

# **L3 Lead Examiner Report 1906**

June 2019

**BTEC L3 National in Children's Play  
Learning and Development**

**Unit 4: Enquiries into Current Research in  
Early Years Practice (31599H)**

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## Grade Boundaries

### What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we set the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade, at Distinction, Merit and Pass.

### Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the external assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries – this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark is for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to ensure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

### Variations in external assessments

Each external assessment we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries for each assessment, because then it would not take accessibility into account.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, are on the website via this link:

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html>

### Unit 4: Enquiries into Current Research in Early Years Practice (31599H)

Grade	Unclassified	N	Level 3		
			Pass	Merit	Distinction
Boundary Mark	0	11	22	33	45

## Introduction

This was the second summer external assessment series of the new specification. Learners appeared to be better prepared compared to the January 2019 external assessment series and centres and learners are to be commended for this.

The question paper follows the format identified in the sample assessment materials. The paper is split into four activities. Each activity requires learners to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different aspects of research. This includes research methods, their advantages and disadvantages, the implications of the research for individuals, early years' settings and the wider society. Marks for each activity are allocated in accordance with the specification design.

Each of the questions has been marked using a 'levels based' approach to assessment where the overall quality of the response is considered rather than the specific number of facts stated from the indicative content, although this does have a bearing on the quality of the response. More detail can be found below in the individual question section of the report.

## Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

Learner performance varied throughout the paper. Learners need to show knowledge and understanding of research methods and their application in early years' practice. Both depth and breadth of information is needed in order to fully address the demands of the paper.

The first activity requires learners to review the stimulus material (an article about the teaching of cursive writing in the early years'). The article is informed by a literacy review undertaken by the author. Learners are asked to comment on the research method used (ie. a literacy review) and to compare this with the methods used in research that they have sourced themselves. Marks are available for work related to both sources, with additional credit being awarded for learners able to provide comparisons and conclusions.

Activity 2 requires learners to develop their ideas by relating the issues and conclusions in the article to their own secondary research.

Activity 3 requires learners to consider the implications of a key finding of the report (the level of children's physical development) when developing a strategy for teaching handwriting in early years' environments. The response should include reference to the article and information from information they have found themselves.

Activity 4 focuses on research practices needed to investigate the teaching of handwriting early years' classes, and learners are required to critique a research proposal, making suggestions for improvement where necessary.

Throughout the paper, where learners were able to show application of their knowledge and were able to access the higher mark bands for the activities. Where basic knowledge was evident, but little application was demonstrated within the responses, learners were not able to access higher mark bands and this was reflected in the marks.

It should be note that responses were of a good standard, with many learners able to access the paper effectively. Learners were able to demonstrate an understanding of research practices and offer realistic critiques of these as well as making suggestions for the application of findings within a classroom environment.

## Individual Questions

### Activity 1

Learners were able to identify some or all of the research methods and types of data collection used in the stimulus material and comment appropriately on the reliability of the research methods used. The authors of the paper had used findings from studies conducted several years/decades ago, and many learners were able to pick up on the currency of this information. Stronger learners were able to show an understanding of the strengths of the findings as well as identifying the disadvantages.

Most learners made clear reference to research papers and articles that they had sourced themselves and were able to provide comparisons and conclusions about the research methods used in these papers. Learners who accessed the higher mark bands were able to compare the research methods used in the research that they had sourced with those used in the stimulus material and draw conclusions on the reliability of the findings in the different sources used.

The work shown below demonstrates a comprehensive approach to this question.

**Activity 1**

One of the research methods used to inform this article was a review of previous studies about the development of continuous cursive handwriting.

How has the literature review method been used to inform this article compared to other research methods you have found when looking into the issue?

Your answer should include:

- other methods of research used to explore the issue
- the reliability of the research methods used.

(15)

In this activity I will talk about the the literature review method used in the article (continuous cursive: cure or curse?) debate compared to my other research methods and the reliability of the research methods used.

In the article (continuous cursive: cure or curse?) It uses previous studies such as observing children's handwriting from a classroom of children aged 5 and uses quantitative methods of research by using example of children's work to demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages of cursive writing. As well as this in this article it uses mostly qualitative methods of research as it uses a target population of children and a cluster sample of girls and boys to give different points of views

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as well as the individual patterns of males and females when it comes to writing in cursive, it says that handwriting takes more time to develop in boys compared to girls.

Although ~~stating~~ this article shows ~~the~~ observations ~~used~~ carried out to show that primary research is a good way of collecting ~~data~~ information as it gives people's opinions and points of view.

However this can also be seen as bias as there is no data researched such as numerical data or facts that back up the quantitative data. However the article I researched about (writing help for special ed kids: try cursive),

used a wide range of ~~pa~~ research methods to back up what they were talking about. In this article they used primary research as scientist were involved in the experiment. In this article scientist believe children who write neatly in script are better at others of development such as maths. and goes on to talk about the significance of cursive writing in a way that approaches



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Turn over ▶



the child's development holistically. Nevertheless this article gives advice and guidance on teaching cursive as well as the benefits on areas of development, such as improving fine motor skills.

By giving the reader relevant up to date argument, backed up with facts means the article is more reliable and trustworthy and so the reader can make his or her own judgements on the cursive writing debate, instead of being persuaded by someone's own point of view. For example in the case study of (continuous cursive: cure or curse?) there is no real balance between the advantages and disadvantages in the literature review as it mostly focuses on the advantages of cursive and although this can be a good thing. It's not right to force someone's ideas and opinions onto the reader as they won't get a chance to see other arguments used within the research.

In this article for example it talks about cursive writing being complex and therefore requires children to use



high levels of gross and fine motor coordination. However it doesn't take into consideration the different needs and abilities of different children, especially because they just use one age range.

