

EDUCATION

Does Anyone Teach Cursive Anymore?

"I have heard arguments about our world going digital, and there is no need to teach cursive, but in my opinion, cursive is an art form that I don't think we need to eliminate from society."

-Tiffany Woodard, Kindergarten Teacher, Sonshine Christian Academy, Callahan, Florida

There's ongoing discussion about teaching cursive writing in elementary schools. Whether you think the connected writing style is outdated or you believe writing cursive enhances creative and critical thinking, it's getting more difficult to find classrooms where it's taught. After hearing students tell me they couldn't read my cursive writing on the board during my years in the classroom, I started printing my instructions. I saw firsthand how much trouble they had reading cursive. Even today, when I'm conducting a literacy workshop in a classroom, I print because more students can read it. Personally, though, I find printing more tedious than writing cursive. Cursive writing allows me to write my thoughts down faster and more fluidly.

In March, I began a series on cursive writing. Based on research, interviews and my own teaching experience, I am examining the arguments for and against cursive writing in my column. This month, I interviewed my daughter's kindergarten teacher, Tiffany Woodard.

A Kindergarten Teacher's Perspective

Tiffany Woodard teaches kindergarten at Sonshine Christian Academy in Callahan, Florida. Having taught in public schools for almost a decade, this is Woodard's first year teaching at a private school and her first year teaching cursive.

"When I first started teaching, we taught D'Nealian to prepare K-2 students for cursive writing. By 2010, we had switched over to teaching print exclusively," Woodard said. D'Nealian is a handwriting instruction method in which students learn to write slanted letters with tails, enabling a smooth transition to cursive. Woodward now teaches cursive to her kindergarteners. She admits she doubted her students' ability to write cursive earlier this year, but she has been pleasantly surprised.

"There are days I think, 'How are they going to be able to write this letter, it's so hard,' but then I teach the lesson and within fifteen minutes, they've gotten it," Woodard said.

Benefits and drawbacks to cursive writing

With Florida certification in elementary education and National Board Certification in Early-Middle Childhood Literacy and Language Arts, Woodard recognizes several benefits of cursive writing.

Cursive helps students develop hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills, Woodard said. It also eliminates confusion between lowercase -b and -d. "Students seem to take their time more with cursive than with print because of the connectivity of the letters," she added. Learning to write cursive also prepares students to read texts written in cursive. "If [students] are not taught cursive, they will have difficulty reading cursive print including historical documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, etc.," she said.

"Cursive writing is also a necessity for creating one's own signature."

Woodward sees no drawbacks to cursive writing. "I have heard arguments about our world going digital, and there is no need to teach cursive, but in my opinion, cursive is an art form that I don't think we need to eliminate from society," she said.

Next month, I'll share input from more teachers on cursive writing. Later this year, I'll share feedback from students, parents and grandparents.

If you have an opinion on the subject, please let me know. I'd love to hear your thoughts. My e-mail address is nancyleethea@gmail.com.

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Nancy Lee Bethea is a certified teacher who left the classroom in 2010 to start her own freelance writing business, River City Revisions. She now conducts reading and writing workshops for students and teachers across North Florida.

"The very spring and root of honesty and virtue lie in good education."

- Plutarch

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