THE EFFICACY OF A SHORT TERM HANDWRITING INTERVENTION FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS

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Abstract
Statistics show that families with children constitute over one-third of the homeless population in the United States (Howard et al., 2009). According to a report by the National Center on Family Homelessness (2010), one in 50 children in the United States are currently experiencing homelessness.

Studies have shown that students who are homeless have an increased rate of learning disabilities, anxiety, stress, and are more likely to repeat a grade in school (Kirkman et al., 2010). They are in a constant state of uncertainty, which can affect their attention and overall academic performance. Although several laws have been established to support homeless students academically, not every child in need is receiving services, and there continues to be a need to review and revise these programs (Mawhinney-Rhoads et al., 2006; Olivet, et al., 2010).

One factor that impedes the academic achievement of homeless children is poor handwriting skills. Studies have shown that handwriting can affect a child’s self-esteem and overall academic achievement (Feder et al., 2007). There are many interventions that are used to improve handwriting, however, very few studies have examined the effectiveness of these programs on homeless students.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to investigate (1) what is the occurrence of handwriting problems in first and second graders who are homeless, and (2) what is the effectiveness of the short term Handwriting Without Tears (HWT) intervention?
Methodology
The research utilized a quantitative pre-test post-test design. The Minnesota Handwriting Assessment (MHA) was used to measure the occurrence of handwriting deficits and to compare handwriting performance before and after 12 sessions of handwriting intervention. The HWT intervention was provided three times a week for 15 minutes for a total of four weeks.

Results
All 13 students assessed were found to have poor handwriting skills. A total of 5 students completed all 12 sessions. In addition, 2 students who did not complete the full 12 sessions were included in the data analyzed, as they were able to complete the post intervention assessment. The 7 students that were reassessed showed improvement in handwriting performance.

Figure 1: Pre-test scores in the five categories assessed by the MHA. The bars represent the number of students that performed like peers (less than 1 SD below the norm), somewhat below peers (1-2 SDs below the norm), or well below peers (2 or more SDs below the norm).
Figure 2: The mean difference between the pre and the post-test raw MHA scores. A mean increase can be seen in all the categories except the category of Rate.

**Discussion/Conclusion**

All 13 students assessed demonstrated handwriting deficits. The seven students that were reassessed showed improvement in handwriting skills. This demonstrates the need for services and the short-term HWT intervention can be effective for homeless children.

**References**


