Digitising the Writing Habit: Digital Submission of Handwritten Writing Assignments

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author discusses the benefits of digitising handwritten work, such as student essays, for both student and teacher. In particular, laying out one method teachers might employ themselves as well as detailing a back up option for those working with less computer savvy students.

INTRODUCTION

The paperless office was memorably described by *Wired Magazine* as a thirty-year old pipe-dream (Milliken, 2014). A 100% paperless office may indeed be a pipe-dream, but a desk and office with *less paper?* That we can certainly do. The technology to allow educators to do so has been around for some time, however, recent software developments as well as the proliferation of smartphones amongst students means that this task is easier than ever. As a teacher working with a variety of students at a range of different locations what was needed was a way to make the challenge of collecting, correcting and returning written work simpler for both student and teacher. The hope was also that a smoother method of delivery would further encourage the student writing habit.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The transition to a predominantly digital classroom can be difficult (Hinchey & Blake, 2014) as it requires a great deal of initial investment, both financial as well as in time and effort. There is also the necessity of teaching students and teachers alike how to make use of any digital additions to the classroom. However, the positives of moving to a more digital model, such as easier materials management and greater possibilities in materials production have also been noted (Rutson-Griffiths, 2014). Digitising content is hardly a new subject and the benefits of doing so in regards to teacher efficiency (Rubrecht, 2008) have been well discussed. The digital submission of student work is certainly nothing new but the proliferation of smartphones in combination with cheap cloud data storage has opened up some new ways to do so that are particularly beneficial for language teachers.

METHOD

The equipment required to digitise handwritten assignments can be expensive, however, it should be noted that said equipment also has a variety of other applications and uses that may be of use to teachers.

The equipment required for this process is as follows:

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Evernote (Version 7.7.8; Evernote, 2008-2015) - a very popular digital-office. All documents can be stored on *the cloud* and accessed via your computer, smartphone, tablet or from any computer with an internet connection.

Scannable (Version 1.1.1; Evernote, 2015) - free application that turns any smart phone or tablet into a single page document scanner.

Goodnotes 4 (Version 4.6; Time Base Technology Limited, 2011) - PDF editing and note taking software designed for use with a stylus (iPad only). Other PDF editing software is available on other platforms.

Stylus - a pen for your tablet. Prices and ability of these range significantly.

Tablet Computer - any popular tablet should be able to use all the necessary software.

Scansnap document scanner - necessary if students are unable to digitise their work themselves.

- *Scannable - Free*
- *Goodnotes 4   - ¥840*
- *Evernote - Free / ¥2000 / ¥4000*
- *Adonit Jot Touch Stylus - ¥10000*
- *Scansnap Evernote Edition inc. Evernote subscription - ¥50,000*
- *Tablet - iPads from ¥40,000*

As a method, *digitising the writing habit* makes use of a variety of hardware and software. To begin with the student receives a standard written assignment on a piece of A4 paper. After completing said assignment the student makes use of Scannable and scans their work with the app. From the app the students can submit to a specific email address. In this case an Evernote document upload address is used. This means that the student's work is sent directly to the teacher and can even file itself into the relevant notebook within Evernote. That written assignment is now saved and easily searchable, including the handwritten content within it. That written work can then be exported from Evernote in PDF form to Goodnotes. Using that software the teacher can use a digital stylus and tablet to mark and digitally return the assignment to the student via email.

If students are not comfortable with using the application or are unable to do so an alternative hardware option is available via the use of a document scanner. For ease, a Scansnap document scanner affiliated with Evernote has been used in order to save time exporting scanned documents as they are automatically sent directly to Evernote when this model is used. Again the written assignment is now backed up to Evernote. The teacher can do marking through Goodnotes once again and either email the students their work back or print it out and hand them back their original next class along with a printout of their corrections.

CONCLUSION

At its optimum, allowing students to submit handwritten assignments digitally has various benefits for both teacher and student. Primarily those gains can be found in the efficiency of the method in cutting out the need for direct contact time or the production of a word-processed copy. The ability to submit hand written assignments is a benefit that is particularly applicable to those working in secondary education. Having easily searchable and reproducible backups of work is also another potential time-saver for both teacher and students. Then there is the simple gain of having an office or desk significantly less cluttered by endless piles of paper. Paperless it may not be, but it is a helpful halfway point for all involved.

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