Compared to the article I researched on (Writing Help For Special Ed Kids: Try cursive) for example they also demonstrate the advantage but, go one step ahead by actually engaging the reader by helping them with their teaching. This more reliable compared to the first case study as it uses the research to impact on early year's practice to support other areas of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) to provide an equal opportunity for all learners.



Weaker responses did not refer to the source material at all, or made little reference to additional material sourced by the learner. Many learners did not identify that a literature review was a method of research and therefore showed little understanding of the way this had been used to inform the source article. These learners referred to the research methods used by researchers in the papers, discussing these methods, not the method of a literature review within, their work.

Reference to other methods used to investigate the issue on continuous cursive handwriting, and comments on reliability and validity were not always included. Where these were presented, work was superficial and not supported. Learners struggled to distinguish between material that had been produced by research studies and general information provided in news articles or other sources which were not based on research findings.

The example below provides an example of work that fails to address key areas of the question:

There are many different research methods you can use to explore the issue such as a questionnaire, survey and secondary research on other articles. All methods can be reliable as long as they are backed up and peer viewed. For example, 'Why teach handwriting before keyboarding' is a reliable article as all the information is backed up and it is published by Thomas Jefferson university. A reliable piece of research also has to be published for not longer than 10 years. You can find more information at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257556613-In-Early-Education-Why-Teach-Handwriting-Before-Keyboarding>. Angela Webb uses a review of previous studies to back-up her research however, she doesn't give evidence of it for example, she suggests she has done observations

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but she has not provided any.

Stevenson, N. and Just, C. (2012) In early education, why teach handwriting before keyboarding? [online] Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257556613-In-Early-Education-Why-Teach-Handwriting-Before-Keyboarding> [Accessed 8 May 2019].

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Stevenson uses tables as a research method. This makes the overall conclusion clear and allows him to put all his data into the research.

Angela Webb's review of previous studies is not reliable as it is not backed-up and doesn't give detail of information where readers can research more.

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## Activity 2

Learners needed to show an understanding of the issues that influence the teaching of continuous cursive handwriting in the early years that were identified in the source article. They should have discussed these in relation to the findings in their own secondary research. For example, physically the child should have established motor sequences before they can develop a 'consistent writing flow'. This was a conclusion drawn from the source article and learners were required to discuss this in relation to their own findings.

Work for this activity gained marks across the range of the mark bands, although the majority of work was achieved in mark bands 1 and 2, as many learners were not able to provide appropriate examples and support these with research findings.

Work that achieved in the higher mark bands cited a good range of secondary sources and made clear links to the primary source material. Relevant comparisons were made and explained, demonstrating a good understanding of the relationship between the two.

The example below illustrates the links between the source material and learners' own findings.

**Activity 2**

The research article explores the issues that influence the teaching of continuous cursive handwriting in early years. The article states 'Establishing correct and consistent motor sequences from the start is optimal for developing automaticity (a consistent writing flow) ...'

How do the issues and conclusions in this article relate to your own secondary research?

(15)

Children are growing up in a world that is moving at a fast rate, and ~~and~~ where ~~technology~~ technology is becoming more apparent in society. It is becoming to be used more in classrooms, so children will use it to do everything on, but being able to read and write is still an important aspect of life and supports children with learning and academic success in the future.

Highlighted in part A, Webb 2019 discussed the movement of being taught in the cursive style leaves many children struggling to write as they have not yet developed a high level of gross and fine motor skills that are required to do this.

Researching into this statement, it was apparent that other studies agreed that these skills needed to be acquired before writing. In a study based around kindergarten children, Keifer 2011, suggested that interventions

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needed to be put in place with children struggling with handwriting as they had not yet strengthened the skills required to write. The children had weak pencil grips and produced illegible letters, showing that their motor skills and visual perception skills were not mature enough to produce legible handwriting. Mentioned in her study, Keifer 2011 made link to the idea that teaching handwriting in kindergarten is crucial as the earlier they are to master it, the more likely they will succeed in school (Oliver and Knapton 2013).

This was made apparent in another study that was set out to find how schools teach cursive writing. They found cursive is more complicated than print as students need to reach a level of readiness with their fine motor skills (Perin Oya, Nalan Akdemir, 2018). This relates back to Part A in Webb's ~~study~~ report that cursive involves flowing movements that are sometimes unachievable by children who may mature later to others. Maturing later can mean that they may not reach the



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Turn over ►

some level of readiness that their peers have to complete cursive handwriting. Teachers need to consider this when teaching cursive as not all children will be able to achieve to their expectations.

On the other hand, some researchers have found that cursive uses more natural movements compared to print. Part A ~~arg~~ argues that it is more natural for children to learn simple individual letters then be shown how to join them, but Cristina Semeraro et al, 2019, argues cursive is easier to learn as it is more natural for a child. In their study of using a control group and intervention group, the cursive intervention group performed better overall. Their findings suggested that teachers should be teaching cursive at an earlier age as discontinuous movements used in print are more challenging for children.

However, in another study that found the views and opinions of teachers, parents and students, it was discovered that 91.1% of teachers preferred to teach print.



