

Ep #436: The Science of Handwriting: Why It Still Matters for Student Success with Holly Britton



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host, certified life coach Angela Kelly.

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Angela Kelly: Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to today's episode of *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*. Happy Tuesday. We're so happy you are here with us today. I have a very special guest. I'm so excited to have this conversation with her. It's near and dear to my heart as a former kindergarten teacher. I have Holly Britton here with me today. She is, are you the founder? I just should ask that question.

Holly Britton: I am.

Angela Kelly: Oh my gosh. Okay, even better, the founder of Squiggle Squad. We're going to talk about handwriting. It's been a hot topic on and off, and people have thoughts and opinions about it. And we're going to talk about it today on the podcast here with an expert, but we are going to dive below the surface of, "Should we be teaching handwriting or not in our schools?" So, Holly, welcome to the podcast.

Holly Britton: It's a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Angela Kelly: And can you just give the listeners a little bit of background about yourself, how you got into this, and how you developed Squiggle Squad?

Holly Britton: Yeah, I have a really eclectic background when it comes to education. I never thought of myself as an educator or getting into education, but I was thrown into it when I started teaching the first of my

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four children through homeschooling. And that was a long, not to date myself too much, but it was a very long time ago. And it was back before computers were in people's homes, before cell phones, before I could go on the internet and ask them. I had to actually do my homework in the library, if that's, you know, that's dating me.

And anyway, I didn't realize how, I think I became an educator through the love of my own children. And I later went on to get my master's, my teaching credential. I've taught in private and public settings and am now a curriculum designer and came out of the classroom. I was teaching, when COVID hit, I was teaching classes in third, fourth, and fifth grade at a dual-language school. All the schools in our area are Title I. So I had the pleasure of working with Title I schools and Title I kids, which I absolutely adored and I miss every day. I would love to find myself back in a classroom.

And I get to visit with teachers that are using Squiggle Squad, which is the handwriting program I eventually designed and now market. But I did it because there was a giant gap in instructional materials when it came to transcription skills. And we'll get into this a little bit more later, but my heart has been really changing the narrative around handwriting as penmanship to handwriting as a transcription skill that we actually still need in order to teach children, in order to do the brain training that teachers are charged with doing.

Angela Kelly: Yes. And I want to dive right into that difference so that people can follow along on this conversation through the podcast. So I was a kindergarten teacher, so you and I really connected on the discussion around developmentally appropriate and, you know, what handwriting is, what it's not. And I just found this so fascinating. So can you go into deeper detail about the difference between penmanship, like writing the letters correctly and ensuring that we're doing proper letter development on the page, into the transcribing that you were just speaking of?

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Holly Britton: Yeah, so there's a lot to that. First, it probably helps to go back in history just a little bit to realize that when handwriting was a big deal in society, when it was used for trade and business and thank you notes, etc., kids were being taught proper, if you will, proper handwriting and even cursive at the age of six and seven.

Since our phenomenon of pushdown academics, where we're trying to get younger and younger kids to do more and more academically, we are now expecting three and four-year-olds to write by hand using a pencil, which biologically is well, complicated at best. And in some cases, you might even say impossible because what it takes to actually write language requires that you have language in your head to write.

And at that young age, they are still acquiring language. They're acquiring speech. They're acquiring decoding skills. They're acquiring the whole idea of turning a page in a book and moving their eyes left to right.

Those are all part of learning to write before you actually learn to write. So the fact that we have academically increased the expectation of these little baby brains means that we have to approach handwriting differently. We can't just give them letters and say, "Write the letter H," and expect them to even know what a letter H is, let alone have the motor skill needed to form that letter properly on paper. And yet, not only are we pushing it there, we are leaving it there.

So if it's expected to be taught in California, we call it TK, transitional kindergarten, or pre-K four, if it is being taught there, then by I don't know what has happened, but going up the pipeline, even in kinder and first grade, they stop teaching it, as if it has been done, as if that skill has been acquired. In the meantime, academic expectations keep increasing, and they are expected to keep writing by hand.

But you can see how it can become this maybe impassable obstacle for kids when the academic expectations of, say, spelling, vocabulary,

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comprehension, composition, syntax, English conventions, all of those start getting harder and harder and harder. And meanwhile, the mechanics of getting your thoughts on paper from your mind to your hand have not been explicitly taught or practiced, so there is no skill there.

