



Case Study: Bringing Talk for Writing to India

Every year I work for part of the summer holidays in India, with The Teacher Foundation (<http://www.teacherfoundation.org/>), a teacher-training organisation based in Bangalore. In July 2014, I was asked to work with a cohort of pre-service teacher trainees, ranging in age from seventeen to early forties, on the content of the Indian primary English curriculum, and its interactive delivery, covering all four strands – listening, speaking, reading, including phonics, and writing – from class 1 to class 5. Not only had the trainees to grapple with the content of the curriculum, but also with an interactive methodology hitherto quite unknown to them.



The course was very intensive: six hours per day, for three weeks. Written homework was given every evening to consolidate material covered in class. The trainees could all speak and write English as a second or third language, but none was fluent. My portion of their nine-month course was preceded by an initial intensive six-week spoken English course to ensure access to the ensuing modules. All the trainees were being prepared to teach in what are known in India as 'low cost private schools'.

Talk for Writing is embedded in Raynham Primary School in London, where I teach, and I decided to use it to deliver the writing section of the course. It was an entirely new concept for the trainees in a country where rote learning and copying from the board are the - norm, but one to which they took like ducks to water.



We worked with both fiction (Red Riding Hood; Little Red Hen...) and non-fiction (The Polar Bear; The Tiger; The Coconut Crab; newspaper articles on an escaped temple elephant, an escaped criminal...). The production of original written work, whether fiction or non-fiction, is rarely taught or expected in India, so becoming able to do this was a very big step for these student teachers.



The Talk for Writing approach engendered spoken and written confidence in the trainees, just as it does in children, but it also sharply accelerated their written English: at the end of the module, TTF assessed their written English and reported to me that, 'We are amazed at their writing.'

Moreover, Talk for Writing works well in a country like India where low-cost, no-cost materials are a must in schools that have few resources. Kitchen paper, felt pens, string and pegs were all that were needed to create a classroom which would be recognisable to any Talk for Writing teacher in Britain. In addition, Talk for Writing engendered a level of collaboration between the students which none had experienced before in their education, and which they realised to be highly conducive to academic progress.

It will be interesting to find out this summer, when I am again in India, how they are using their new learning, no doubt adapted to their own particular classroom circumstances, as they begin their teaching careers.

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