



Talk for Writing™



# Beginning our Talk for Writing Journey by Caitlin Jones, Coastlands CP School, Pembrokeshire

“Can you tell me a story?” “Uhhhh...”

This was the all too common response from my Year 1 and 2 children when conducting their first ever cold tasks. It was clear that they did not have the variety of vocabulary to create an interesting story, despite having heaps of imagination. Stories are to be shared, enjoyed and are cemented in human society, yet so many children are not hearing stories often enough.

Pie Corbett and Carol Satterthwaite have delivered two training days to our school cluster in Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire. After the first day, I was excited by the process and of course the potential for dramatically improving children’s literacy skills. As all our cluster teachers were present for the training, it felt like something we ought to be excited about.

The day left us with a multitude of ideas which we were keen to start sharing with the children right away. As a small staff (the head teacher and four teachers) we were able to discuss immediately ways to begin the process. The first term definitely felt like ‘having a go’, but the children responded enthusiastically to the first story. So far, the process was proving beneficial in supporting children with articulating their imagination in a coherent and interesting way.

## Imitation

Using a storymap and actions proved extremely effective in learning the story inside out – the imitation stage. Even during the first telling of the story, the children began noticing the patterns and either joining in or completing the next sentence – brilliant! The picture-based story map and actions for key connectives meant that all the vocabulary was fully accessible for all the children in the class, no matter their age or stage.



Lingering over the text in the way required for this stage allowed for more discovery and embedding, therefore a better independent application. It could be so easy to rush through this stage but choosing a challenging text and taking the time to fully understand has been crucial.

The children are always excited to bring their story maps home and practice with their families.

Using the story as a stimulus for cross-curricular learning has worked well. When we learnt the text 'Kassim and the Greedy Dragon', children were retelling the story on the outdoor stage, creating storymaps and conducting experiments to create the frost from the story. This led to a deeper understanding of the vocabulary used in the text.

## Innovation

The innovation stage has been a time to celebrate the children's creativity. Something I quickly learned was how valuable it is to bank these words and ideas that come from the class discussion on a second piece of flip chart paper. (Realising you've forgotten to do this halfway through and attempting to write with both arms really doesn't work!) Using another adult to scribe the children's ideas during shared writing provides them with support when writing their own during the innovation stage. This part of the process needs to be snappy and quick paced - when you've got a carpet full of restless 7-year olds, I'm sure you'll agree!

## Independance

After our first fiction unit, the progress in storytelling ability was apparent. The powerful sentence openers and variety of connectives they became so used to repeating, began to slip into their oral storytelling and their independent writing. Progress could be seen in every classroom. As a school, the hot and cold tasks have been invaluable in presenting this progress.

Initially, some staff dabbled with Talk for Writing. It is now being used across the school and this has brought consistency to our teaching. Adopting an open-door policy has also been vital in sharing best practice. At the end of my first year using Talk for Writing is a good time to reflect and looking at how far the children have come along their own storytelling journey!

- *"I love acting out the stories – it makes me feel like we're in the story!"* – Bella, Y2.
- *"Learning the stories has helped me to create my own stories, as well as getting to know more about adjectives, connectives and paragraphs."* – Eva, Y2.
- *"I enjoy writing my own stories and Talk for Writing has helped me to understand how to make them more interesting!"* – Millie-May, Y2.
- *"I love all the adventures we have learning the stories!"* – Lola, Y2.
- *"Talk for Writing has helped me learn more about writing and improved my spelling."* – Emily, Y2.