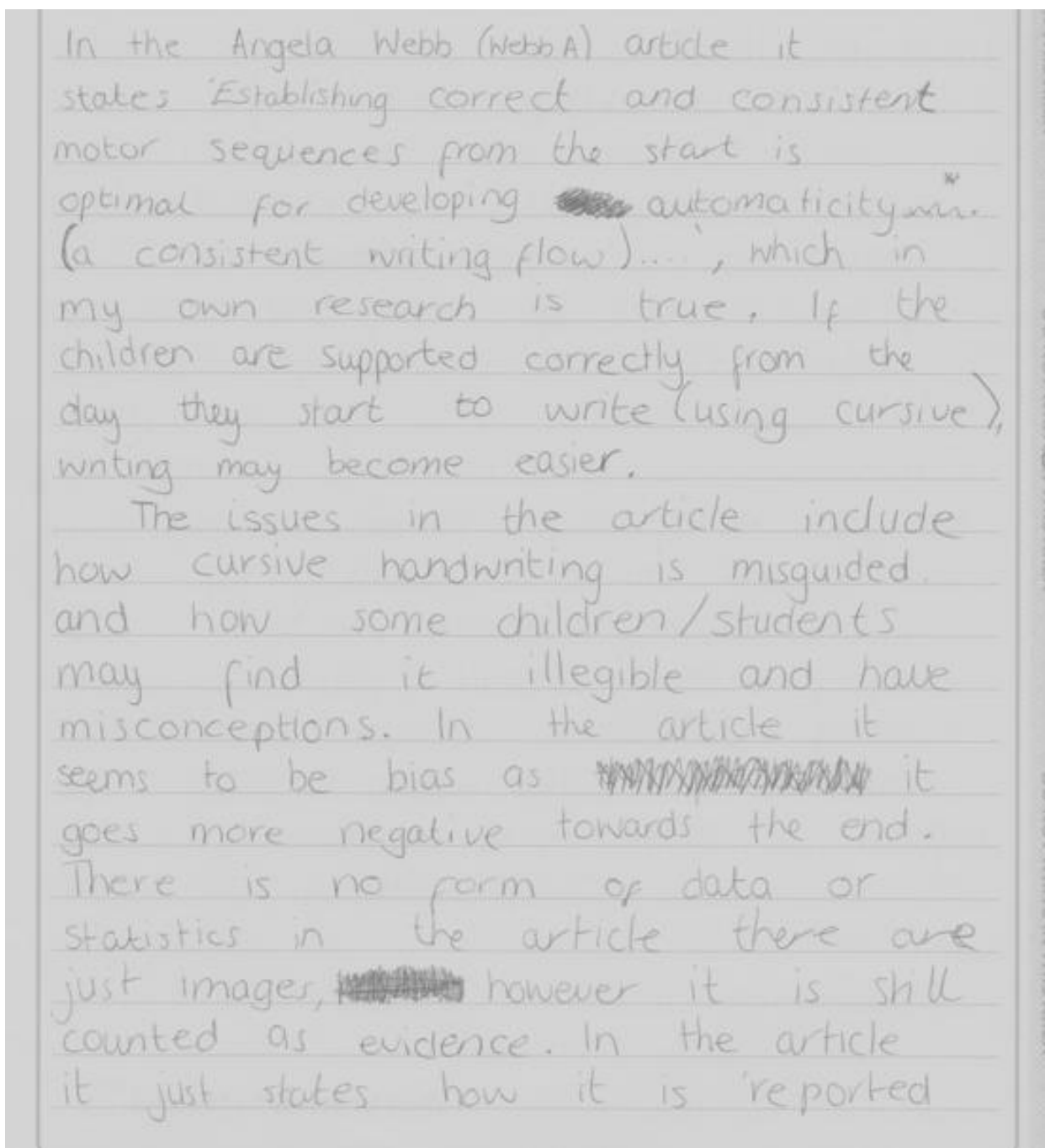
(Perviz Oya, Naim Akdemir, 2018). It was discovered teachers preferred print as cursive is more difficult to teach whereas print is faster for the children to write and produces legible writing that cursive does not always achieve. Linking back to part A, ~~these~~ concerns were raised about the overall legibility of the children's writing using cursive. Webb 2019, explains that children can become confused with the joining of strokes and it can lead to additional strokes. This supports that print should be considered to be the standard teaching of handwriting for 4-5 year olds ~~to~~ before cursive for them to learn the basics of handwriting (Pam Hulme, NHA).

Overall, the issue with cursive is apparent in some cases, such as children are not at the level needed to be able to produce legible writing, but some cases ~~of~~ disagree and say cursive should be taught younger as it is more easier. Teachers should be provided with more support from Ofsted and the National Curriculum of the best ways to support handwriting and whether

or not cursive should be used from reception.

Weaker responses demonstrated some relevant information however, this was limited in relation to the links between the learners own research and the source article. Learners were able to make some reference to the issues and conclusions relating to the teaching of continuous cursive handwriting in the early years. Some links were made to secondary research sources, although this information was not always relevant. Weaker responses contained conclusions which were not supported.

The work below is an example of this:



In the Angela Webb (Webb A) article it states 'Establishing correct and consistent motor sequences from the start is optimal for developing ~~the~~ automaticity (a consistent writing flow)...', which in my own research is true. If the children are supported correctly from the day they start to write (using cursive), writing may become easier.

The issues in the article include how cursive handwriting is misguided and how some children/students may find it illegible and have misconceptions. In the article it seems to be bias as ~~it~~ it goes more negative towards the end. There is no form of data or statistics in the article there are just images, ~~it~~ however it is still counted as evidence. In the article it just states how it is reported

by teachers', this could mean two or more teachers but there isn't an ~~still~~ exact number of ~~participants~~ participants.

In another article which I found for my secondary research which is by David Molloy, 11 November 2017, I found it off BBC News (online) The title of it is 'Do we need to teach children joined up handwriting?' The article is about how ~~but~~ this app teaches cursive script handwriting to children. It is good as children like to use technology and they 'enjoyed it' as it's engaging. However, the app doesn't show mistakes and using just the app means it is harder for children to develop fine motor skills they need to control a pencil and to form letters.

