

ARTICLE TWELVE

*HANDS UP FOR HIPPO THERAPY: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF HIPPO THERAPY TO PROMOTE HANDWRITING LEGIBILITY FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE DISABILITIES*

Key Words: Paediatrics, handwriting, hippotherapy, disability, child, occupational therapy, horse

*ABSTRACT*

*Background:* Hippotherapy involves providing therapy treatment using the activity of (horse) riding, something that children who have disabling conditions can 'do'. Hippotherapy has been found to assist with developing balance and postural control, attention and motor coordination, which may contribute to the development of skills in the functional area of handwriting, an activity many children who have disabilities have difficulty in 'doing'. This paper investigates the use of hippotherapy to develop the handwriting skills of children who have disabilities.

*Method:* Seven children, who experienced a variety of disabilities, participated in ten weeks of hippotherapy intervention and a school/home-based handwriting programme. Baseline, midway and post intervention measurements were taken using the Miller Function and Participation Scales (Miller 2006) and the Evaluation Tool of Children's Handwriting (Amundson 1995).

*Results:* Friedman's Analysis of Variance identified significant change in all areas of the M-Fun, with post-hoc analysis finding improvement after the commencement of hippotherapy in gross motor and fine motor areas. Analysis of the ETCH found significant improvement in word or letter legibility for four of five participants. - 74 -

*Conclusions:* Hippotherapy may be a valuable activity to include within a comprehensive occupational therapy program, to develop fine, gross motor and functional skills, including handwriting.