THE PRIMARY WRITING PROJECT

TALK FOR WRITING: BACKGROUND PAPER

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Summary

Talk for Writing is a well-established approach to the teaching of writing in primary schools. It has been disseminated quite widely but mainly through the medium of conferences and short courses. As result, while T4W has met with an enthusiastic response from large numbers of teachers, who have experience of aspects of it, the approach is properly embedded in only small minority of schools. This developing T4W programme is designed to secure T4W at a school level by providing support and training over a period of time. We estimate that it takes two years for a whole school to understand and implement the work effectively. Schools embarking on the programme should see it as a long term investment in the improvement of writing, primarily, but also of reading and communication skills more generally.

It is fundamental to success that each school identifies a senior leadership team with the headteacher as a member. Each 'project team' will then be responsible for implementation in their school. Participating schools will need to make T4W a major development priority over the 5- 6 terms of the programme. Time commitments to the programme comprise about 15 days overall with 4 school closures by agreement between schools over the 6 terms, to enable all staff to participate.

At the end of the programme we encourage each school partnership to organise a conference to celebrate and disseminate their successful practice. By this stage, we expect to leave schools in a sustainable position with effective inter-school support systems. We also expect to find potential in each partnership to create capacity for developing partnerships in other areas. We expect to identify a growing national group of highly successful schools on whom we may draw and, more widely within each partnership, identify outstanding T4W teachers to whom we may refer for support to other partnerships from time to time.

Thus, there are five aspects to the programme:
  - a training programme for school leadership teams;
  - 3 training days for all teachers (the first of which includes teaching assistants as well), which require three agreed school closures
  - implementation, staff development, monitoring and evaluation by project teams in schools;
  - a partnership conference at the end of the programme
  - developing school-to-school support to identify, use and develop capacity.

We are confident about the potential of this work for improving progress and achievement but, at this stage, much of the evidence is still unsystematic. For this reason, we have secured support from the Education Endowment Fund for a pilot programme which is under way in Portsmouth, to help us move towards a stronger evidence-based approach with more scientifically founded evaluation data. We will look to each partnership to evaluate their progress within a common framework to add to this evidence base.

The cost per school is £12,000, plus VAT which is reclaimable. This is invoiced in two tranches over the two years so schools would need to budget for 6,000K per financial year. This is equivalent to less than 5 pupil premiums per year so, for most schools, is relatively modest by this comparison.

RATIONALE:

What is the 'Primary Writing Project'?

The aim of the 'Primary Writing Project' is to motivate children and teachers as writers, deepening understanding about writing and refining skills so that children make good progress and standards are raised. The project is based on clusters of schools, with a similar interest in improving writing, working collaboratively over time. Each school has a 'project team' that meets regularly, developing and lead the project in school. Every teacher and teaching assistant will also have whole day training sessions.

Although many teachers are already aware of *Talk for Writing* and may have attended conferences or seen examples of *Talk for Writing* practices, getting to grips with the practices effectively takes time. Experience shows that where all teachers embark on the core strategies, spend time collaboratively refining each key aspect and deepening their understanding, schools begin to establish whole-school systems that they have found to be highly effective in raising standards. A key element of this programme is to establish processes from previous projects that have proved effective, in order to create a coherent approach to teaching writing.

The project is a whole-school, cumulative and systematic process for teaching writing, based on what has been developed in many schools, to help children make faster progress and gain confidence as well as pleasure in becoming writers. It is grounded in the processes of shared writing with a strong and systematic focus on securing the basics of handwriting, phonics/spelling and grammar in relation to what is needed for progress and the text type being taught. It is also founded on the principle that schools should increase the amount children read/are read to and establishing a very strong 'literature spine' which identifies key stories, picture books, poems and non-fiction which will be read and drawn upon and referred to when teaching writing.

Talk for writing is based on deepening our understanding of language development and how writing might best be taught; and there is still much to be learned. *Talk for Writing* projects involve teachers in researching the processes needed to develop young writers. It is therefore a shifting and dynamic process through which we are forever developing our understanding. It is less effective when reduced to simplistic class routines without teachers thinking carefully about what is happening and adapting their teaching as they learn. Over time a set of core practices has developed (e.g. learning texts orally, shared writing, etc.) which would be central to any 'talk for writing' school. However, each school develops the work in different ways, according to their school community, discovering what systems work in their context

Over time, children gradually build their bank of well-known texts, supplemented by picture books, novels, poems and non-fiction books. Gradually this living library of language begins to equip the children with the words they need to express themselves. In the same way, the ability to manipulate that bank of texts increasingly enables children to create new versions and become inventive, blending and experimenting.

Constant shared writing also develops writing habits within the class community of writers. Each year, new strategies and techniques are introduced, building on previous learning and giving children confidence as writers. A central concept is the importance of children enjoying writing/creativity, being praised for 'trying hard' so that children's confidence and self-image as a young writer is enhanced. If we all try hard then we will all have every chance of making progress.

The 'Primary Writing Project' focuses on helping teachers deepen their knowledge about how to teach writing effectively and develop the skills needed. The challenge is how to work together to establish common practices across schools that are highly effective and deeply satisfying for teachers and children?