And yet, you're being asked to use it every single day. I mean, I run against that frustration every single day in classrooms, every single day, when it's not because the child is not bright, it's not because the child's not willing, it's not because they have a learning disability. It is because they have not been given the space, the time, and the explicit instruction to develop a skill that they are being required to use.

Angela Kelly: Yes. And I think that you describe this so beautifully because what teachers and educators are feeling, the frustration that they're feeling, is coming from this, you're like butting up against the science of humanity, the science of human development.

Holly Britton: Yes.

Angela Kelly: And we're trying to impose upon children an aspect of development that hasn't yet been acquired. It's like asking a child like who just got their driver's license to go and drive a semi truck.

Holly Britton: Totally. On a 70-mile-an-hour freeway.

Angela Kelly: Yes, and to expect them to know without having any training other than, "Well, you have your license. Therefore, that equates to you being an expert." And I also love how you talked about the, how can you write language when you're developing the skill of language. So having the language in your head, and I think about, you know, I have a girlfriend that has a four-year-old and a nine-month-old, like their little brains are just learning language and learning a second language at that. They're a bilingual family.

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And I'm thinking like how the brain has to have language to be able to transcribe, would that be the right word, it down onto paper. And if it's not yet developed there, we're asking them to, you know, drink out of an empty glass.

Holly Britton: It's really unfair. And it's so much more complicated than learning how to talk. And this seems so common sense. I think that your listeners could follow us through the skills progression that happens. But, you know, when babies are born, they are hearing language, they're watching facial expression, they're watching lips moving as speech is coming out. So obviously, that is more innate for them to start mimicking. They can try themselves, and they can sort of copy.

And then you get to trying to introduce them to print, where you open a book and you turn a page and you point to the letters. And so then they are starting to make sense of the squiggles that are in front of them, even though they can't read them. They're making a connection because they're recognizing pattern.

Mom opens this book, Dad opens this book. She points here, and she says the story. She says the same story every time she opens that book. And it goes to that picture that talks about that thing. And so they're just, they're recognizing those kinds of patterns, which is a huge important aspect to reading and writing, is pattern recognition.

And then all the conventions around that, you know, seeing normally black on white or color on white and all of those squiggles, they start to differentiate those squiggles from other shapes they see on paper. And they can do that super, super early. But when it comes to actually decoding the language, understanding that a B says /b/, and a C says /k/, or in some cases /s/, that has to be explicitly taught.

And now it stands to reason that learning that that grapheme phoneme connection for reading comes first, it stands to reason that writing it then is

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the next more complicated ask, because now we have to take those cognitive understandings and put it with motor skill that is still developing.

Kids that, you know, can't balance on a balance beam, they have a hard time sitting up at a table. They're still learning how to climb a ladder and, you know, grab and release rungs on a ladder, which is, you know, hand-eye coordination.

And they're still doing that in their gross motor skills. In order to have the fine motor skills necessary for writing, they have to have the independent finger movement. They have to be able to understand directionality, eye hand, visuospatial skills, you know, there's so much that goes into it. And when you ask too young a child to put all that together really quickly without any kind of incremental buildup, you just create frustration, and you take that little excited, willing student and you kind of crush.

Angela Kelly: The curiosity of learning and the eagerness and excitement to learn fades quickly when you're asking somebody to do a skill they haven't been taught at a point in their developmental stages that isn't relevant or maybe even possible.

And we are having these expectations of not just the handwriting piece, which we're not teaching in many cases, but to, then you said the layers of communicating, putting an entire sentence together, having it make sense, having it being spelled correctly, having the letters be formed correctly, having the punctuation. And it just when you think of the layers of that, the complexity of what we're asking of them is pretty phenomenal.

Holly Britton: Yeah, and I think if I were to ask any admin in considering how handwriting should be treated at a given institution, first and foremost, it needs to be given time and space in that child's life. It cannot happen in one school year, and it cannot happen early and, you know, one and done.

