



Case Study: Talk for Writing at secondary level - Thomas Becket Catholic School, Northampton

How Talk for Writing helped move Thomas Becket Catholic School, Northampton, from special measures to 80% good or better for teaching and learning in just one year.

When I joined the school as Assistant Principal and Director of Teaching and Learning, the school was in a difficult place. We were in Special Measures, had a large number of temporary staff and a recent round of observations suggested that the quality of teaching and learning was weak. We had a huge mountain to climb.

Myself and three other members of staff had already received a year's worth of training in Talk for Writing from Julia Strong as part of a project in Northampton, so we felt that we were familiar with the concept and were confident in embedding the strategies within our own teaching practice. We felt that we were in a position to develop the programme across the whole school – but where to start? How would we do this? These were the big questions we asked ourselves!

So, in September, 2014, we found ourselves in a scheduled slot on the first Inset Day after the holidays. Once we had recovered from the initial panic, we decided that the first task we had to complete was to sell the vision of Talk for Writing to our colleagues. We knew the approach worked, but how could we convince others? We started our presentation by showing students' work – the cold task and the hot task. We deliberately selected the work of well-known characters across the school so staff could easily see for themselves the impact of the approach. This was a key part of the process – by showing the effect of Talk for Writing and linking it clearly to student progress, our colleagues had the 'buy in' we wanted them to have.

We then started to introduce some strategies that people could take away and use in their teaching practice. Strategies such as the "Great Fire of London" card sort and dominoes were our initial starters and we set them the challenge of using at least one Talk for Writing activity before half term. We also asked for our Literacy Champions to attend a further meeting that day where we introduced further Talk for Writing strategies. Our Champions were then given three weeks to try out these approaches

and to feed back to us their strengths and areas of developments. Once colleagues felt comfortable with using these strategies in their subject areas, they then fed back to their Faculty at the termly Faculty meeting. Colleagues observed the Literacy Champions using these techniques and began adapting them to fit their schemes of work. By the January Inset, staff completed a questionnaire that reflected on the Talk for Writing approaches used. We held Learning Walks in the Spring Term, focusing on Talk for Writing, and could see that the approach was making its way to all areas of the curriculum.

During this term, we had a visit from Ofsted. This time, our quality of Teaching and Learning had risen dramatically to 80% Good or Better. I believe that this is linked to the implementation of Talk for Writing across the school.

We still have a long way to go until we can say that Talk for Writing is embedded across all curriculum areas, but we are on our way! Staff and students are familiar with the strategies and the quality of writing is improving. Students can quickly see their progression in a short amount of time and are now motivated to write. It is exciting to see how much progress can be made with this approach!

We ensure that by the end of F1, each child is exposed to and can retell a bank of at least 4 stories, using key language, actions and props, and are beginning to create their own story maps. At the end of F2, the children will be able to retell a further 6 stories and will be able to create story maps, re-write the familiar stories and are beginning to create their own versions of these stories, but with a difference. The children all thoroughly enjoy the whole process (as do the adults!) and are always really excited to begin a new story experience.