Both of the articles both have issues with cursive writing, in Angela Webb's article, if it's not taught properly the children may

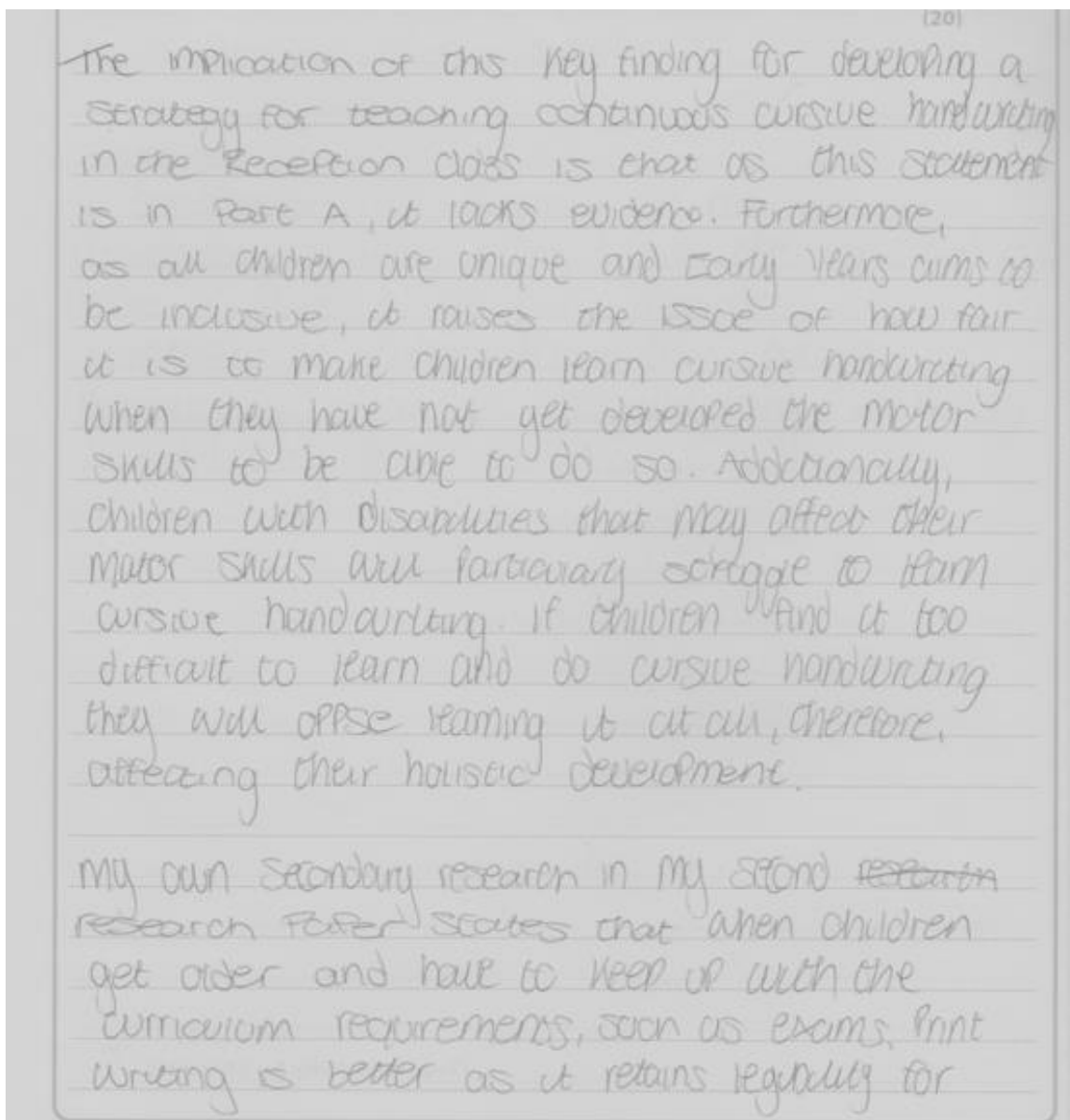
struggle to do it and in David Molloy's article the app doesn't allow the children to develop their fine motor skills. But in conclusion they both ~~believe~~ believe cursive writing is faster for children to write.

### Activity 3

Most learners were able to describe the implications of the research in respect of current classroom practice. Some learners were able to show an understanding of the implications of teaching continuous cursive handwriting through a discussion of the challenges faced by children and teachers. They were able to relate this to the developmental stages of the children and to their research findings.

Rationales for their suggestions and recommendations for change were included.

The work below provides an example of work that addresses key areas of the question:





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longer when handwriting speed increases. This is based off questionnaires, most from adults. This will impact practice and provision as it would mean that teachers would teach unjoined script. For this they would have to get re-trained and the curriculum would need to change to better suit this. This may improve children's learning at home as their parents may feel more comfortable teaching unjoined script.

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Part A would impact practice and provision as it would mean that older children should be taught continuous cursive rather than younger children. This is due to younger children not being able to do the correct motor movements. Therefore, the curriculum would need to change to suit this and a different style of handwriting would need to be taught to younger children. Furthermore, practice and provision would be impacted as children who 'mature late' would need to be taught a different style of handwriting, than their peers, as that will have easier movements.

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My first piece of secondary research would not



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agree with the statement in Part A as they believe cursive is good due to higher HLWT scores. Furthermore, this research works in line with the Bold Beginnings report that good and outstanding rated schools do not teach cursive in reception. Additionally, it is stated that it is not best practice to teach cursive from a young age (Ofsted, 2017). This would have an impact as children would learn a different type of handwriting while they were young / not developed enough. Yet, once they had developed that skill they would go on to learn cursive at a older age.