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It really needs time over several school years, which means teachers, I like to call them literacy teams. And you've got in literacy, you've got the reading and the writing. You've got, just to break it down, you've got the decoding and you've got the encoding. And both of those are absolutely necessary for literacy mastery, and literacy mastery cannot happen without foundational skills.

So you have a foundation literacy team that goes in my mind from TK age four, but more importantly, kindergarten through second grade, no less, maybe more. The science actually backs up handwriting instruction through I've heard a minimum of six years and I've heard into high school, and this by handwriting experts, researchers. So, you know, take it as you will.

If you think of handwriting as a transcription skill, and we decide that we need to help kids transcribe their thoughts. And by that I just mean take what's inside their head and get it visible. I like to say, get the invisible visible, which means what's inside my head is going to go to my hand, whether it is handwriting or typing, it has to become visible. That is what I'm referring to as transcription skills, and they will change as, obviously, as necessary up the pipeline.

So we start with transcription as a pencil and paper, and we do that for so many reasons, developmental reasons and also language acquisition reasons. It's necessary for us to map those letters onto our brain kinesthetically. That's very important. The science will back me on that.

Then we will eventually move into keyboarding, which we're not teaching either, by the way. And then later into a hybrid of those. How do we use handwriting as a way of accessing pieces of our brain that we can't access by pushing a button? And then how do we use the keyboarding skills to really get those thoughts out quickly and in mass? Obviously, it's going to behoove us to be able to use the technologies we have to get that information onto paper.

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Angela Kelly: Yes. So what I'm hearing, and I want to say this explicitly to our listeners, there is an inherent value in number one, teaching handwriting explicitly, but number two, doing so in a way that's developmentally appropriate so that you're not banging your head against the wall.

Holly Britton: Your children aren't banging their heads against the wall.

Angela Kelly: Yes. And everyone's frustrated. And so we throw the baby out with the bath water because we're like, "Well, handwriting's really frustrating. They're not getting it. It's taking up time. Therefore, we must just, why don't we just eliminate it because it doesn't really matter because we're just going to learn to type anyway and they're just all the kids are texting and they'll just kind of figure it out."

Holly Britton: Yeah.

Angela Kelly: But there is a science to the art of transcribing your thoughts into a written expression that communicates your brilliance, your ideas, your wisdom, your knowledge.

It's how we measure children's growth and progress, and yet we're not teaching them how to communicate so that we can measure their growth and progress, which is why I feel like students and staff educators alike are spinning their wheels in trying to figure out how do we connect what we're teaching to why we're teaching it, to how we're teaching it, and to the value of it in the long term, right? And the value of this is the ability to express oneself, which is a form of empowerment.

Holly Britton: Yes.

Angela Kelly: Hello, empowered principals. But the empowerment for all is just the gift of being able to communicate and express yourself and to share your ideas, your individual brilliance and wisdom that you were born

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with, and the ideas that you have as you enter into the world of school. It's essential.

Holly Britton: Angela, I want to take it one step further because I used to kind of stop there. My thought was, we need to be able to get their brilliant ideas out on paper. But I'm going to take it one step further, and it might be controversial, but I think people will understand this and they, especially if you're older than, say, 30 years old and you had handwriting instruction, I think you'll understand this.

I will go so far as to say, I think a lot of those brilliant ideas will never be realized unless you have been taught language by hand, because we train our brain differently when we learn language kinesthetically. It is just a completely different way of thinking. How many master writers say that when they hit a block, when they need a brilliant idea, when they are trying to troubleshoot or problem solve, they go back to pen and paper.

We need that. We can mine treasures out of the recesses of our brain better. I mean, if you think about learning anything in life, if you are a nature lover, how much better you know that flower or that bird when you sketch it, when you sit out in nature and you actually notice the details of something and you write it down. We used to take field trips as a family, and one of our things to do when we noticed something that struck our fancy was to sit down and get out our sketch journals and sketch it.

And 100% of the time, we learned more about that thing than we would have had we just admired it as we were walking by. So language is that way. Writing language is like sketching language. It's like drawing language, and it touches us in a different way. The sad, really tragic part about not teaching handwriting is we are robbing kids of a tool that helps them discover themselves better. We are robbing them of a learning tool. We are robbing them of a skill that they could use for the rest of their life, but they won't if they never learn it.

