Young students making textual changes during digital writing

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* Learning
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## Sample

30 young students aged 7 to 9 in three cities in Sweden.

## Implications For Educators About

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

In this small-scale study young students' digital writing as it unfolds in real time via screen recordings is discussed. The students attend the first and third year of schooling in Sweden and are recorded during lessons. The aim is to describe students' digital writing as they use computers to create texts, with a specific focus on the changes the students make. The type of change, its cause, whether the change results in correct or incorrect language use, and the semantic and syntactic consequences of the changes are analysed. The results show that changes are made locally, and that the students focus on dealing with software underlining that indicates problems with spelling or grammar. Revisions on deeper meaning-making levels, such as additions, insertions or reorganisations, are generally not performed even though such operations are easily accomplished with digital tools. Seven different strategies when dealing with underlining are identified, and how the students' linguistic knowledge about spelling, rules for writing and digital literacy skills are used in explorative ways to avoid underlining is described. The students' responsiveness toward following a correctness norm affects the semantic depth of the texts as misspelled words get erased or exchanged for more non- specific words. Syntactic structure is also affected resulting in non-conventional punctuation due to misunderstandings concerning the reason for software underlining. The outcomes show a close relationship between operational literacy and meaning-making as the content of the students' texts often changes when underlining shows up on the screen. Identity formation is also at stake when a misunderstanding positions student as unaware of punctuation when the problem concerns the software's rule of spacing after full stops. Different aspects of operational literacy and their significance for a social conception of literacy is suggested to inform teachers' planning of text creation using digital tools in the classroom.

# Outcome

"[T]he students make surface-based changes locally in the part of the text where they are writing at that moment. The meaning-based changes that occur are exchanges of words. With a few exceptions, the students do not move, insert or add words, phrases or sentences.... We identified seven different revision strategies in relation to software underlining, which is the most common cause for making changes.... When the students recognise the software’s underlining they use their knowledge of spelling, language structure and operational digital skills in explorative and creative ways to eliminate the software-generated remarks. Even if the efforts are not always successful, it is clear that the young students are linguistically aware of problems concerning spelling and word formation....When it comes to the consequences of the changes, in some cases they lead to a reduc- tion in semantic depth or specificity when a more common and less specific word than the original is selected. Underlined words are also erased without being replaced, and in one case full stops are erased as they were believed to cause the underlining. The ambition to follow spelling and grammar conventions thus overrides initial choices of words that result in underlining, and may be understood as a prioritisation of a “correctness norm” above other norms." (Authors, 199)