My third piece of secondary research believes that cursive handwriting skills play an important role in academic achievement therefore it should be taught. Putting this and the statement from Part A together would impact practice and provision as older children who have the needed motor skills would be taught cursive and children who mature late should be taught cursive handwriting when at the needed developmental stage. Therefore, teachers need to further implement research effectively and re-train in teaching cursive handwriting. This would work

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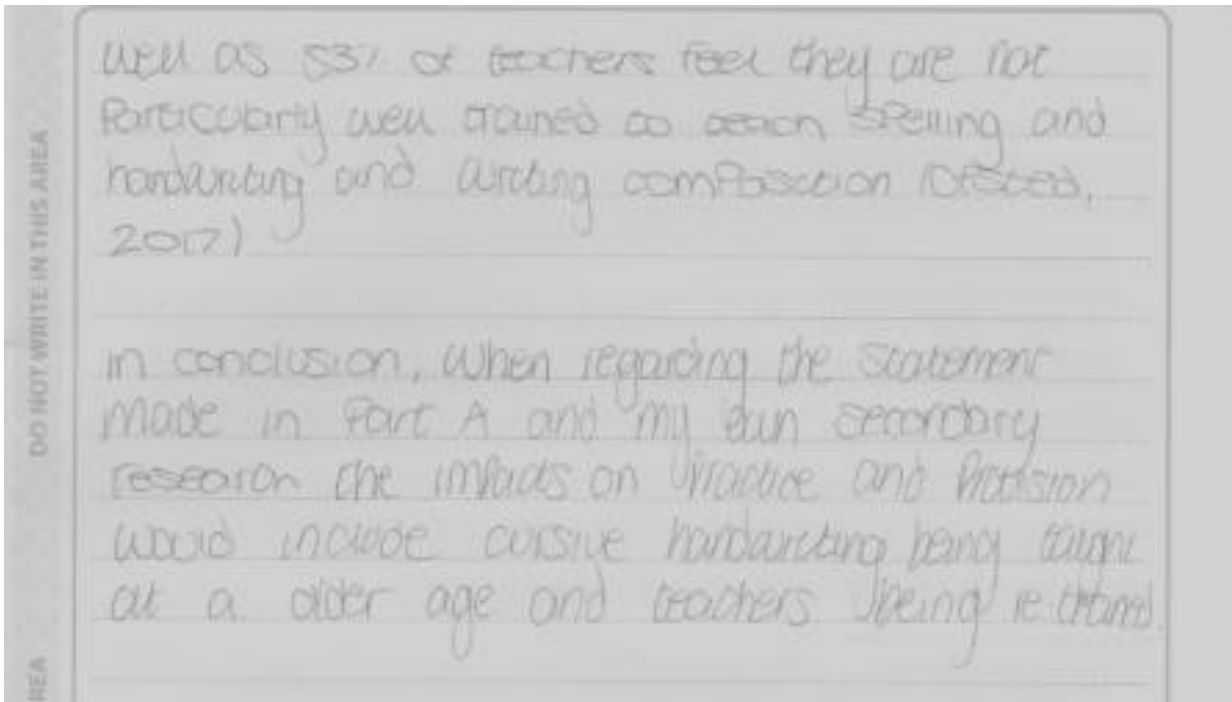


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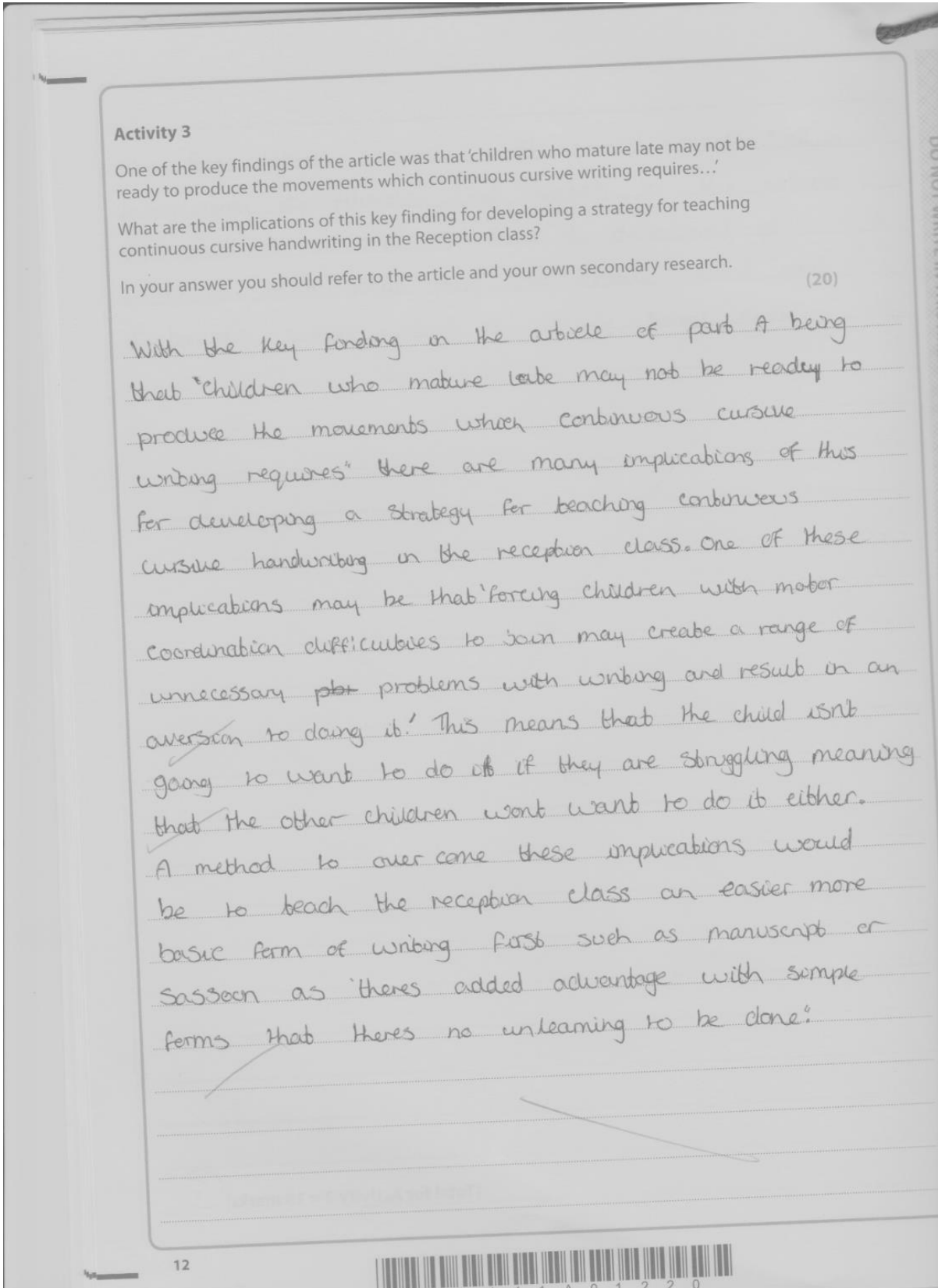
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Weaker responses demonstrated a limited understanding of the implications for teaching continuous cursive handwriting in the early years. Learners were not able to identify relevant points or make reference to appropriate research information. Where suggestions were made these were not supported or justified. No suggestions for changes were included.

