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Definition

Graphotherapy is the re-education of a person's handwriting. It is based upon the methods of de Ajuriaguerra¹, Olivaux Robert², Thoulon Page³, Adeline Eloy⁴ and a sound knowledge of graphology.

Regardless of the age of the writer, the goal is the attainment of painless, legible and efficient handwriting – a personal handwriting which above all should satisfy the writer.

A graphotherapist can also show kindergarten and primary school teachers specific training methods that have proven to be the most effective ways of creating optimum handwriting skills in their pupils. As such, graphotherapists teach teachers the most efficient way to teach children to write. But graphotherapists work most of the time alone, face to face with the person.

Who most benefit from Graphotherapy?

This speciality has the capacity to help any person who has difficulties with his or her handwriting. This may include problems such as:

Illegibility, lack of speed and fluency, aching muscles, excessive fatigue, awkward posture and/or pencil grip, uncertain laterality (handedness), general lack of confidence with handwriting creating a poor self-image.

¹ J. AJURIAGUERRA, L'écriture de l'enfant tome I et II, Delachaux et Niestlé, Paris 1978

² Robert OLIVAUX, Pédagogie de l'écriture et graphothérapie, L'Harmattan, Paris 2005

³ THOULON PAGE, La rééducation de l'écriture de l'enfant, Masson, Paris 2001

⁴ Adeline ELOY, L'écriture à l'école primaire, Magnard, Paris 2006

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What is the training to become a Graphotherapist?

It is a wide-ranged knowledge of several topics which makes an expert graphotherapist. Training includes basic notions of child/adolescent developmental psychology, psychomotor development of the child, pre-graphic and graphic development, anatomy and neurophysiology of the writing, and how to perform grapho-motor assessments. Training also involves different developmental problems (ADHD, giftedness, dyslexia, dyspraxia, visual problems), techniques of re-education, methods of relaxation, ways of understanding evaluation reports from other professionals (WPPSI, WISC V, NEPSY II, WIAT III, TAPS-3), and the different testing approaches for dysgraphia⁵,

Some graphotherapists are also graphologists but these are two different disciplines. The only common concern is the handwriting.

Many graphotherapists are teachers, occupational therapists, dyslexia trainers, psychologists, physiotherapists, and some began as parents who wanted to understand and help their children.

Studies in Graphotherapy should be undertaken within a serious academy or academic institution. Some countries founded their professional association⁶ and put their trust in some schools⁷. A standardized European framework could provide a quality guarantee.

How does a graphotherapist work?

Before starting remediation, the graphotherapist assesses the handwriting, analyses the reason of referral and only then establishes a tailored re-education plan or, if necessary refers the writer to another professional.

⁵ DSM - 5 terminology:

"...dysgraphia is characterized as a learning disability in the category of written expression when one's writing skills are below those expected given a person's age measured through intelligence and age appropriate education. Deficiency in the ability to write primarily in terms of handwriting, but also in terms of coherence..."

⁶ www.gbgt.com

⁷ www.ggre.com

⁸ www.acadeg.be

The initial report contains: child and the parents interview, results of different tests (speed, writing by heart, copying, acceleration capacity), examination of the written school work, observation of posture, grip, evaluation of the fine motor development (suppleness) laterality, and spacial awareness.

The re-education itself uses different techniques of relaxation, the training of fine motor exercises and of graphic exercises, adapting the model and using different learning channels, for example a sensory-motor approach.

The range of writing difficulties is very large and can go from an immature gesture as far up to dysgraphia.

Depending on the country, the diagnosis of dysgraphia may only be made by a specialised doctor. Dysgraphia may affect the writing in such manner that the child/adolescent will have serious school problems. For an adult it may affect his private and/or professional life.

The causes of dysgraphia may be multiple. It can be due to lack of adequate apprenticeship coexisting with another problem (dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia), dystonia or « writer's cramp », giftedness (brain working faster than the hand can master), also due to an auditory or visual problem, hypo- or hypertonia or where movement is limited due to illness such as Parkinson, multiple sclerosis, etc.