

Handwriting is Boeing 747 Technology



One of the most hotly debated topics in education these days is the issue of handwriting. Mr. Shapiro, a journalist for the Washington Post, wrote an article titled “Cursive Foiled by Technology” on April 4, 2013. The handwriting/keyboarding debate is definitely gaining momentum. However, in my opinion, the rationale cited in this article regarding the pros and cons of handwriting focused on the wrong argument.

Placing cursive handwriting in the same category of skill as keyboarding is similar to categorizing flying a kite and a Boeing 747 as being synonymous. Cursive handwriting and keyboarding are not equal nor should they be viewed as interchangeable skills. Yes, keyboarding aptitude is necessary in today’s technology driven mode of interaction where children have more digital friends than neighborhood playmates who used to gather regularly to capture the flag or play ghosts in the graveyard. However, researchers in the nation’s top institutes have substantially documented how handwriting develops reading, writing, language and critical thinking. Keyboarding does not increase brain activation and impact performance across all academic areas as does handwriting.⁴

Dr. Virginia Berninger, a professor of educational psychology at the University of Washington, indicates that students in grades 2, 4, and 6, who used handwriting wrote more words, wrote words faster, and expressed more ideas than those who used keyboarding.² Additionally Dr. Berninger demonstrates through fMRI studies that sequential finger movement needed in handwriting differ from the movements in keyboarding and actually activate massive areas of the brain involved in thinking, language and working memory. Thus, the physical act of writing by hand makes a significant difference to brain activation patterns.³ Another researcher, Dr. Laura Dinehart at Florida International University, reports that handwriting is key to developing reading and mathematics skills. In a recent study, Dr. Dinehart found that four-year olds who demonstrate strong handwriting skills are more likely to have better reading and math skills in second grade.¹ Dr. Graham, professor of education at Vanderbilt University, indicates that good handwriting improves test scores from the 50th percentile to the 84th percentile.²

Let’s not settle for “flying a kite” in response to the tyranny of the urgent of standardized testing prep and offer elementary students keyboarding instead of handwriting. We have the Boeing 747 technology and power of handwriting. When handwriting is properly taught, students are equipped to more efficiently perform the hierarchy of skills required in other subjects, and ultimately this leads to better grades, assessment scores, and overall academic performance.¹

The writers of the Constitution were thought generators, innovators, and established the foundation of this nation through multiple drafts of the Constitution and Bill of Rights-all done in cursive writing. Today’s students and tomorrow’s leaders need to be radically more prepared to face lightening fast advances in

technology, evolving social media influences, and diminishing insular geographical limitations. I would argue that if our society desires to prepare students to face these new challenges cursive handwriting should be included in the Common Core standards of all elementary schools.

If you are interested in finding out more about the significant and pervasive impact of cursive handwriting on more than just writing please contact the National Institute of Learning Development (NILD). NILD has been changing the brains of students for over thirty years and teaching cursive writing is the DNA of our work.

Footnotes

1. Handwriting in the 21st Century – An Educational Summit
http://www.hw21summit.com/media/zb/hw21/H2948_HW_Summit_White_Paper_eVersion.pdf
2. How Handwriting Trains the Brain -The Wall Street Journal, 10-5-2010
3. James, K.H. “How Printing Practice Affects Letter Perception: An Educational Cognitive Neuroscience Perspective.” Presented at Handwriting in the 21st Century?: An Educational Summit, Washington, D.C., January 23, 2012.
4. Schools Try to Stop Trend That’s Erasing Cursive Writing – Associated Press, Los Angeles, 11-25-12

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