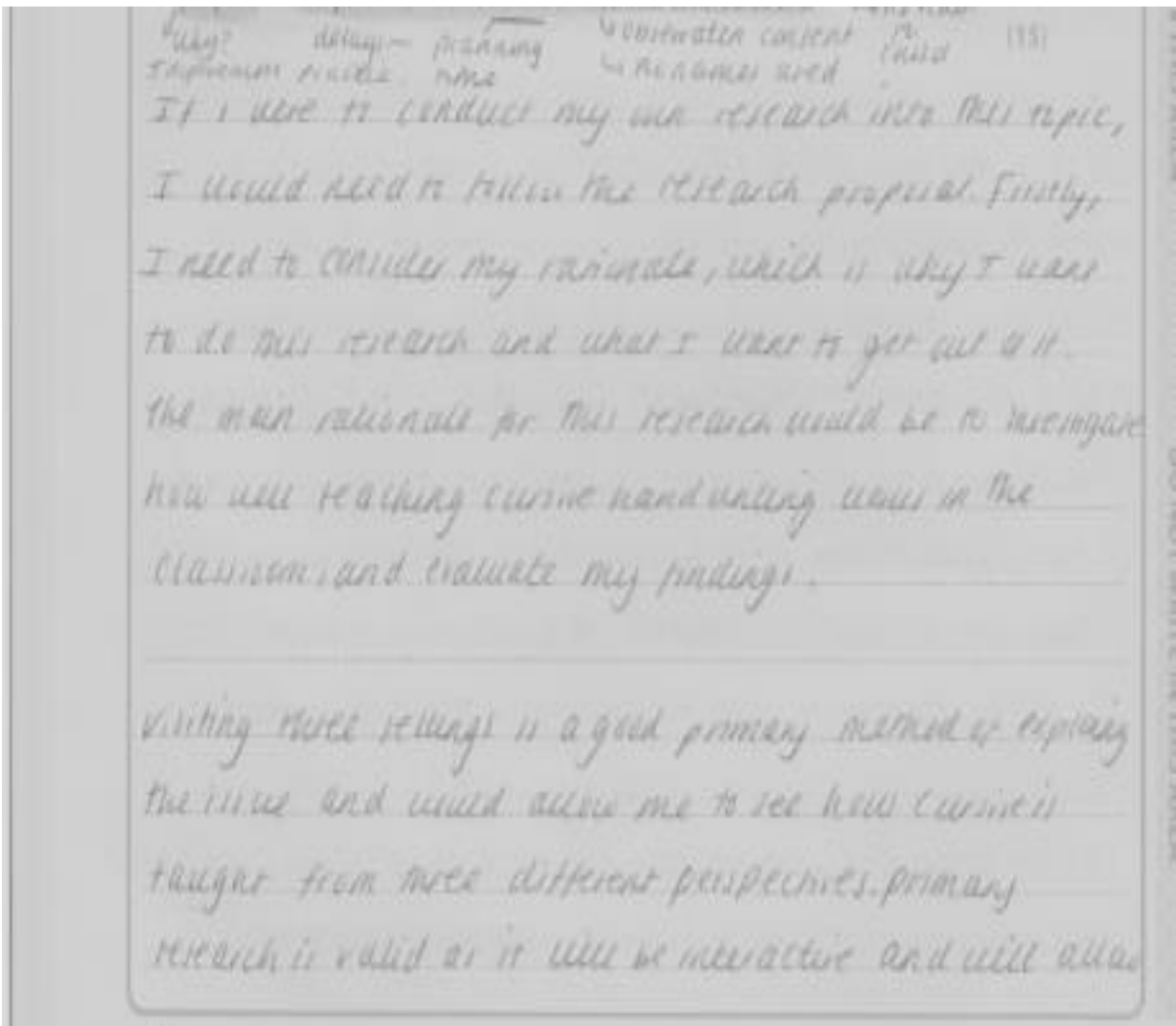
The work below provides an example of a response that did not address key areas of Activity 3:



### Activity 4

The majority of responses for this activity met the requirements for mark band 2. Higher scoring responses achieving mark bands 3 and 4 demonstrated the learner’s understanding of essential aspects of research processes, including data protection, reliability, validity, sample size and implementation practices. Learners were able to critique the suggested research plan and suggest ways in which it could be improved, taking into account essential aspects, as mentioned above. Suggestions for change were appropriate and well supported. Links to the case study were evident.

