

National Handwriting Association Day in London in June 2018

by Klara Leclercq Backes

The National Handwriting Association (NHA) exists since 2006 and aims to raise awareness of handwriting among the public and education professionals. It promotes good practice of the teaching of handwriting, encourages handwriting research and provides expert advice and practical help. The NHA organises workshops, lectures, courses and conferences. It publishes once a year a journal summarising recent researches on handwriting and information on their difficulties. The NHA promotes as well the development of assessment procedures and arouses an active interest in the acquisition of writing skills as an essential component of literacy. Every year, the association organises a six day course that is designed for teachers, occupational therapists and others interested in the complex ability of writing and in the writing difficulties to be recognised. The website www.nha.uk contains very interesting tips and information for people who are faced with writing difficulties. NHA also publishes books and leaflets for professionals and parents (<http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk/publications/publications>).

This year's meeting had two focal points. First, apps for learning handwriting on tablets were presented, and, secondly, two winners of the annual school competition with the topic "handwriting acquisition" were introduced.

Ms. Vandevyvere, Artevelde *University of Applied Sciences in Ghent in Belgium*, presented her work with mentally handicapped children on tablets. She has found in practice that the mentally handicapped children gradually develop the fine finger motor skills in the drawing-typing exercises on the tablet. This first step then makes it possible later on to hold a pencil and to unfold specific movement for writing.

This year, the *Hillington Manor School*, a special-needs school, has been honoured. The children and their educators introduced their method of teaching handwriting. The basic letter formation pattern was taught on the basis of a straight and an arched wooden piece and then step by step they covered all the early stages towards the proper letter formation.

The second school, *Peover Superior Endowed Primary School*, a primary school, explained how they adopted a simplified style of a handwriting scheme proposed by NHA.

In the UK, there is no handwriting policy and the NHA proposes a simplified style with which the letters are sorted into different groups. For example, there are the "giraffe" letters which are provided with an upper length, the "caterpillars" letters which have the letter "c" as a starting point.

During the subsequent exchange, I felt that the acquisition of cursive handwriting is a concern and an important topic. The future and current teachers have been insufficiently or not at all trained in writing pedagogy and the children and young people have to make the best of it on their own.

Some British colleagues in graphology will join the NHA course next year, and so we lay a foundation for graphotherapy (<https://www.acadeg.be/formation-en-graphotherapie/>). Subsequently, further courses and seminars will be offered by the Belgian Graphotherapists to extend this training.