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Angela Kelly: Right. I think way back to like caveman days with what you were speaking of and how even then, humanity itself, the humans found a way to express and communicate with one another. And not only that, they created communication for all time.

And now, of course, like modern day people have to figure out what that, what those squiggles meant and what those images meant and how they wrote it. But there was an innate desire to communicate, to express their knowledge and their understandings and to etch it forever in forever time, you know, through their cave person drawings. And I just think about in all of humanity across the globe, across all centuries of time before schools were even a thing, there has been like a human desire to express via kinesthetic communication.

Holly Britton: Yes. And a deep need, a deep need. Handwriting is, writing in general is human. It sets us apart. It is why we know our past. It is why we can tell stories from hundreds and hundreds of years ago. And it is so uniquely human, but it is also a human construct, which means we're not going to innately pick it up as we go. We all know or have heard of adults who do not know how to read.

And it's not because there isn't print all around them. It is all around them, but they still cannot read. We're seeing that more and more these days, that adults are illiterate because they were not taught. It is on us, the literate, to teach the children. We have to take it seriously as a brain training skill, a brain training practice that takes years and years and years.

We can't work in isolation as teachers. I need to know where that child has come from. I need to know where that child is going so that I can prepare them in the time I have them. We are not islands in and of ourselves. We are a point on a progression, and we are charged with doing what that child needs in that moment and preparing them for what they will need in the next moment.

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That was my frustration up in fifth grade, was I was supposed to be teaching them fifth grade, and I could not teach them fifth grade concepts because they did not have second grade concepts. They didn't have the skills that they needed to make it up. And I felt terrible for these kids. They're amazing. They're amazing and bright and willing. But I was going to be sending them, I say was going to be sending them because I didn't get to see their year end because it was COVID, sending them up the pipeline, and I knew they weren't ready for sixth grade.

Angela Kelly: A couple of things came up for me. I just want to say this, and then I want to go into what I think are going to be the obstacles or the questions that educators, because I feel like we have hammered in the value of this work.

Holly Britton: Yes.

Angela Kelly: Then everyone's like, "Okay, I understand the value, but how?" Right? There's going to be that. We're going to get to that in a second. But what came up for me as you were speaking, Holly, was I was taken back in a moment of time of sitting in my principal's office and then later sitting up at the district office and imagining not having the ability to write or to be struggling to read.

I would never be in a position as teacher, as principal, as district administrator, if I, had I not been taught the skill of handwriting, the capacity to read and to write the connection between my body, my brain, and the expression of myself. You know, you're expressing yourself and you're taking in content, right? So that ability, that expressive and receptive language, but if it hadn't been explicitly taught to me, and I went to school in like 70s and 80s, we'll say.

But where would I be? And when you said that we're robbing children of this freedom of expression, of the ability, of the skill set, the mindset, the capacity, there is an urge, like you said, from all of mankind, there has been

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this urge and desire to express oneself. And it comes out in its natural form kinesthetically.

Like I really want people to sit with that for a second as educational leaders and just realize that we are the ones who make these decisions around what education kids receive, what skill sets we teach them and what we don't, and how we prioritize, which I'm now is going to roll into. I know leaders out there, the question is, there's so much to do and not enough time and teachers would squawk and now we're going to have to fit this all in.

So Holly, can you walk us through what it might look like in a school day where we're integrating this instruction of writing in a way that fits into all of the other priorities that, you know, educators are expected to implement.

Holly Britton: One thing I find helpful is to change the way we think about handwriting as not a noun, but a verb. So instead of seeing handwriting as a finished product, especially in those early years, we need to think of it as a process. It is part of the learning process. So if we try to feather that in, integrate that in, the same way we integrate reading skill. So we don't teach reading to kindergarteners by giving them Steinbeck and saying we're going to just, you know, parse through this. We don't do that. We break it down.

So when you break down handwriting, so breaking down reading, of course, breaks it down to its base unit, which is phonics. It doesn't stop there and it's not the only and it's certainly not even, you know, the most important, but it is the base unit for learning how to read, for learning how to code or decode that language. Learning how to write takes letter formation.

