



## CASE STUDY REPORT

# Loitering with the text! Implementing Talk for Writing in Year 2

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*This study was originally published in 2010 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.*

## Abstract

**Background:** The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of Talk for Writing materials on pupil learning, teaching, and school organization and leadership in a school with challenging circumstances.

**Aims:** The main aim of this development work was to use a multisensory approach to enhance the learning experience and raise the quality of writing across the board, particularly for boys in a socially and economically deprived area.

**Methods:** The participants were a small team of primary teachers from a school in a socially and economically deprived area, working with a local authority literacy consultant to pilot Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing materials. Methods used include multisensory learning, giving children ownership over their learning, using ICT, and using Talk for Writing materials to focus on sentence structure and connectives.

**Findings:** The main findings of this development work are that Talk for Writing has had a major impact on literacy standards for all ages, particularly for boys. It has enabled children to engage in a multisensory approach to enhance their learning experience, and has given them the tools to craft their writing in an effortless way.

**Implications:** The findings suggest that Talk for Writing can have a major impact on literacy standards, particularly for boys in deprived areas. It can provide a multisensory approach to enhance the learning experience, and help children to understand the link between talk and writing. It also encourages children to see themselves as authors and to use a specific writing process.

*This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.*

**Keywords:** Primary education; English - speaking and listening; English - writing

## Introduction

### What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

As part of a small team working in a school with challenging circumstances, I felt that our approach to teaching writing was beginning to become a little 'dry'. Our school is in a socially and economically deprived area. We have a high mobility of children and a large percentage of free school meals. There is a higher percentage of boys throughout school and in my own class it is over 60% boys. Although throughout school our writing levels have improved over time and teachers' confidence has increased with the teaching of literacy, having looked at the Talk for Writing materials briefly I was sure that this could be an approach that would have a major impact on standards within literacy for ALL ages.

As an AST and as part of my AST outreach time, I was invited by an LA literacy consultant to join a very small group of primary teachers who would pilot the Talk for Writing materials within each year group. This was to enable us to see how Pie Corbett's theory worked in practice and to assess whether other colleagues could implement similar practice.

I have always used 'talk' as a tool which enables children to engage (and therefore learn!), however I wanted to be far more specific within the literacy teaching sequence than I had been in the past in highlighting opportunities for structured talk which could be replicated within each unit. Whilst working in the early years I had been part of a CLLD programme which introduced aspects of Talk for Writing into both F1 and F2. The benefits were great, particularly as we were working with children who entered F1 at well below the national average. By the middle of F2 they were using book language confidently, engaging in mark making happily and many were writing independently. Oral rehearsal of stories worked brilliantly and provided our children with a bank of stories that they could then magpie from in the future (see Summary page for video clip).

I wanted to bring a more multisensory approach into my year 2 classroom in order to enhance learning in literacy as I worried that often learning became too formal far too early. I also wanted to see how these materials would transfer across to non-fiction as most of the DCSF resources (video, transcript, case studies etc) and the documentation which accompanies them, has a fiction focus. With male reluctant writers in mind I wanted to focus on non-fiction. Although over a period of time writing levels had improved, there was still fluctuation and I felt something needed to be put in place in order to raise the quality of children's writing in the long term.

Our children find writing hard! It's a task where they are constantly juggling a different focus - from holding a pencil to spelling polysyllabic words, writing clear punctuated sentences to using a clear structure of a text type. Talk for Writing seemed like it would give them something concrete that they could hold onto, something which would make their job as writers seem far less daunting.

### Who might find this case study useful?

- Headteacher
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- SIP (School Improvement Partner)
- Teacher

## Description

### What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- English - speaking and listening
- English - writing

## How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

- By increasing the number of children, particularly boys moving towards age related expectations.
- Raise the quality of writing across the board.
- Use a multisensory approach to enhance the learning experience.
- Enable children and adults to see that there is an explicit link between unmeasured talk and a written outcome - if you can't talk it, you can't write it!

## What were your success criteria?

- Engagement with tasks - particularly the written outcome. Evidence of talk within writing, particularly as a result of 'magpie-ing'.
- An understanding of the specific writing process and an understanding that it can be applied to all writing.
- Children seeing themselves as authors and understanding the reader-writer link.

## What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupils' work

## Describe the CPD approaches you used

I recently delivered INSET to the whole staff. This involved the use of the Pie Corbett CPD materials, modelling of approaches and an opportunity to share what I had already trialled.

As part of my AST role I am often asked to support teachers with their planning. Where possible I talk about the benefits of Talk for Writing and integrate some of the features within a teaching sequence (it is tricky to integrate the whole approach as very often teachers are not aware of the approach).

## Who provided you with support?

- Local authority staff

## How were you supported?

- Strategic working relationship with LA consultant
- Buddying with KS1 member of pilot group (joint planning)

## Impact

### What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Children understand implicitly that if you don't talk it, you can't write it. The talk in the classroom, within groups and within partnerships is more focused and positive. There are very few times when talk becomes 'off task' in nature.

They see that writers go on a specific journey during the writing process and because many of the features of Talk for Writing encourage children to see themselves as authors, they are happy to go on this journey. In particular the use of picture maps and 'boxing up' as an approach to planning.

