



The Future of Handwriting

I read recently that from 2016 Finland will no longer teach handwriting in its schools. When a 'high performing' country like Finland makes a move it should at least cause us to consider what we are doing and why.

Not surprisingly, rapid technological advances have caused many people to question the relevance of handwriting. By the age of 8, many children can type faster than they can handwrite and in 2016 NAPLAN will be completed online, so how much time should be spent on handwriting?

The history of handwriting has always been one of convenience and change according to the writing technologies available. Early alphabets were angular and right to left because they were using chisels on clay or granite. Ink and paper saw a change to the directionality of the text because it became too messy (for the right handers!). Curved shapes also became easier to produce so the shape of the letters changed. With fountain pens, the ink flowed more easily with downward strokes so the directionality of how letters were formed became important.

Gravity no longer plays a part with ballpoint and felt tip pens yet children still complete handwriting exercises based on the technology of the fountain pen and ink.

I don't believe we are at an 'either or' point in the debate about digital v hand. Less than half the world has access to digital technology so it is premature to suggest that handwriting is no longer useful. Most would agree that everyone should be able to pick up a pen or pencil and write a message that is legible to others but does it matter how you form your letters when you hand write? Isn't it about legibility and automaticity?

No matter how standardised we attempt to make handwriting, we all end up with our own style so perhaps there are better things to do in the school day. For now though, students (in Australia at least) will spend time on how to 'correctly' form letters but it is worth remembering that things do change and education is too important to become simply a set of activities we do because we've always done them.

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The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new – Socrates.