

Enhancing Kindergarten Readiness with Handwriting Without Tears

When Katie Suriano began teaching at Educare West DuPage, she loved many things about the pre-K program, but she quickly identified an opportunity to develop its handwriting curriculum. She knew that children’s abilities to draw, write, and recognize letters are key components of kindergarten readiness. Katie remembered the Handwriting Without Tears (HWT) curriculum from a previous teaching position, and recommended it to Educare West DuPage.

HWT is designed to build handwriting skills while maintaining a child-focused, play-based pre-K environment. It includes fun activities that appeal to young children, such as songs, play dough, and building with wood pieces. The curriculum builds fine motor skills as well as letter and shape recognition.



Mateo and Katie

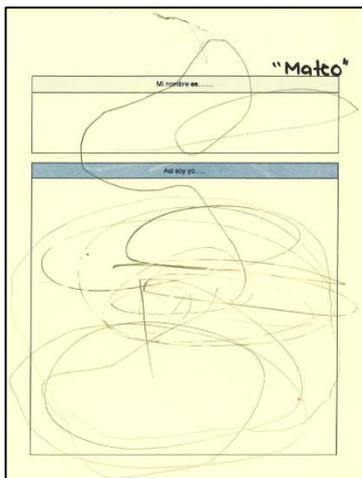
Katie knew the pre-K students at Educare West DuPage need as much support as possible for kindergarten readiness. Most of her students come from under-resourced families, and many speak Spanish at home. According to the Illinois State Board of Education’s 2018-19 Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS), only 15% of Latino children and only 17% of English learners are kindergarten ready in all learning domains, as compared with 26% of all children throughout the state. While 30% of Latino children in Illinois are kindergarten ready in language and literacy development, compared with 46% of all Illinois children.

Programs like HWT can help to close this achievement gap. With the support of Comic Relief USA through Red Nose Day funding, Educare West DuPage has expanded the HWT curriculum into all of its pre-K classrooms. Katie also became a HWT trainer and works with her colleagues to translate songs and activities into Spanish.



Among the many examples of student success with HWT in Katie's classroom, Mateo stands out. When Mateo began pre-K in fall 2018, Katie asked him to draw a picture of himself. He scribbled happily on the page.

After participating in HWT activities for a few months, Mateo could draw a figure with an identifiable face and feet. By spring, he was drawing an individualized self-portrait and could sign his name at the bottom.



Fall 2018



Winter 2018



Spring 2019

HWT has given Mateo more than the skills to draw and write clearly. In his spring self-portrait, Mateo depicted himself in a colorful dress, with a bow in his long hair. Katie already knew that Mateo sometimes likes to wear dresses in Dramatic Play, but his drawing has helped her understand how he sees himself.

With support from [Educare West DuPage](#) and from [Red Nose Day](#), learning how to draw and write has empowered Mateo to express his unique identity, so his teacher can support him as he grows.

In 2018, the [Educare Learning Network](#) received a grant from the Red Nose Day Fund at Comic Relief USA, half of which has been allocated across all Educare schools to support innovation, peer learning and professional development efforts.

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