The example below shows how more marks can be accessed when learners demonstrate an understanding of research processes and include details of how these should be effectively implemented within this activity.



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me to control the validity and reliability of the findings. However, I would need to ensure that I don't let my own opinion influence the research as this would produce biased findings that don't show the real ~~truth~~ truth. I also need to be objective when visiting the settings by only stating the facts that have been proved, as this will produce accurate data findings. It is important that the name and location of the settings are anonymous so that they can't be identified and so information is confidential.

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Before actually carrying out this research, I need to ensure that I have some background knowledge on the topic of cursive handwriting teaching and this can be achieved by skim reading sources in advance and scanning articles to look for facts that can support my understanding on the topic. I would then need to consider the research design - such as what questions would be asked and how the handwriting tasks would be carried out. This would help prepare me as I would have a research plan in mind and it would run smoothly.

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Firstly, I would need to conduct interviews with the reception teachers to ~~discuss~~ <sup>discuss</sup> ~~talk~~ <sup>talk</sup> about their approaches to teaching cursive handwriting. <sup>These produce qualitative findings.</sup>



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are a good way to explore issues in depth with the participants and are a direct form of research. These would work well in discovering the opinions of teachers in the class. However, interviews are not anonymous, which may mean that the participants might not feel confident to answer truthfully, which may produce unreliable results. To improve the reliability, I would ensure that the responses are kept anonymous and I will give the teachers an option to choose if they would like to take part or not. Interviewing teachers will provide me with descriptive, qualitative data about the teaching of cursive handwriting, which can be subjective, so I would need to ensure that I only write down what the participant says, and not assume anything.

Next, I would observe and record activities in the classroom that support children's handwriting skills. To do this, I would conduct non-participant observations of children during activities, as this would allow me to get a clear picture of the activities supporting children, and wouldn't influence their behaviour. However, these observations would need to be overt and I would inform the teachers of my research rationale and improvements for practice. Observations are a good way to note detail about children's learning.

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and allow me to get a first hand look. I would carry out narrative observations as these are detailed and provide a wider look. However, these take a lot of time to write up and are open to bias so I need to make sure that I only record the facts to provide more valid findings. When recording what I have observed, I need to remember to remain confidential by not using real names and guarding the identity of participants. Instead of using observations of children as more suitable research method may be to carry out questionnaires for staff and parents, that allow them to decide what activities support childrens handwriting skills, as these are anonymous and teachers & parents can feel comfortable to answer truthfully. <sup>which provides valid</sup> they also results allow me to gain an idea of what activities can be used in the classroom in the future, to make improvements to practice and provision.

\* I would also ask the participants open questions so that they can give a free answer. to analyse responses statistically I could use a Likerted scale (eg 1-10) as this can then be analysed systematically and gives a wider variety of responses.

(Total for Activity 4 = 1

TOTAL FOR TASK = 6





Question  
Number

4) I may also need to produce a risk assessment in advance to ensure that I reduce harm - such as during the writing tasks as the children shouldn't be physically harmed. I will follow the UNICEF principles by ensuring that all of my research is carried out ethically and doesn't cause emotional harm to children. When covering children, I need to ensure that I have gained informed consent from the parents and that I make them fully aware of the research aims, how their child's data will be used and the benefits to the policy & procedure. This will ensure that the research remains ethical and can then provide accurate valid results. In order to produce valid results in the handwriting tasks, I would have to ensure that the children were given the same tasks and compare children of the same ability, as this would be fair.

Overall, when planning this research, I need to propose a rationale and ensure that I

Question  
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follow all ethical codes of conduct in order to provide valid data findings.

Question  
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4) Lastly, I would need to review my observations of children and then carry out handwriting tasks. I would first need to ensure that the children are given work that is suitable for their ability, as otherwise they may struggle to complete it and this wouldn't provide valid data. To get reliable results, I would need to ensure that tasks are tailored to children's needs and that parents have given informed consent for their child to take part. It is important that I give parents the chance to withdraw their child from the research at any point, and that children don't feel under pressure to perform, as this would decrease the reliability. The sample size for this method needs to be representative of the class, so that the results are an accurate representation of the class and are more valid.

Carrying out these methods will provide valid and reliable <sup>data</sup> results of the teaching of cursive.

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Question  
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as triangulation it being used as three different research methods are being conducted. This will increase the validity as there are more sources of data that can be analysed.

In order to carry out this research, I need to consider my own skills that are needed. First, I need to plan a realistic time scale for my research to take place and this can be done by planning in advance and creating a time line, where I can break down the stages. I also need to be aware of any possible delays in the research - such as a teacher not in and the school timetable. Another skill that I will need to carry out research is organisation skills and I can use these by planning the observations in advance and preparing open ended questions that I will ask when interviewing teachers.

