**A case for teaching cursive before print (and teaching cursive to those already printing):**

Since the adoption of common core in the United States, many schools have taken cursive handwriting out because it is not included in the list of standards. However, cursive is still a very important skill to have. Let’s put aside for a moment the obvious reason of being able to read for yourself what our Founding Fathers wanted when they started our country and look at the immediate benefit to our children.

* Hand-eye coordination
* Sensory-motor coordination
* Thinking memory
* Dynamically engages both hemispheres of the brain
* Visual recognition requirements create a broader repertoire of letter representation
* Easier to learn! There are only 3 main strokes for cursive (more on this below) \*\*
* Prevents reversals and confusion of letters: “b” and “d” are the most common reversals in print; not so in cursive.
* Less potential for errors: cursive is a continuous, fluid movement, which leaves room for fewer errors.
* Enforces skills and patters for reading and writing: in cursive, all lower-case letters start at the bottom, as opposed to print which starts at various points depending on the letter.
* Prevents too much space between letters and words: The flow of cursive handwriting is from left to right which encourages spatial discipline. In print, children often have letters too close together or words space too far apart.
* Helps left-handed children: With print, the left-handed child will write printing from left to right but will cover what he has written with his arms. This is called the hook position. In cursive writing, the left-handed child learns to write from the bottom up and turns the paper clockwise which increases comfort and legibility.

\*\*Print (manuscript) handwriting is what most schools and preschools in the US start with for letter formation and recognition. There are some basic prewriting lines that are important for preschoolers to know BEFORE they attempt to print letters.

* Vertical – (Age 2 imitates, age 3 copies/masters)
* Horizontal – (Age 2 imitates, age 3 copies/masters)
* Circle – (Age 2, age 3 copies/masters)
* Cross shape (+) – (Age 3 imitates, age 4 copies)
* Right/Left Diagonal Line – (Age 4)
* Square – (Age 4)
* X shape – (Age 4)
* Triangle (Age 5)

Ideally, a child should not be learning to print a letter of the alphabet until these pre-writing lines are mastered. However, most children entering Kindergarten (age 5) are already expected to know how to write their names and also form most letters of the alphabet. Developmentally, this is not always appropriate.

Print or manuscript handwriting involves hand-eye coordination as well, however, each letter starts at a new point and a student needs to be able to pick up the pencil and place it at the appropriate starting point of each letter in order to produce legible work that is also spelled correctly.

Letter reversals are also common in print or manuscript handwriting, particularly with “d” and “b”, “p” and q”, “t” and “f” etc. This is often due to under-developed visual motor skills and visual discrimination.

None of this is necessary for cursive writing. Therefore, a child can start writing as early as 3 or 4 with confidence if they are interested.

Looking at some other aspects, we find that forming letters with the hand by using a pen or pencil is cognitively different than pushing a physical or virtual key on a keyboard. When learning, forming letters by hand creates a connection with the movement of the hand to the visual response of seeing the letter on the page. There are multiple processes coexisting simultaneously: the movement of the hand, the thought of the letter, and the visual cue of the letter. This is reading and writing concurrently, which is a necessary skill.

Children need to go through this process to fully understand the English language and connect words to motor memory. Learning cursive handwriting is important for spelling skills, enabling children to recognize words when they read them later. Typing doesn’t have the same effect on the brain, as it doesn’t require the same fine motor skills and simultaneous activity.

According to Dr. William Klemm, the “Memory Medic,” cursive can make children more intelligent. Writing by hand helps train the brain to integrate various forms of information at once, including visual and tactile inputs, while applying fine motor skills. Dr. Klemm suggests cursive can provide similar benefits to the brain as learning to play a musical instrument.

While everyone certainly needs to learn to type in today’s world, cursive handwriting has its benefits. It can be demanding to learn, but it teaches organization skills and assists children in composing their own thoughts and ideas. For those struggling with dyslexia, cursive is often part of a treatment plan to help hand-eye coordination, memory, vision related difficulties, and other brain activities. Instead of letting handwriting die in schools, cursive is an important part of a curriculum that improves children’s cognitive and visual skills.

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