And one of the things we are not doing from the very beginning is teaching a child a proper way to write a letter. It sounds so basic, but hear me out on this. If you show a child a shape and you say, "Write this letter quote

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unquote, write this letter," to them they just think, "Make that shape on a paper." Well, that's all fine and good when you're writing one letter at a time as a four-year-old.

But what we need to keep in mind is the end goal of handwriting instruction is recall and reproduce. We need to recall words, sounds, words, and sentences in our brain and reproduce them on paper. That means that we're putting together strings of letters. We're not just writing one letter at a time. But that teacher that's teaching that one letter needs to realize that, that one letter is going to go into another letter into another letter into another letter, which eventually leads to writing fluency. So we need to teach them efficient letter formation.

So from the very beginning, they are forming directionality-wise and size-wise, they are forming the letter correctly and making it the right size. So tall letters are tall, short letters are short, and that's because legibility depends on that.

So those two main things early on, and then working up the other expectations, which involve spacing between letters, spacing between words, sitting letters on a baseline, English conventions, all those things that are all part of handwriting that obviously, if you listen to that list and you think four-year-old, you realize, oh, four-year-old is not going to be able to get all that. It's going to take a few years.

So back to your question about integrating it. One of the first things that we need to consider is we cannot integrate it until we've incrementally taught it. So don't have your ELA lessons require a lot of sentence writing in kindergarten when they don't know how to recall and reproduce the alphabet. They need to be able to recall and reproduce a letter before they can recall and reproduce a sentence.

And I know that sounds so basic, but that's what our ELA curriculum is doing to our kids. They have pushed handwriting out. They've expected

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that kids just already automatically know how to do it. If they pay it any mind, it's very weak and poorly designed. And that leads to the frustration with both the teacher and the student because the teacher is required to do those lessons as instructed by the curriculum, and it's unfair. They have been asked to do something those kids are not ready or trained to do.

So the first thing I would say is give your teachers permission to extricate writing from other learning, from other cognitive learning. Squiggle Squad does that, by the way, in handwriting. We separate the motor skill from the letter learning. So you are teaching letters, but you're also teaching directionality, movement, eye-hand coordination, all of the motor skills and vernacular needed to teach handwriting before you actually ask them to pick up a pencil and start writing letters.

And then it moves into that and they're not as frustrated because they've already been introduced to those aspects of handwriting before they're asked to write letters.

Angela Kelly: Yes. This speaks to my teacher heart because I think back to all of the years in kindergarten where in my early earliest years of teaching, when I was learning how to teach, we were much more developmental. And I was thinking then the next question that might come up for listeners is like, what is the sweet spot?

And what I love about what you're saying is it's not like teach it all in kinder and first grade so that we can be done with this and move on and by third grade, you know, everybody's fluent. It's this slower, kind of a slow drip progression throughout all of elementary. And you can tell us, you know, expert-wise, what the sweet spot is in terms of that time period developmentally for students. But this is really a conversation about going back to what is not just cognitively developmentally appropriate, but also physically.

Holly Britton: Physical. Yep.

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Angela Kelly: Yes. And that brain body connection. And I've had so many conversations over the last year with experts like you who are focusing on different aspects of learning as it relates to mind body connection. And this one, it's so, I feel like it's just like the grandmother of it all because what we're really asking kids to do in any standard across any grade level is to be able to express themselves and their knowledge, their wisdom, their insights.

We talk about inference when we talk about self-discernment, when we talk about, you know, like summarizing, all of those standards, when I think back to the ELA standards throughout, I was an elementary principal, but regardless of what grade level, it requires them to be able to express themselves from brain to hand to either paper or eventually computer.

Holly Britton: When you want to hear music and you don't know how to play the instrument, it's so frustrating. It's frustrating for a teacher and it's frustrating for the child. The teacher just keeps saying, "Play Mozart. Play Mozart. What's wrong? I can't understand that note. Why aren't? Go back and try again." And the poor kid's like, "I don't know how to try anymore. I hate it. I hate it."

And you shut them down. Whereas when you built them up incrementally, it builds confidence. The very opposite happens. Then they try to play all by themselves. Then you hear them playing the music in their room or, you know, on vacation because they love it instead of shoving it down their throat and not teaching them.