Planning a text with young children is hard! Planning frames that I have used in the past would be handed to me with the entire text squished into the planning boxes - they just didn't get it! 'Boxing up' just makes so much sense to them and they are able to pick out the main features of a text and then magpie them in their own plan.

Not only do children find the new approach quicker and easier, what they create is a plan, not an entire text pretending to be a plan!

Children are more equipped to focus on the really tricky bit of writing - sentences! This is because Talk for Writing gives them the tools to craft their piece of writing in what seems quite an effortless way so through guided writing, the focus on sentence structure can occur.

The use of connectives and understanding that there are different types of connectives with different uses has been really powerful. Because pictures and gestures are assigned to key features such as connectives, children remember them due to this multisensory approach. Once they have a bank of a few connectives they seem able to add to it easily. Children regularly spot connectives as we look at texts across the curriculum or during story time and they are beginning to classify them. Some have even started to note when writers do not use them! On the whole connectives appear in their writing without prompting and children are desperate to point them out when they've used one.

They KNOW that it is ok to magpie and they explicitly understand that this is what good writers do. However, they also understand that there is a fine line between magpie-ing and copying. They may ask to look at someone else's whiteboard or rough draft (I actively encourage it!) however they won't copy great chunks or complete sentences. I will hear them saying "I like that bit" or "I'm going to use that picture on my map".

### Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Although I understand that people who are unfamiliar with the materials may just want to give 'book talk' a go or try a picture map with the children, Talk for Writing shouldn't be seen as a set of activities that can be dipped into. It is an approach. If all the elements are integrated into day to day planning, the whole writing experience will be a powerful one.

### Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

### Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Pupils' work

### Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

In the assessment data below the focus boys are highlighted. In two terms, three focus boys have exceeded their end of year targets.

The examples of writing are from the lower-attaining focus pupils.

### What has been the impact on teaching?

- I consistently ensure that all units have a purpose and are contextualised in some way. This means that children have a reason for what they are doing. Publishing should be for a real audience and carried out in imaginative and varied ways - I firmly believe that when children have been learning about a text type and have built up to their final piece of work, it shouldn't just end up in their literacy books.
- My teaching sequences do last a little longer than they did previously, but I am confident that this 'loitering' is time well spent, particularly with non-fiction text types. Until children have a firm grasp of the text type and understand the features (without just being able to 'recite' what they are), they are not able to write in that style.

- Seeing the value of multisensory learning. Talk for Writing enables different learning styles to be reached through spoken word, action, picture and writing and ensures that the journey to the end product is practical.
- I am now more conscious of giving children more ownership over their learning, particularly when unpicking a text through Book Talk. I'm sure previously I used to ask questions about a text and have the responses I wanted to hear already in my head. I was guilty of leading children down my path when investigating a book, rather than letting them discover things for themselves. Book Talk enables them to create their own conference about what they've read and is led completely by THEM.
- I have become more confident in my use of ICT, not only throughout the teaching sequence but also within publishing. Previously I shied away from the exemplified units within the Strategy which suggested an ICT based outcome.

### Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning

### Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Planning shows that whereas previously, non-fiction units may have had around three weeks dedicated to them, now in order to fulfil the outlined objectives well and provide children with a learning experience, four weeks is more appropriate.

Recent observations of Literacy teaching throughout school have shown that features of Talk for Writing are being successfully used. An observation of my teaching by the Head commented that "children have a great understanding of the text type because of the teaching methods used...(children are) enthusiastic about their learning and therefore made good progress."

### What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Because this study was only focusing on impact at classroom level, it is difficult to assess the whole school at this point.

### Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

As above

## Summary

### What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

See 'impact on teaching' (purpose, context, multi-sensory learning, letting children discover things in texts for themselves)

### What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

- Talk for Writing materials
- Exemplified literacy units

### What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

The Talk for Writing discs, particularly the training from Pie Corbett, are invaluable (the training clips on the National Strategies website are not complete).

A buddy - having the opportunity to work alongside five other teachers, all trialling the materials for the first time in their own classrooms was extremely beneficial. We were a support unit for each other as well as a pot of ideas. working closely with someone to plan a unit of work for the first time was also very useful.

Having not received training directly (either from Pie Corbett or from LA course provider) working closely with an LA literacy consultant

**If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?**

- Buddying
- Experience of using National Strategy teaching sequences - its easier to see and understand where the features of Talk for Writing 'slot' into the teaching sequence if teachers are familiar with the phases.

**What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?**

During 'in-reach' time I would like to plan unit of work using the Strategy guidance, with each member of teaching staff within school. I feel that now they have the background to the approach and can see that it works, the next step is to see that the features of Talk for Writing fit easily within a teaching sequence - and they make sense!

## Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- A practical start - science investigation - EXPLANATION
- Boxing Up
- Flow digrams - EXPLANATIONS
- Picture maps (shared and independent) - EXPLANATIONS
- Planning - EXPLANATIONS
- Planning - INSTRUCTIONS
- Unit plan - EXPLANATIONS
- Unit plan - INSTRUCTIONS
- Assessed writing levels (Autumn 1 to Spring 2 2010)
- EXPLANATION - draft (LA boy)
- INSTRUCTIONS - published (LA boys)

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## About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. Most were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use. This report was awaiting final approval when the National Strategies site was archived.

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