

Why is Rhythmic Writing so important?

by Debbie Garrick and Ken Scott

Rhythmic Writing, if done properly, will stimulate the language area of the brain as well as improve judgment of space and size. The therapist should be aware of working on cognition throughout the Rhythmic Writing technique. Watch how students form the letters. Are they moving in the right direction automatically? Are they planning ahead? Are they pushing the chalk from the shoulder, a movement that stimulates the language area of the brain? Avoid emphasizing neat handwriting. A stiffness and rigidity will come in the shoulder when the appearance of the letters is a major focus. Students begin to develop the ability to plan ahead and to make spatial judgments, there will be a gradual transfer to academics.

Deborah Zimmerman, Author, NILD Educational Therapy

Rhythmic Writing is by far the most common battle in the collective NILD experience. Students struggle to get out of it. Parents struggle to get students to do it and often give up. Therapists struggle to get parents to get students to do it - and often give up. Why is it so important? Is the absolute consistency therapists lobby for really

worth the strain Rhythmic Writing can put on the parent/child relationship?

One study confirmed gains made by students in NILD educational therapy as compared to a control group (Hopkins, 1996). Deborah Zimmerman, program author, states that there is no technique more central to the success of NILD educational therapy than

Rhythmic Writing. Although Rhythmic Writing has not been tested apart from the other techniques, parallel research, particularly in the field of neuropsychology, continues to identify physiological components that affirm the power of Rhythmic Writing. Consider the following excerpts from past and present research.

Reminders for Parents

1 Rhythmic Writing is done six times a week, two of the six times as part of therapy sessions. Consistency is best achieved if it is done at a regular time such as first thing in the morning or before homework in the afternoon.

2 A complete Rhythmic Writing session takes about 15 minutes. It includes tracing three patterns of 8's on the chalkboard, completing all motifs from one page and writing the upper and lower case alphabet letters of that page.

RHYTHM AND PATTERNING

Evidence suggests that a sense of rhythm and patterning is essential in the development of language and cognition. Students with learning disabilities are often unaware of their patterns or rhythms and this could affect focus, memory and predictability. Language itself is rhythmic and patterned [and] . . . each language form, spoken or written, has its own rhythm and pace, and its own specific rules of organization. A breakdown in dynamic functioning in individuals with learning disabilities may have at its root an inability to discern the rhythms of language. (Feuerstein, 1980; Hopkins, 1996; Kronick, 1988)

CROSSING THE MIDLINE

The use of cross lateral repatterning motions can have dramatic effects on learning. For students who are "stuck" in their learning, cross lateral movements can be the perfect and simple antidote to engage both sides of the brain for full advantage. Cross laterals are arm and leg movements that cross over from one side of the body to another. Since the left side

of the brain controls the right side of the body and vice versa, engaging the arms and legs in cross over activities forces the brain to "talk to itself". (Dennison, 1988; Jensen, 1995)

STIMULATION OF THE LIMBIC SYSTEM

Specifically, Rhythmic Writing addresses the limbic system of the brain, which calls for neurotransmitters, chemical changes and exchanges that make learning possible. Since the limbic system responds to balance and crossing the midline of the body, the technique of Rhythmic Writing should produce a chemical continuity. (Hopkins, 1996; Kandel & Hawkins, 1993)

CONSIDER THE COST

Anecdotal records over the past four decades have shown that students who do not consistently practice Rhythmic Writing do not make the same progress as students who do. Parents who want the most out of therapy for their children would do well to take this regular time of stimulation seriously. Ignoring Rhythmic Writing can be a costly decision for parents - even more costly for the children whom it affects.

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3

The vertical 8 should be slightly above eye level, slightly above the waist and more than shoulder width. The horizontal 8 should be at chest level and more than shoulder width.

4

Trace each 8 approximately 4-8 times, staying on the lines as closely as possible. Usually the student must slow down and think the directions rather than reacting mechanically. Say "change" often. Correct a wrong direction immediately by saying "direction."

5

A relaxed body position is essential for free-flowing motion from the shoulder. Shoulders and chest remain in alignment with the board with both arms relaxed and "hanging" freely. The elbow should remain down and the head should turn freely as eyes follow hand movement.