

Remember the proverbial 'apple for the teacher' from yesteryear? Times have changed. Few teachers are getting apples from their students these days but most students have an Apple, or maybe something IBM-compatible, which remains a steady friend throughout grade school.

As one who analyzes handwriting to discern facets of personality, I am often asked about the widespread use of computers by kids. Specifically, people ask whether graphology will still be a useful method of personality assessment in the future when relatively few people have a practiced script, owing to their reliance on the keyboard. I say that question is the least of our problems.

There are many consequences when we all but drop one of the 3Rs from the curriculum. Beryl Gilbertson, an expert on handwriting, writes, "When mastered [handwriting] uses at least 80 percent of the cerebral cortex, almost all of the deeper structures, every sensory and perceptual system except those of taste and smell, and a great deal of the body. It subsumes all the language-processing, both receptive and expressive, as well as verbal thought. It subsumes all of reading processes, all visual-spatial motor processes, and the massive complexity of voluntary movement and precise patterning. All the underlying mechanisms of continual stopping-

starting, monitoring, ratio-comparisons, complex feedback, information-processing, adjustment, modification, balance and precise judgments are also involved, as is much more."

In short, in handwriting, the practiced, calibrated, fine motor movements of the thumb and fingers impacts the developing brain. Handwriting experts such as Jeanette Farmer note that learning penmanship and practicing handwriting helps children make the shift from right brain dominance to left brain dominance. The left brain's sequential processing skills are essential precursors to the development of self-control. Practicing handwriting actually promotes the acquisition of skills that include planning, monitoring, reviewing, revising and focusing. Typing, with its relatively simple, repetitive and even monotonous finger movements, does not offer the same 'work out' to the young brain.

Parents, it is up to you to find ways to get your kids to practice handwriting. If you use 'time outs' as the consequence for misbehavior, why not ask for a one-page handwritten letter as the price for early parole! Or, you could offer rewards to kids who write stories by hand. Whatever you do, I hope you will take this advice to heart. Teaching children to mind their "p's" and "q's" is actually teaching them to grow their minds.

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Growing the Young Mind



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