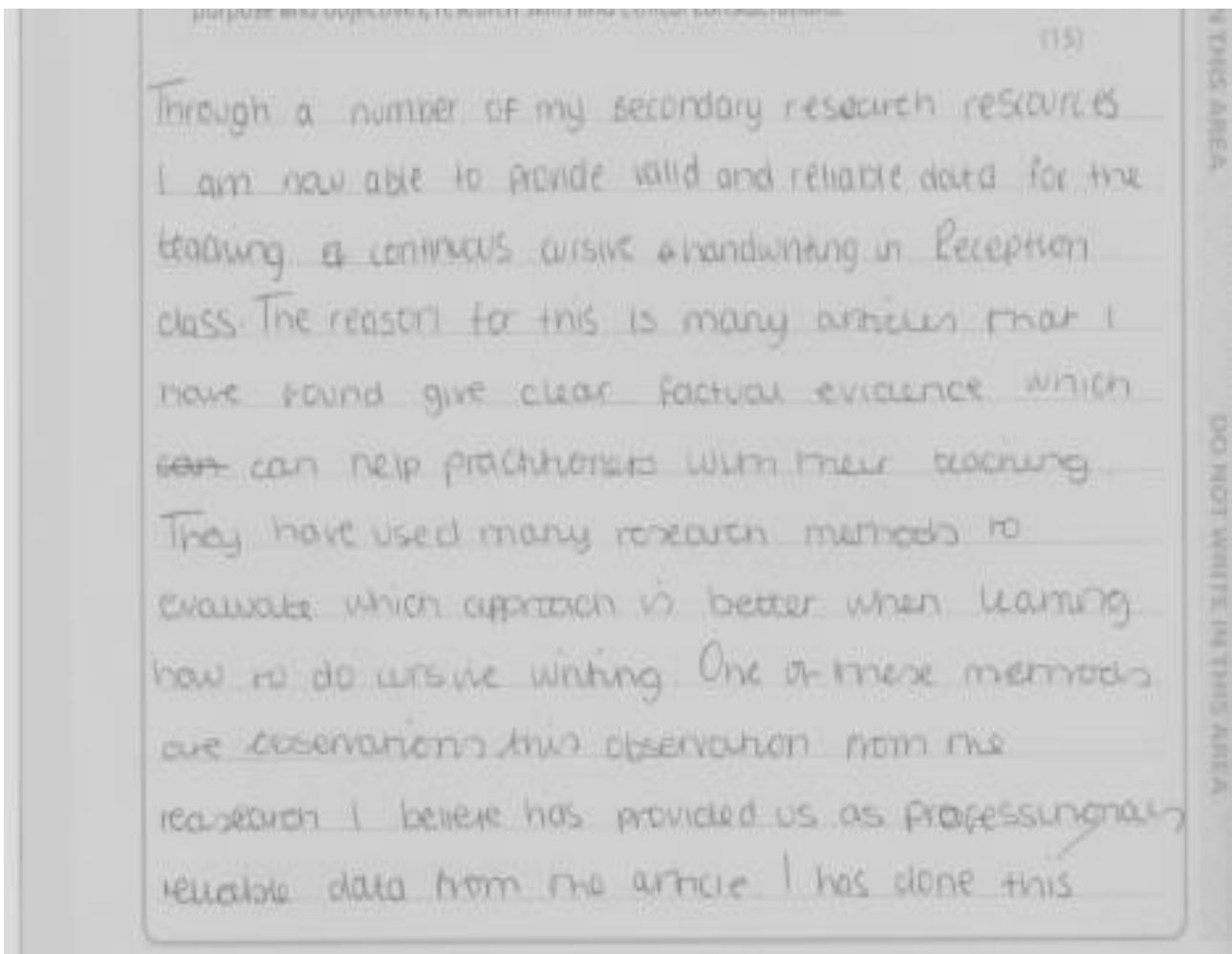
Lastly, I need to be aware of the ethical considerations. I will follow the 1998 Data protection act by ensuring that I only use my research for the specified purposes and ensuring that the data I collect is kept securely, and I will do this by keeping files in a locked cabinet and ensuring my computer is locked.

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Weaker responses identified some research processes and showed a tenuous link to the plan suggested. Some responses identified key elements in the process, such as validity, reliability or data protection, although they were not always related these to the plan suggested. Some learners were able to link their comments to suggestions for changes to the research proposal.

The work below is a completed response for this activity. The work demonstrates limited understanding of the requirements of the activity, with some implied links to the proposal.



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as it shows where children are struggling from the observation so that practitioners are able to help by completing activities where the children need improvement on certain areas of their handwriting.

However in my research Leslie J has only used a small sample size compared to other resources I have seen from this the research given may be potentially unusable due to the fact it doesn't involve a range of different children in different schools. From this, changes could be put in place to gain correct information. For example, the publisher author of the research may go to travel to different schools to gain an insight with what the average amount of children are struggling on. When creating activities for the children practitioners need to consider the factors with setting up activities. It is really important if a child has an additional need that the practitioner is aware about how to support them within the setting. One thing a practitioner could do to support a child with additional needs is have one to one support classes out of class hours by doing this you are able to focus on what the child is



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struggling on compared to what the class as a whole is struggling on.

As well as this practitioners need to take into account the child's religious beliefs. They may miss out on lessons and it is the practitioner's job to make sure that child has caught up on his writing skills. The reason for this is writing supports the child's overall development. This quote was taken from the Guardian by Swain H. (2018).

## Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, learners should:

- Have a basic understanding of different types of research methods
- Be able to review and comment on particular research methods in relation to the information provided
- Show a clear understanding of key issues such as validity, ethics and consent when planning or reviewing research findings
- Be able to refer accurately to current regulations and legislation, including data protection, in their work where necessary
- Be able to evaluate research findings and draw realistic conclusions
- Understand that research findings can be influenced by external factors, such as cultural norms or expectations
- Be able to make links between research findings and the implications for early years practice
- Be able to show an understanding of the links between research findings and wider society
- Be able to communicate their ideas and understanding in a logical way
- Be able to address specific points within the appropriate activity

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