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Press release/invitation

Most children start writing their name at the age of four

DARMSTADT, 26 October 2017. Pre-school children are usually highly motivated to learn to write. Through a survey of mothers, the Schreibmotorik Institut, Heroldsberg, has now investigated children's first attempts at writing. After all, even in the digital age, handwriting is still of vital importance. An international symposium held by the Schreibmotorik Institut in cooperation with the TU Darmstadt's Institute for Ergonomics on 10 November in Darmstadt will be addressing precisely this topic.

Most children – 61.4 per cent – start writing their name at the early age of four. In this age group, drawing skills are usually still not very well developed, yet it seems to be essential for children to be able to write their name at that stage. They do this on average about 400 times independently before their first day at school, as shown by the results of a representative survey of mothers conducted by the Schreibmotorik Institut, Heroldsberg. The results will now be presented as part of the "Handwriting 2020" campaign. "Correctly writing their name and then receiving praise for it from adults is probably a child's first conscious educational achievement", explains Institute Director Dr. Marianela Diaz Meyer – and the pace of further development is accordingly high.

"The discovery of handwriting is voluntary and intrinsically motivated by the curiosity and relentless will to learn to write", says the ergonomics expert. After all, four and five-year-olds write their names an average of 3.8 times a week by hand, and 82 per cent of children enjoy doing so, according to their mothers. Particularly motivated children write their name by hand a total of 490 times before their first day at school. They do it more frequently (4.7 times a week), and an above-average amount of them noticeably enjoy handwriting (91 per cent). There is, however, no difference between boys and girls: on average, they write their names with roughly the same frequency and enjoy it to the same extent. This raises the question as to where boys lose their motivation: according to the results of research carried out by the Schreibmotorik Institut, 51 per cent of boys have problems with handwriting.*

Because more and more words are subsequently added, the majority of children should be writing by hand on a daily basis until their first day at school, according to the scientists at the Schreibmotorik Institut. "The fact that children enjoy writing and learning represents a great opportunity", Dr. Diaz Meyer believes. "But it

also entails a danger”, as “Children need to learn to precisely coordinate more than 30 muscles and 17 joints to develop the necessary motor skills to be able to guide pens as ‘precision tools’”. If a child develops an incorrect hold that then becomes habitual, permanent problems with handwriting may result.

The Schreibmotorik Institut’s recommendation to parents is: “Always make sure your child develops the correct sitting posture and pen hold as well as the right page position from the outset!” Mothers and fathers can save their children a great deal of problems with writing as well as incorrect posture in later life if they pay attention to the correct pen hold and page position, in order to ensure a more relaxed handwriting style. Much teachers’ and occupational therapists’ experience shows that relearning this later is almost impossible. This is one of the most serious causes of writing problems among children in Germany according to teachers. The Institute’s surveys of teachers shows that three quarters of children cannot write legibly for extended periods of time without cramping.*

Early training of coordination and the hand muscles is thus very important. “The earlier children become familiar with using a pen and the more they enjoy practicing, the easier it will be to learn to write later on at school”, says Dr. Diaz Meyer. Research carried out in cooperation with renowned universities shows that children who were given the opportunity to engage in various fun exercises in writing motor skills training early on learned to write much faster, and were better at it and more motivated. One hour a week is perfectly sufficient for this.

2nd International Symposium on Handwriting Skills, 2017

“The media are changing, but handwriting remains.” And, “Education needs handwriting in a sensible digital context.” These are two working theses that scientists, teacher trainers, representatives of culture ministries as well as teachers and occupational therapists want to discuss at an international symposium held by the Schreibmotorik Institut in cooperation with the TU Darmstadt’s Institute for Ergonomics on 10 November in Darmstadt. The focus will be upon the opportunities and risks of handwriting in the context of digitalisation and addressing the fundamental issues of future educational practice.

For several years, there have been international efforts aimed at increasingly replacing handwriting with typed letters in schools. The contributions at the symposium will reveal the various problems this causes in terms of educational attainment. After all, handwriting promotes cognitive development. “Only Three Fingers Write, but the Whole Brain Works.” This is the title of a lecture by Prof. Dr. Ruud van der Weel, professor of cognitive psychology, Norwegian University of Science & Technology.

Prof. Dr. Gerald Lembke, professor of digital media, DHBW Mannheim, will use his opening speech to discuss the opportunities and risks of digital education. The fundamental question of “How prepared are children for writing lessons?” will also be addressed during the symposium. To this end, Dr. Christian Marquardt, the scientific advisor for the Schreibmotorik Institut, will be presenting a simple new writing motor skills test for those who are just learning to write, called the “SMI CompetenceWeb”. Alongside scientific findings, experience from practice will also be presented.

The entire programme can be found at www.schreibmotorik-institut.com/index.php/en/programme.

2nd International Symposium on Handwriting Skills 2017

Friday, 10 November 2017, 9am to 5pm

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg-Haus
Dieburger Straße 241
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Media representatives are warmly invited to report on the event.

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Background:

Representative face-to-face investigation in Germany using a standardised questionnaire. Survey on the frequency with which children write their own name before starting school (sample size: n= 264 mothers of four to five-year-olds).

For this reason, the “Handwriting 2020” campaign is taking initiative so that the requirements and opportunities for learning handwriting can be improved both in educational institutions such as childcare centres and schools, and with the family at home. Each child should have the chance to develop flowing, legible handwriting. The founding members of the “Handwriting 2020” campaign are the Didacta Association of the German Education Industry, who represent more than 250 companies and organisations both nationally and internationally and actively participate in debates about the development of educational systems, and the non-profit Schreibmotorik Institut from Heroldsberg that – with the support of the writing instruments manufacturer Stabilo – conducts research into the fields of writing motor skills and writing ergonomics.

*More than 96 percent of parents believe that learning handwriting is still important today; almost two thirds of those believe it to be very important. However, over 23 percent have observed that their child has trouble writing for more than 30 minutes at a time. Extrapolated to all of Germany, this amounts to 1.2 million children between the ages of six and twelve who cannot write legibly for longer periods and without cramping. These are the results of a representative survey of mothers in Germany that was carried out by the Schreibmotorik Institut with the support of the Bundeselternrat last year. Further results from the parent survey can be found here: <http://www.schreibmotorik-institut.com/index.php/en/news/press-releases>

Teachers in Germany are seeing more and more pupils with handwriting problems. This is based on a survey carried out in 2015 by the German Union of Teachers (Deutscher Lehrerverband, DL) together with the Schreibmotorik Institut in Heroldsberg. According to the survey, four fifths (79 percent) of the secondary school teachers surveyed believe their pupils’ handwriting has deteriorated on average. As many as 83 percent of the primary school teachers surveyed stated that the skills pupils require for handwriting development had deteriorated in the last few years. According to the teachers surveyed, half of all boys (51 percent) and a third of girls (31 percent) have problems with handwriting. Further results from the teacher survey can be found here: <http://www.schreibmotorik-institut.com/index.php/en/news/press-releases>