I'm a really strong opinion that the hate for handwriting is not because they hate handwriting. It's because they hate the frustration that comes with trying to do something they don't know how to do. So why don't we give them something they know how to do? Like for little kids, it's making movements with their gross motor skills, really big movements with their

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arms and their bodies and their nose and their, you know, and then that's fun.

We call our preschool level squiggles and wiggles because that's the developmentally appropriate way and that brings intrinsic reward from the brain. It feeds the brain that adrenaline and the dopamine and they go, "Ooh, I love this." And you watch the little lights go on in their eyes, and then they ask me, I have yet to go into a classroom where the kids go, "Oh, Squiggle Squad." They're like, "Are you coming back tomorrow?"

You know, because we're doing developmentally appropriate things that work them academically. So they don't know that. They don't have to know that, but we as teachers know, this is building their academic prowess, and it's going to get better as they go up the pipeline.

But teachers have to know how and why that happens. Admin has to know why and how a teacher's doing it that way because there's purpose in it. And it is going somewhere just because they're not writing their name the first day of kindergarten does not mean they're not learning to write their name. They are. It just looks different than forcing their hand onto paper when they're not ready.

Angela Kelly: Exactly. I love these conversations. I feel like we're coming back full circle to like we expect kids to learn in the way, like we have an image of what learning looks like and it is sitting at a desk. It's like an adult version of learning. Which that isn't even fun for us. If you think about it, like nobody wants to sit in a conference for eight hours on a hard chair writing all day long. But yet we do this even down in preschool and kindergarten. And we have forgotten that we can have a, I call it a grand slam when it's a win, win, win, win where...

Holly Britton: Yes.

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Angela Kelly: Kids are excited and they're moving. You are having fun. It doesn't have to be boring and hard and frustrating if we bring in the science, the physical science of humanity and human development back into the classroom. And because we are in the business of human development, we are literally, education is the business of developing humans, and we have to work with the human design...

Holly Britton: Yep.

Angela Kelly: In order for us to evolve.

Holly Britton: Well, you brought up a neat point that I'll jump off of, this whole part of not wanting to sit at a desk and work really hard. When the kids are little, we are not just teaching them how to handle their bodies and their brains and how to think about what and how to acquire all that, but we are also teaching them to love learning.

And if we squish that early, then getting them to do the harder things is impossible. I mean, we're seeing now just a rash of problems with apathy. Kids just refusing to do anything. And there's a lot of reasons behind that and it's scary and it's sad and it's hard to watch. But I would say that part of it starts with that developmentally appropriate aspect that you were just talking about, where we need to use the biological bents of a little body to teach them so they like it.

And then when things get harder, because it will, learning's not always entertaining. Learning actually requires struggle. It requires grit. It requires stick-to-it-iveness. But that will come, that is more likely to come if we have built up the confidence of the learner. If they've already experienced the joy of intrinsic reward, they actually understand that if I try a little bit harder, I'm actually going to accomplish what I'm trying. And when I accomplish what I'm trying, I feel good about it.

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Those are things we're also training, but it's nuanced and it starts super, super young when the kid is wiggling for fun and we are using fun to teach. Later, that fun becomes, it doesn't look the same anymore. It actually, fun, and we can attest to this as adults, we get this sense of fun, if you will, or more over sense of reward when we do something hard and we succeed.

And so we're more willing to do those hard things because we know what's coming. And that's a part of it that has to be trained. It's not always fun, but it will be more rewarding if a child has been trained how to do that up the pipeline.

Angela Kelly: Yes. Yes. Yes. I feel like we could talk about this forever, but if listeners are eager, they may probably feeling a lot of relief that there is something out there because many teachers know the developmental appropriateness of their current class, the grade level, the department, wherever you are along the spectrum of teaching, they know this. It feels true to their heart. It's like something a song that they haven't heard for a decade on the radio.

And here we are speaking the truth of this process again. Where can, whether you're a teacher, an aspiring leader, a site leader, a district leader, where can they go or what can they do to explore this concept more and to find resources that could support them in this developmental endeavor of really leaning into literacy in a way that works for both students and educators?

Holly Britton: Yeah, you can find me at holly@squigglesquad.com if you want to talk to me personally, holly@squigglesquad.com. You can visit our website, of course, at squigglesquad.com.

