 3. Means for both groups at pre- and post-test on quality of written text

# Improving Spelling

- Berninger et al, 1998
- Sample of 128 seven year olds in the US
- Intervened with twice weekly 20 minute sessions on improving spelling for 12 weeks. Focused on alphabetic principles and High Frequency words.
- Embedded use of new words in compositions as part of the spelling intervention.
- Raised not just spelling but also had a wider impact on composition quality and in particular number of words written in classroom compositions.

## Recent Project

**“Using a developmental model of writing to inform evidence based practice.”  
Economic & Social Research Council Knowledge Exchange Follow on Fund**

**Working with teachers to identify any problems they have with the teaching of writing.**

- 1) Workshops**
- 2) Conference**
- 3) Website**
- 4) Dissemination of information**
- 5) New Assessment Tools (CBM)**



## Programme of Events.

- 4.30 pm An introduction to the Teaching of Handwriting and Spelling Vince Connelly
- 4.55 pm Research into Handwriting and Spelling Emma Sumner,
- 5.15 pm Handwriting Practice and Measuring Speed of Handwriting Anna Barnett,
- 5.35pm Question and Answer Session
- 5.45pm Break for canapés and tea/coffee
- 6.10 pm Teachers Talking about Writing . Magdalena Olofsson, Year 6 Teacher
- 6.30 pm Using Curriculum-Based Measurement of writing in the classroom to monitor progress in writing Julie Dockrell, Institute of Education, London
- 6.55 pm Handwriting to Writing: one leap or many hops? Angela Webb
- 7.20 pm General Discussion /Question and Answer Session

# What's in the bag?

Research Reviews:

“Informing writing through assessment”

CBM manual

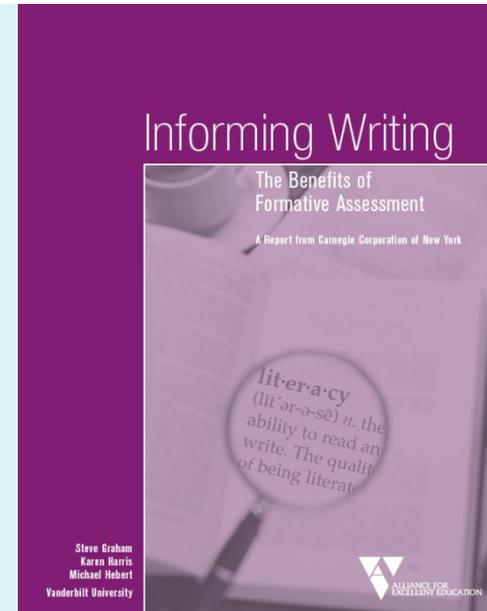
References/Writing Packages in Common Use in Schools

Developmental Model

Publishers Materials

Yellow Evaluation Sheet

Michel Fayol Presentation



# EWSC Brookes Website

### Welcome!

Learning to write is a complex skill. Children often struggle with learning to write and for children with learning difficulties writing can be particularly challenging. To develop as fluent, accurate and creative writers children need the opportunity to practice different components of the writing process.

### Enhancing Writing Skills in Children - Workshops

We are currently running a series of workshops looking at writing development in Key Stage 2. These workshops are with our project partners and other professionals within education. The aim of these workshops is to develop ways in which teachers can monitor children's writing to enhance learning and attainment.



### Oral Language and Writing

From 2009-2011 we conducted a longitudinal project that aimed to identify which aspects of the writing process are critical for which children at which developmental phases. We are particularly interested in the role that oral language places in developing writing skills. We are currently analysing the results from this study. These findings will feed into our workshop series. When the project is complete we should be able to develop appropriate support strategies for pupils.

If you would like more information about either of these projects then please contact us directly: [EWSC@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:EWSC@brookes.ac.uk)

# EWSC Website

## SLI Project Feedback

The data collection phase of the SLI project is now complete, so we are now in the process of feeding back to the schools. If you would like to know about some of our results then please take a look at [this presentation](#). Further information and feedback about the project will be posted here as we continue to analyse the data.

## Conference Presentations

Results from some of our on-going research projects into children's writing skills were presented in September 2010 at the EARLI SIG:Writing conference in Heidelberg.

To have a look at the accompanying slides please click on the pdf icons below.

Dockrell, J.E., Connelly, V., Critten, S., Walter, K. (2011). The relationship between spelling and writing development in children with language difficulties. Society for Research in Child Language & Development. Madison USA.

Connelly, V., Dockrell, J.E., Critten, S., Walter, K. (2011). The writing difficulties of children with specific language impairment. British Dyslexia Association Conference. Harrogate, UK.

Connelly, V., Dockrell, J.E., Critten, S., Walter, K.W. (2011). Children challenged by writing: The writing difficulties of children with specific language impairment. Prozesse der Textproduktion in der Schule: Strukturen und Verarbeitung aus sprachdidaktischer und psycholinguistischer Perspektive. DGfS conference, Göttingen, Germany.

Dockrell, J.E., Connelly, V., Walter, K.W. & Critten, S. (2011) Using curriculum-based measurement to assess writing development. COST ERN-LWE Workshop, Potsdam, Germany.

Walter, K. (2011) Eye & Pen: An Introduction. Association of Technical Staff in Psychology Conference. Oxford, England.

 Connelly, V., Critten, S., Dockrell, J., Walter, K. & Lindsay, G. (2010) Writing development in children with language difficulties and the influence of spelling skill. EARLI SIG:Writing conference, Heidelberg.

 Dockrell, J., Connelly, V., Walter, K. & Critten, S. (2010) Using curriculum-based measurement to assess writing development. EARLI SIG:Writing conference, Heidelberg.

## Recent Publications

### Book Chapters

 Connelly, V., Dockrell, J.E., Barnett, A. (2011). Children Challenged by Writing Due to Language and Motor Difficulties. In V. Berninger (Ed.) *Cognitive Psychology of Writing Handbook: Past, Present, and Future Contributions of Cognitive Writing Research to Cognitive Psychology*. Psychology Press.

## Programme of Events.

- 4.30 pm An introduction to the Teaching of Handwriting and Spelling Vince Connelly
- 4.55 pm Research into Handwriting and Spelling Emma Sumner
- 5.15 pm Handwriting Practice and Measuring Speed of Handwriting Anna Barnett
- 5.35pm Question and Answer Session
- 5.45pm Break for canapés and tea/coffee
- 6.10 pm Teachers Talking about Writing . Magdalena Olofsson, Year 6 Teacher
- 6.30 pm Using Curriculum-Based Measurement of writing in the classroom to monitor progress in writing Julie Dockrell, Institute of Education, London
- 6.55 pm Handwriting to Writing: one leap or many hops? Angela Webb
- 7.20 pm General Discussion /Question and Answer Session