



‘Talk for Writing is potentially transformational’

Louise Hamilton, deputy head at John of Gaunt School explains how external and internal support for Talk for Writing is transforming teaching and learning at her school in Trowbridge and is celebrating the school’s new status as a Talk for Writing Secondary Training School.

For the past eighteen months, The John of Gaunt School (JOG) has been developing the Talk for Writing approach as its core teaching and learning methodology. Inspired by the success of other secondary schools who had adopted the strategies, and impressed with its impact in some of our feeder primary schools, we contacted the TFW team in summer 2017, to seek a programme of training for our staff.

Year 1: Trialling the ideas

Term 1: After being trained by Julia Strong in September 2017, the English department and a cross-curricular Project Team spent a term experimenting with the various aspects of the approach and were amazed by the impact it had on students’ thinking skills, oracy and, of course, writing. Students who had struggled with knowing how to start a piece of work, or with constructing a specific text type, could suddenly fly with the structure provided by the Talk for Writing process.

Term 2: Having collected examples of how Talk for Writing was impacting their students’ progress, the Project Team presented these as a ‘showcase’ on the first whole school training day in November 2017. Seeing respected colleagues demonstrate the power and potential of the approach was inspiring for staff and created enthusiasm for the rest of the training day with Julia. Although the whole day was interactive, engaging and inspiring, the highlight was watching the entire staff and governors act out the mime for ‘A fox is not a pet.’ This provoked much laughter and proved that the best learning happens in an atmosphere of fun and enjoyment as pictured below!



Developing the approach

Now that everyone was trained in the TFW process, colleagues started to discuss how this could be best developed in different subject areas, and to experiment with different aspects of the approach.

The English and History teams experimented with text mapping very early on and found it to be a powerful tool for helping students ‘tune into texts’ and recall their pattern and structure. Science and PE were among the first to experiment with mime, and how it could help students with recall of key terms and processes and help them enjoy subjects as this [short science clip film illustrates](#).



MFL were able to map much of the TFW process straight onto what they already do as skilled language teachers, but quickly reaped the benefits of introducing a boxing up approach to plan longer writing activities. The Maths team was pleasantly surprised to discover that much of the approach was relevant to them and devised their own ‘boxing up’ grid to help students show their working.

Students responded well to their teachers’ unified approach to writing, and to the common



language provided by the approach (e.g. cold and hot tasks, 'Never Heard the Word' grids and boxing up). One of the most useful aspects of TfW for students and staff was the focus on model answers, both co-constructed and de-constructed as part of showing students how excellent writing is put together. As expertise accumulated, twilight training sessions were run by members of the Project Team to share best practice and stimulate ideas.

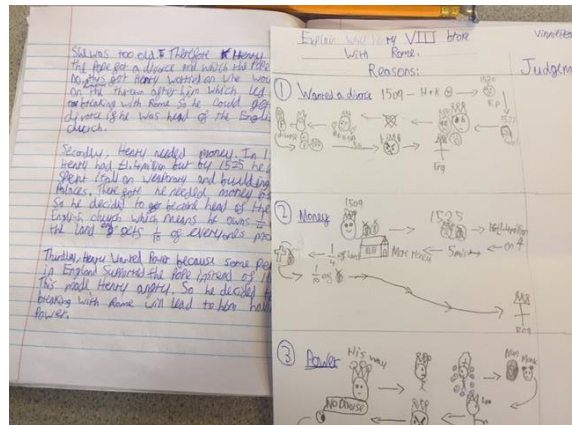
By terms 5 and 6, it was clear that TfW was already making a significant impact on students' progress, and a Good OFSTED inspection of the school found this to be the case, stating that, 'the recent introduction of T4W has been well-received and its impact was evident in lessons visited by inspectors.' (May 2018). This impact was made even clearer when the GCSE English exam results were received: the classes taught by members of the Project team attained the highest progress scores in the department, having had negative progress scores the year before.