I want to throw out there that all curriculum is not the same. All handwriting curriculum is not the same. There are a couple good ones out there. Some of the more common ones are not great. One of the things to think about when you think about getting curriculum is that most of them were written

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30 years or more ago when we were teaching six and seven-year-olds without a mind to four-year-old handwriting.

And there's a couple that, you know, are traditional that I love. There's a couple that are not so great. And so be careful what you get. There is a design to it that is biologically friendly. Keep that in mind when you choose your curriculum. Having said that, I am super happy to do professional development. Our materials and programs come with on-ramping and Q&A sessions and a teacher's lounge with all kinds of resources. So explore those on squigglesquad.com.

Also, you can find more about handwriting in general through my writings on Substack. So I can be found at Holly Britton or Holly on Handwriting on Substack or LinkedIn.

Angela Kelly: Perfect. And we will drop all of these links in the show notes so you have direct access to whichever, you know, venue you would like to explore further. But I wanted to make sure that people listening to this, there's hope, there's and there's resources available.

And of course, like if you still want more information on the science and the research behind it, Holly has her substack for that. And you can explore if you're a person that's like, "I'm totally in, I'm ready to go." Like you can go directly to squigglesquad.com and explore all of the resources that are available and the information there.

So, Holly, I just want to thank you for your time today, for sharing your expertise so openly, so beautifully, for reminding us that as educators we're, number one, we're human. Number two, we're teachers. And we're here not to be led by the standards that have been written, however long ago now, and that keep changing, but like to go back to the humanity of teaching, to the human development aspect of teaching, because it's a win, win, win, win, win. It's a win for kids. It's a win for families. It's a win for staff and students and it's a win for leaders.

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And the win for leaders, I just want to say this directly because as an empowered principal, I want you to hear this. Like think about this. When your students are learning developmentally how to read, to write, to express themselves over the course of many years, the short-term impact is that you have less frustration, you have less teachers coming to you with frustration around getting scores up. You struggle less with flatline scores.

But the longer term impact of this is that you made a difference in the life and the expression of this child, the empowerment of this young person who's going to grow up and go into the world and be a productive individual globally. It doesn't matter where you're teaching around the globe. This matters at such a profound level, and we have the power and we have the ability to start leveraging it at a developmental level as early as TK.

My little guy that I was talking about earlier, he is in a preschool going into TK next year. I think about this all the time. I'm actually staying at a friend's house. You can see there's a crib behind me and, you know, her little grandson. This is a teacher friend I'm staying with this week. But I think about the future of these kids. I want them to love to speak, to read, to write, to express themselves because of the value it gives at a global level as they move through the institution of our educational system, wherever you are on the globe.

Holly Britton: That's beautiful. And who would have thought that something so mundane and everyday for us as handwriting can actually be a key to empowering a human? It's wild to think that the pencil could actually be used as an instrument of dissection and you can get into your own brain and figure yourself out. But we have to be mindful of giving kids that skill.

Angela Kelly: Yes, we do. And I will end with this. Educators, I want you to think about, for those of you who have been following this podcast, this podcast has been going since January of 2018. I talk so often about self-coaching, self-regulation, self-discernment, self, you know,

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introspection. That cannot be done at the same level if you are just thinking, you can't think about evolving yourself developmentally, even as an adult. You write about it.

Whether you type it in on your phone or you write it on your computer or you write it in a journal, you are writing, you are expressing yourself. And that mind body connection, it's essential to our evolution and to tapping into potential possibility as humans. I think it's just foundationally the way that we as humans function. And it's a gift. Like you said, it's a, it's a human construct. It's something that we have created for ourselves that's different than any other animal on the planet.

Holly, I know your time is precious and you need to run. I want to thank you so, so much for being here. It's been a delight to connect with you. I do hope we stay in touch as colleagues, as friends, and we continue to network and collaborate on building up the empowerment of our staff and students. So thank you for your time today.

Holly Britton: Well, thank you for letting me talk to you and your audience. And I do hope that we stay connected and I hope your audience stays or gets connected with me and with Squiggle Squad and all that we're doing there. So thank you so much.

Angela Kelly: Thank you for the work you're doing. It's wonderful. All right. That's it, everybody. We've got to run. Have a beautiful week. Take good care. Bye.

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