

Stakeholder summary

Video screen capture helps instructors understand students' writing process

By tracking activities that take place on a computer screen, video screen capture (VSC) technology makes students' writing processes visible to themselves and to instructors. For students, this facilitates reflection on their writing behaviours and habits. For instructors, it opens a dialogue between them and students on the writing process. Both students and instructors value the personal feedback it makes possible, allowing them to discuss the strategies and behaviours involved in the writing process instead of concentrating solely on the final product.

Project description

Writers in Action: Modelling and Scaffolding Second Language Learners' Writing Process assessed how VSC technology could best be introduced into a university-level second-language writing course, and the benefits that its implementation could provide both instructors and students. Thirty-six students participated in the study, 18 from a French as a second language course at Carleton University and 18 from an English as a second language course at the University of Ottawa. Data were collected by analyzing the VSCs students created in the completion of course assignments. Students also provided their opinions on the usability of the tool through a post-intervention questionnaire, and instructors were interviewed to provide feedback on the implementation process.

The study examined how to integrate VSC into writing courses; which types of assignments are best suited to this technology; the advantages of using VSC in the development of students' critical thinking, language proficiency and autonomy; as well as the benefits for the instructor.

Findings

Both students and instructors found that VSC technology is an accessible and user-friendly tool. Screencast-O-Matic software is free, does not have to be installed on a computer and conveniently allows VSCs to be saved in multiple formats. Training on the software for both students and instructors is vital to ensure smooth integration into the courses. The authors suggest that training should be delivered in advance and include coaching by a trained professional. Having a user guide is also important as it minimizes long periods of downtime and uncertainty with the software.

VSCs provide instructors with innovative ways of encouraging student reflection on their writing and of providing feedback on student work. The ability to save VSCs in an archive permitted students to review their writing behaviours and habits, as well as allowing instructors to reflect upon and modify their writing assignments.

Integrating VSC into the classroom is not without its complications. Instructors were forced to rethink their instructional approaches and the structure of their assignments. The time required of instructors to learn how to use the technology and to integrate it effectively into their courses also proved to be considerable.

Writers in Action: Modelling and Scaffolding Second Language Learners' Writing Process was written by Marie-Josée Hamel and Jérémie Séror, University of Ottawa, in collaboration with Chantal Dion, Carleton University.