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Brukner's "The Kids' guide to getting your words on paper: Simple stuff to build motor skills and strength for handwriting" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Brokner, L. (2020). *The Kids' guide to getting your words on paper: Simple stuff to build motor skills and strength for handwriting*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 142 pp. \$19.95. ISBN 9781787751569

“Writing is an academic skill, yes. But it is built on a foundation of developmental skills” (p. 101). This sums up occupational therapist and author Lauren Brokner’s approach to helping children with handwriting. Rather than focusing on letter shapes or penmanship, Brokner introduces strategies for children to more easily process their environment so that the path to learning is clearer.

All of the suggested strategies are easy to understand and perform. Some are as simple as using different style pens, while some strategies involve practicing full body movements or creating activity journals. Brokner encourages children to perform each strategy and then to practice writing certain words or phrases on the provided lines to see how each strategy makes them feel. Brokner encourages children to test each strategy and to stick with what is most helpful for them.

Each of the five main chapters is centered around certain issues that children may face when attempting to write, and each chapter describes between five to ten strategies that are meant to help in this area. The chapters and strategies are geared toward children who have trouble focusing, whose eyes or hands may become tired easily, or who simply do not know how to handle everything going on around them. The introduction includes a simplified quiz to help children know where to begin in the book. Brokner explains that the chapters can be read out of order and as many times as is useful.

While most of the guide is directed to the children, there are a couple sections geared toward the “grownups” who will be helping the child. Brokner always encourages children to ask for help from an adult should they need it. However, she also aims for the children to work independently and pushes them toward growth. For example, she encourages them to memorize certain hand exercises and to fill out the chart at the end of every chapter which maps out certain strategies and their helpfulness.

Brokner has taken care to make this guide user-friendly with simple vocabulary. While she does use technical language at times that relates to occupational therapy,

she always explains these terms in a way that is easy to understand. She also attempts to draw children in so that they will understand that they are not alone in their struggle.

The structure of each chapter is consistent so that children and adults alike will know what to expect each time. Each chapter follows this basic format: simple hand exercises, an introduction, an explanation of each strategy, an emoji page for children to note how they feel, and a chart for them to document their experiences throughout the week.

Overall, what Brukner has accomplished in this guide is to provide children with a safe place to learn and practice. She does not make them adhere to rigid organization, but gives them flexibility to find what works best for them and encourages them to form habits that will ultimately grow their skill and comfort with handwriting.

Reviewer

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