The impact

Many schools have found that daily 'talking the text' has a dramatic influence on progress in composition/writing. For instance, the initial teacher research focussed on children in Reception classes. At the start of the year only 2% of the sample were able to retell a whole story. By the end of the year 76% retold a whole tale. In a study carried out in Lewisham (reported in 'Stories to tell, stories to write') 100% of the primary age pupils tracked made average progress in writing and 80% made 3 or more sublevels progress in one year. By contrast, the same pupils did not make such good progress in reading with 73% making average progress and only 33% making 3 sub levels progress. Interestingly, boys made better progress than girls.

It is worth noting that the teachers involved in this project had attended a one-day conference, followed by support from their local literacy consultants. Complex developments require time, attention and support. The published booklet 'Stories to tell, stories to write' provides useful case studies that illuminate the teachers' and children's journeys as storytellers and writers. It also highlights the value of 'Talk for Writing' for children who have English as new Language as well as those who struggle.

To track progress with the youngest children, it is worth spending time recording. A simple strategy is to ask them, 'can you tell me a story you know' and 'can you make up a new story for me'? It is important to turn these recordings into transcriptions to make later comparisons easier. By the end of the year ask the same pair of questions and compare results. On the original project many children had no clue about stories, some explained that they had no books at home and had not been read stories. A typical response came from one boy:

Q. Can you tell me a story you now?
A. Um, this is the story of … they went to buy stuff. And that's the end, it's only that.
Q. Can you make up a story for me?
A. A fishy story um, um. Ummmm, I don't know really.

Within several weeks of starting 'Talk for Writing' nearly every child can retell a story. At the end of the year, one of the reception children on the original project is asked by the teacher to retell a story. There is a long silence and then he says, *'the trouble is – I know so many that I don't know which one to tell!'*

A more recent study in Salford by teachers at St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School showed that the approach works very powerfully for children who have English as a new language – indeed, compared with a control group in similar schools, those pupils benefiting from the 'talk for write' approach on average made outstanding progress (reported in 'Learn it, say it, write it!').

Currently, a *Talk for Writing* project is under way with a pilot group of primary schools in Portsmouth. This is being evaluated by the Institute of Education under a grant from the Education Endowment Fund. Results are not due until 2014 but early indications of progress are very encouraging. A number of other partnerships are now under way and the programme is gradually building up.

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DELIVERY:

PRIMARY WRITING PROJECT
T4W SUMMARY

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LEARNING TO WRITE: THREE 'I'S
Imitation
Innovation
Invention

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TEACHING: THREE 'T'S

Teaching – shared and guided writing, together with a repertoire of activities for promoting the 3i's

Texts – schools construct a balanced programme of poems, stories, novels and NF texts in a progression of half term units across the school

Toolkits – focus, in context, on:

- generic language features progression – sentences and grammar, connectives, paragraphing, vocabulary development and choice, punctuation, spelling and handwriting;
- Text specific writer's toolkits – characters, settings, plots, dialogue, paragraph types, style, playscripts etc. PLUS one toolkit for each NF text-

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DELIVERY

Whole school training days focus on:

- understanding 3Is model
- shared and guided writing processes

Project team days focus on:

- Reinforcement of above
- Texts, toolkits and related activities
- Whole schools planning for progression
- leadership, monitoring and support strategies

Leadership by Project Teams in schools focus on:

- Leading, modelling and supporting the teaching
- Ensuring common practices across school in line with non-negotiables and vital signs
- Developing texts and toolkits into a common school planning framework
- Monitoring and formative assessment to ensure progression
- Establishing sustainable structures and systems for continued development

SUMMARY OF TRAINING DAYS In principle, this programme could be started in any term, subject to negotiation	
	HT = headteacher day (preliminary meeting) PT = Project Team day BD = Big Day for all teachers and teaching assistants – requires agreed school closures
Preliminary term	HT1 all schools preliminary meeting
1. Term 1	PT1 all schools BD1 50% of schools (teachers and TAs from all schools) BD1 50% of schools (teachers and TAs from all schools) PT2 all schools
2. Term 2	BD2 (all teachers without TAs) PT3 all schools
3. Term 3	PT4 all schools HT2 all schools
4. Term 4	BD3 school closure (all teachers without TAs) PT5 all schools
5. Term 5	HT3 Heads only evaluation meeting
6. Term 6	Partnership Conference (encouraged but not required)

Criteria for schools selection

- school's Ofsted report i.e. does the school have capacity to participate and contribute? We are seeking schools with a high level of commitment who will participate actively. We are not expecting to include schools where there are evident issues of management, staff turmoil etc., or where there are other major priorities on the agenda that might divert attention from T4W;
- quality of school management: capable and motivated leadership where there is an identified need to improve progress and attainment in literacy e.g. these might be schools with Ofsted 'requiring improvement' grades, but can also include schools with 'good' ratings who still to improve literacy;
- ideally, a partnership would be a 'mixed ability group' where there is potential for self-help and school-to-school support;
- schools with relatively disadvantaged socio-economic profiles e.g. relatively high Pupil Premium FSM, and other measures;
- school sizes i.e. a reasonable balance of numbers in relation to types and sizes of schools and the overall numbers in the partnership, relative to our capacity to deliver training, particularly on the schools closure Big Days.