Year 2: Embedding the approach

Terms 1-4: September 2018



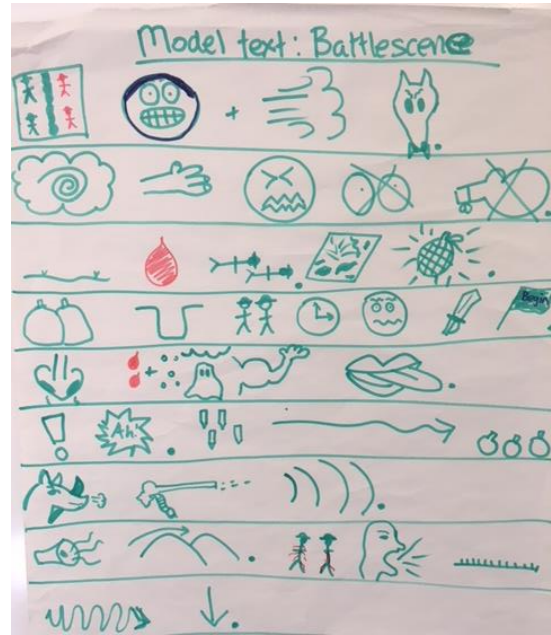
Year 2 of TfW at JOG started with a second whole staff training day from Julia Strong, who led us through more advanced application of the approach. A second 'showcase' from the Project Team illustrated how their TfW practice had evolved throughout year 1, and outlined the clear impact of the approach on students' progress. It was uplifting and inspiring to begin the new school year with hands-on learning for teachers, and the collaborative approach to activities resulted in some fabulous ideas and insights.



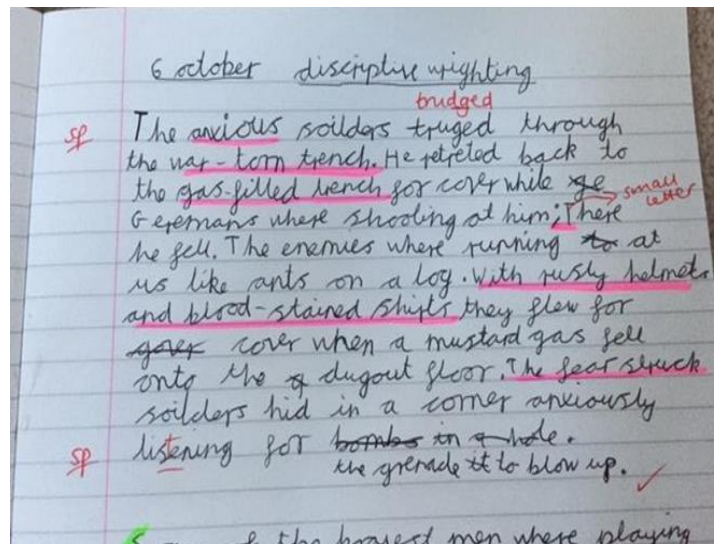
Even before we began our TfW training back in 2017, it was clear that our overarching aim for Year 2 would be to embed the approach in longer-term planning, as consistent use across all teams and key stages is essential for its success. To this end, subject areas have been given protected time this year to work on developing resources (e.g. model answer banks, vocabulary-based activities), and to integrate TfW strategies within their schemes of work. Teams have also had the opportunity



to share best practice in their subject areas through termly TfW briefings, many of which have been run as subject-specific mini-Teachmeets, where colleagues can share ideas and discuss what has and hasn't worked in their lessons.



This year, twilight training has once again been delivered by members of the Project Team, who continue to inspire their colleagues with their enthusiasm for the approach. The Project Team has also been involved in supporting staff with embedding the strategies by dropping into lessons to offer 'incremental coaching'-style feedback. In addition to receiving drop-in visits, teachers have been able to sign up for more regular coaching from a member of the Project Team, to help them gain confidence and expertise in an area of TfW that they find more daunting e.g. text mapping or mime. A recent evaluation suggests that this offer of support is much appreciated by staff, and that those who have received more regular coaching have developed as TfW practitioners.



Although we are aware that we still have a long way to go to fully embed TfW throughout our school, we now feel that we are far enough on our journey to be able to train other secondary schools who are interested in adopting the approach. Our direct experience tells us that TfW is an incredibly powerful teaching and learning toolkit, that develops students' metacognitive toolkit, as well as their oracy and their writing skills. Most importantly, our students tell us time and again that it really helps, and their improving rates of progress show us that this is indeed the case. As a National Leader of Education said on a recent visit to JOG, the effect on a school that truly embraces and embeds the TfW approach can be "transformational".