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Update on teaching writing – the Quest for flexibility of an inflexible skill

My presentation discusses teaching written skills and lessons learned during lockdown.

I begin by presenting the traditional arguments for why written skills should be taught:

Writing changes our cognitive processes by improving our abilities to anticipate, structure, be coherent, and search for perfection.

Writing changes our relationship to the world by imposing more universality and a better openness to the thoughts of others.

Writing is a social transformer that allows us to be administratively autonomous and to take part in political and social life.

Writing is a source of cultural activities focused on creation, affirmation of a unique personality and sharing on a large scale.

However, these arguments are not very motivating and are quite dated.

For example, the difference between oral and written communication is no longer as clear-cut today: oral communication leaves as many traces in social networks as written communication.

Most importantly, they don't fit the modern use of writing, which is mostly focused on immediate communication (email, texting, captions) note taking or to-do lists as shown by the lockdown.

If learning to write is about essays or summaries, it doesn't meet the real need of learners, and it demotivates teachers.

I then present a few activities conducted in my department that I find motivating, particularly because the officers' written productions are read by real readers.

Conversations on WhatsApp between the officer and myself to agree on a language evaluation interview.

Realization of the slides for the presentation of the country of each officer.

Production of a weekly report or a magazine to be read by the other officers and the management of the department or the War College.

Report on visits or excursions with photos for the newsletter of the association that finances these activities.

Finally, I note that these activities (except for the excursions) are compatible with distance learning, and that they never use handwriting.

Confinement has shown that writing can be realistic, dynamic and daily, and that it is motivating when one really writes to be read, and not to do a school exercise.