Non-negotiables

Schools joining the project should expect to adopt the T4W model as their framework for teaching writing. The model carries implications for school leaders and teachers. Among these, and with appropriate training and support, we will expect the following to become non-negotiable elements for each participating school:

- a commitment by everyone to making the writing process a positive and enjoyable experience for children;
- adoption of the 3i's teaching framework described above;
- agreement by head, relevant senior staff and governors to develop, sustain and monitor this work over the initial two-year period, ensuring that everyone stays on the case;
- involvement of every teacher, plus a defined and substantive role for teaching assistants;
- identification of at least one leading teacher to model practise and support colleagues, and a commitment to enable classroom visiting within and between schools;
- over time, to develop a school-wide progression of key fiction and non-fiction texts for each half term across all years with teaching plans, developed by schools, for their own use, making grammar and language features explicit;
- regular and extensive shared, guided and independent reading and writing in every class to teach relevant writing skills and increase motivation and confidence to write;
- daily age-appropriate skills practice and teaching of phonics/spelling, vocabulary and sentence-level work in every class;
- common practices including children's writing journals and class-based strategies for text-building and drafting;
- a clear emphasis on writing for audiences and purposes to make writing relevant;
- regular and systematic formative assessment by teachers to focus teaching, involve children in their learning and to secure progress;
- parent/carer involvement.

Summary of programme content:

In principle, the course of the training, like the T4W model itself, marks a progression from dependence to independence by the schools so that, as the programme moves on, schools play an increasingly proactive part in running the sessions for themselves with leadership and support from us.

The pattern below could start in any term and continue over a period of 5 – 6 terms depending on what schools feel best suits their needs. The length of the programme tends to be determined by the pattern of school closures that can be achieved across the partnership for the Big Day inputs. Each programme is made available as a 'package' on the basis of pre-planned schedules which allow us to organise the work strategically across a growing number of partnerships.

We ask schools to agree four school closures; three of these are for Big Day inputs for all teachers and relevant TAs, while a fourth would be reserved for running a partnership conference. This conference should serve two purposes: to celebrate the work of the partnership schools and to disseminate T4W processes and successes with other schools.

The programme is principally directed at the participating schools but we also expect to use it to build capacity from which others can benefit. The conference could be an important step towards this. We also expect to identify a number of able and skilled school leaders and teachers, and a number of schools where, as their work develops, we can send others to observe and train. This additional activity will form part of a wider process of scaling up the T4W programme to make it more widely accessible and it gives participating schools the potential to work at the leading edge of a wider initiative.

For any partnership, there will be a degree of flexibility in the programme to allow us to accommodate the needs of particular groups and also to learn and refine things as we go.

HT = headteacher day (preliminary meeting)

PT = Project Team day
BD = Big Day for all teachers and teaching assistants
NB In practice, there is some flexibility about which terms each day appears in, subject to negotiations for dates in each partnership

TERM -1	HT1	Setting up: – The shape of the programme: expectations and commitments – Times and dates for meetings and school closures – Data collection – Business matters – EEF evaluation process – Summary of actions
TERM 1	PT1 – all schools project teams	– Learn and prepare to teach story text KS1 and KS2 – Understand the T4W rationale – Roles of the project teams – Action to begin implementation.
	BD1 **school closure**	– Imitation and innovation: teaching poetry and fiction
	PT2 – all schools project teams	– Feedback and review of progress – Securing the T4W teaching sequence across the school – Planning a unit of work – Making a start on whole schools planning
TERM 2	BD2 **school closure**	– Imitation and innovation: teaching non-fiction
	PT3 – all schools project teams	– Feedback and review of progress – Sentence level work – using grammar for effect – Grammar progression and writer's toolkits – Sentence level games and activities
TERM 3	PT4 – all schools project teams	– Feedback and review of progress – Vocabulary development – Teaching vocabulary – Comprehension and word choices for writing – Word level games and activities
	HT2 – all HTs and possibly some other senior staff	– Visit to a successful T4W school for lesson observation and input from the HT on implementation and strategy etc.
TERM 4	BD3 **school closure**	– Review of progress – Invention and creativity in writing. – Levels of innovation leading to invention – Progression and differentiation across the school
	PT5 – all schools project teams	– Reading strategies – Talk for reading – Implications for schools reading policies
TERM 6	HT3 – all schools Headteachers only	– Programme evaluation – Next steps – Preparation for the partnership conference

	Partnership Conference **school closure**	– To be determined by schools

School to school support is also a key element in our strategy. We will encourage, e.g.

- sharing and building resources together;
- inter-school visiting to learn from and support each other;
- the creation of particular cross-school interest groups e.g. literacy coordinators, Y2 teachers etc.;
- shared PD e.g. for inducting new teachers, supporting TAs, sharing strengths etc.;
- identification of 'leading light' teachers whom we might use to support others or help us develop the programme and use as capacity in support of other partnerships;
- visits to, and consultancy from, successful schools beyond the partnership;
- etc.

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