



Leading Talk for Writing in your school

Talk for Writing expert Alison Cooper provides a few useful suggestions on how to lead an effective Talk for Writing project.

So, the day's over and everyone is buzzing about Talk for Writing and eager to get started but, if Talk for Writing is going to have a real impact on children's writing outcomes then it needs strong and committed leadership and the following suggestions may help you to plan for this.

Getting ready: before the training day

You may have attended one of Pie's conferences and, like everyone else, you've left inspired and keen to share the approach with your staff and pupils so you have arranged an INSET day with a TFW Trainer.

Before the INSET, have you got all the staff (teachers and TAs) together and given them an overview of TFW? If you've been using the approach with your class, share the outcomes. If staff can see the value of a new approach before the event, they'll be raring to find out more!

Are all the SLT on board? Will everyone on the staff be attending the training day – Headteacher, Senior Leaders, teachers, TAs and maybe your Governor with responsibility for Literacy? It's crucial that everyone understands the Talk for Writing process and has shared responsibility for implementing TFW and raising standards in writing.

Have you written an action plan for achieving your vision? How will you get there? What are the intended outcomes? What does achieving your vision actually look like? You may decide to revise this after the training day but it's a good idea to know where you want to be heading right from the start.

If you're a big school, who's going to work with you? Can you build a small team? You can't do it all alone.

Have you thought about how you're going to monitor the implementation of TFW and build this into the school's monitoring cycle?

Have you booked in follow-up staff meetings/professional development meetings? It's a good idea to book one straight after the training day and then monthly until TFW is really off the ground. Each meeting could have a specific focus. These could include: tailoring stories to the needs of the class, warming up the word activities, shared writing, boxing up, working walls and anything else which arises incidentally.

Getting going: within a week after the training day

Meet with staff to follow up any issues from the day. Share your vision, your action plan and the time frame. Everyone needs to buy into this so be as open as you can. Most schools start with a narrative unit so you may ask everyone to use the TFW approach in their next unit. Ask colleagues to take photos, make recordings if possible and keep all the story maps, toolkits etc and samples of children's writing as the unit progresses. This will give a focus for future professional development meetings.

Agree the key connective actions that you'll use across the school and share the progression document you can find on the Talk for Writing Resources webpage. Make sure that you and everyone else are really clear about what progression looks like both in terms of text and language features. Build Grammar learning into each unit so that it's contextualised.

If you are already working with the TFW approach, demonstrate to colleagues how you go about planning a unit so they have a model. Some less confident staff may like you (or other team members) to plan with them or work alongside them. Collaborate.

Make sure that teachers have an appropriate text to use. Suggestions of where to find texts will have been made during the training days and it may be best to start with a text that's already written but which can be adapted to the needs of the class.

Agree on the date and focus for the next professional development meeting.

Talk about how you could involve parents and carers.



Keeping up the pace: over the next few weeks

These first units are a time to explore what's worked well and what hasn't; an open and honest discussion is needed here. You need to create a culture in which colleagues are prepared to have a go, review and evaluate, adapt practice and share the ups and downs with each other. Some staff may be flying; others may need some support.

The second and third units are really important if TfW is going to embed and raise standards in writing. Leading change can be difficult so keep modelling best practice and sharing children's outcomes with staff. Discuss how you've overcome obstacles. Stay positive and committed! If colleagues can see the impact of the TfW approach on children, then you'll keep them on board.

Perhaps you can open your classroom door so that staff can come and see how you approach shared writing or story mapping or whatever is the sticking point. Make sure that you're drawing on those colleagues who are really underway with TfW to support you and others, developing and extending the team. Remember: "If you're not doing shared writing then you're not teaching writing." (Pie Corbett)

Share success. Perhaps an assembly when each class tells their story and share the writing that has resulted? Talk with pupils, give time to looking at each other's story telling areas, working walks and/or washing lines and select pieces of writing which show real impact to form part of display in a central part of the school.

And onto becoming a Talk for Writing school

Start your monitoring.

Is TfW in every classroom now? If not, try to work out why and address this. What will you expect to see and hear in classrooms (age appropriate texts, adapted to need, text maps, children telling stories or texts, washing lines, toolkits, shared writing, actions for key connectives, story-telling areas, inviting reading areas, enthusiasm and engagement, role play and drama as children explore texts and so on...)

Is teachers' planning though the Imitation, Innovation, Invention phases secure? What evidence is there of writing across the curriculum?

What will you expect to see in books? Is there clear progression through the school? Can you see the language patterns and features, plot structures and vocabulary reflected in children's writing? Are children drawing on the toolkits? Is Grammar being taught and applied? Is teachers' marking giving formative feedback to pupils?

Pupil conferencing.....how are children responding to TfW?

As TfW develops, teachers will want to write their own texts. Guidance for this can be found on the Talk for Writing Resources webpage.

Some staff will automatically be applying the TfW approach to non-fiction. Share and develop this in on-going professional development meetings. Now may be the time to revise the school's overview of Literacy texts and Literacy units so that you can link fiction and non fiction.

Monitor and evaluate against your action plan. What are the successes? Celebrate them. How will you take TfW forward?