

Handwriting speed in children with Developmental Coordination Disorder: Are they really slower?

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ABSTRACT

Handwriting difficulties are often included in descriptions of Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD). They are cited as the most common reason for referral to health professionals following parent and teacher concerns about slow and untidy writing. The aim of this study was to compare handwriting performance in English children with and without DCD across a range of writing tasks, to gain a better understanding of the nature of ‘slowness’ so commonly reported. Twenty-eight 8–14 year-old children with a diagnosis of DCD participated in the study, with 28 typically developing age and gender matched controls. Participants completed the four handwriting tasks from the Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting (DASH) and wrote their own name; all on a digitising writing tablet. The number of words written, speed of pen movements and the time spent pausing during the tasks were calculated. The findings confirmed what many professionals report, that children with DCD produce less text than their peers. However, this was not due to slow movement execution, but rather a higher percentage of time spent pausing. Discussion centres on the understanding of the pausing phenomenon in children with DCD and areas for further research.