

Talk for Writing in a Bespoke Bilingual

Context

By Jessica Waghorn

Bromsgrove School Mission Hills is an innovative bilingual school based in Shenzhen, China. We have developed a unique programme that blends best practice from both East and West. We follow a co-teaching model of learning; with Overseas and Chinese teachers working together to support students learning in our dual language context.

If you have had the opportunity to be part of a team creating something new and exciting, you will know it is accompanied with its own set of unique challenges. For us, it was how to create students who were confident and independent communicators, not just in one language, but in two.

Launching Talk for Writing

We began our Talk for Writing (TfW) journey with a whole school training session with Fran Beers an amazing UK trainer. It was important for all staff, both Overseas and Chinese teachers, to attend as it was vital everyone had a strong and shared understanding of the approach. This was our first step to ensure we were using Talk for Writing as a communication tool and not a just an approach to teach English; which would be key to making Talk for Writing successful in our bilingual setting.

Our next step was to develop a Talk for Writing project team. The team consisted of teachers across both Pre and Prep School, many with previous TfW experience, ensuring they could support and encourage consistency across the whole school. The project team planned and implemented a whole school TfW launch during Literacy week using *The Gingerbread Man*. The week would have two main aims:

- To generate excitement within the whole school community about Talk for Writing.
- To establish a love for reading and stories.

To generate excitement we used videos, mysterious flour foot prints, cooking and tasting sessions and a 'real' gingerbread man creating mischief around the school, who was eventually caught, questioned and made to apologise. To establish a love for reading we created a reading



TalkforWriting



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galaxy collecting stars for every book we read, held a readathon, told bilingual stories and invited parents and teachers to share their favourite stories.



Oh no! The Gingerbread Man is causing mischief!



Sharing a book during our Readathon.

Both of these aims were important for the cultural context of our school. Chinese education deeply values reading yet traditionally, in order to demonstrate this value, it is simplified within curricular documents to a listed number of words to be read per day, term or year. This is due to a variety of factors such as the size of population combined with the need for a simple way to measure the amount of characters read. However, we wanted to utilise the deeply rooted Chinese value and demonstrate it in a way more meaningful for our learners.

Each step we took as a school was to create a sense of community with this new adventure. Our English language learners were no longer taking the risk with their language alone. Children and staff, from all language backgrounds, were partaking in a shared experience. We were sharing in the excitement of a mischievous Gingerbread on

the loose, learning to story map together, making mistakes with story language and new vocabulary, and then finding ways and actions to help us remember and improve. This “shared risk taking” and the notion of “safety in numbers” created a safe environment for language learning, but at the same time fostered excitement and high expectations.

Parental Involvement

After a successful launch we began to focus on building parental involvement. If we were to create a school community who loved stories and valued reading, we needed parents to understand why we had chosen Talk for Writing in our bilingual context. The project team ran a coffee morning inviting parents to take part in some activities based on the story *Dear Zoo*. It was vital for us to highlight to our parents that although this approach seemed drastically different to traditional language learning, it did have similarities to traditional Chinese language development.

Traditionally, Chinese language is taught in large classes with a more didactic approach focussing on memorisation and repetition. Repetition and memorisation lends itself to the imitation stage of Talk for Writing. Quickly, it became apparent to our parents that at the very core of TFW was an approach they were comfortable and familiar with. Then with help from a special delivery of zoo animals and some fun language games, we were able to explore how incorporating creativity and innovation deepened and complimented their children’s language learning.

Talk for Writing Progression

With all of our learners, it is important to provide engaging hooks and real experiences for them to refer to, enabling them to attach meaning to the new language being introduced with each story. Some examples of this are baking and tasting Gingerbread men, receiving the Little Red Hen’s tools in the post and holding A Wild Thing’s Party.

To begin, we predominately focus on oral storytelling and inventing. In the early years, we initially tell the story in the children’s native language to develop and strengthen their understanding and confidence. Then we progress

to using a second language to aid language development. Storytelling through play is encouraged in the child’s chosen language. This encourages translanguaging to take place. Translanguaging is when a child freely moves between and uses both their known languages to communicate. This not only enhances language learning but allows the learner to access a greater variety of learning opportunities.

Once the children are in Prep school, we focus on immersion in English for our stories. However, TFW strategies are used in both English and Chinese lessons. Children become familiar with storymaps, guided writes and reads and boxing up in both languages. This allows them to master the techniques and tools needed to be successful.



Where the Wild Things Are Party – Prep 1

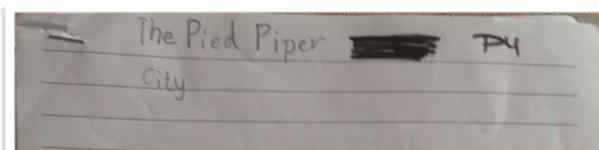


Story Mapping in Chinese Class.

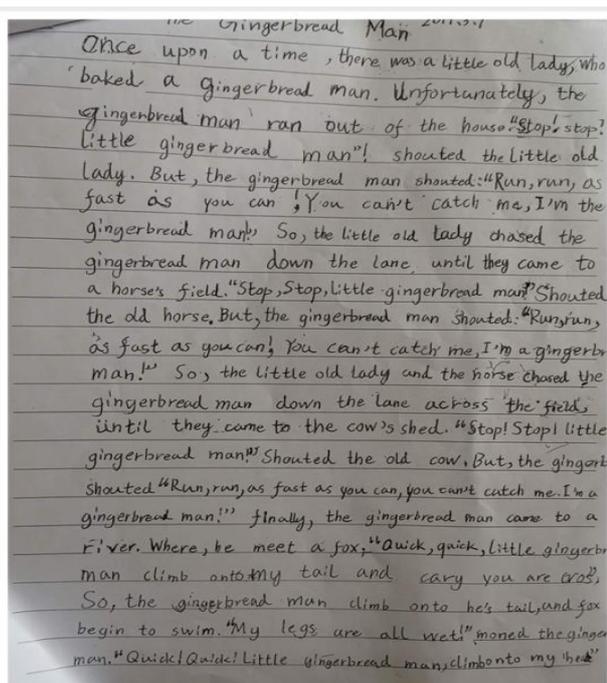
Student Impact

The biggest impact Talk for Writing has had so far is on our student's confidence. Children are not only capable, but also now willing to share their stories and ideas. Whole cohorts have shared stories to parents and visitors in assembly. Children who were reluctant speakers are now confidently innovating well known stories. This confidence has had a positive effect on their language development as a whole. Even from our youngest students, story language such as "after that" and "next" is beginning to be used in their play and general conversation, in both languages. Our older students have started to make the link with reading and imitating the language they have read, both orally and in written form.

In our upper years the progress in writing has been noticeable. Below is an example of a cold task and then a piece of writing during our first TFW unit. In the cold the child is only able to write the word "city", which he accessed from word aids in the classroom. In the piece of writing from the imitation stage the same child is using punctuation, story language and adjectives.



Cold Task – P4 Student



Writing during imitation stage - P4 Student

Another positive outcome is the link between home and school has been strengthened. Parents are invested in the approach and want to be part of it. They share books, create story maps together with their children, send videos in to class showing new, invented stories and help creating exciting and engaging hooks.

"It has aroused an interest in Kingsley in commanding the language, be it in life or study. He is acquiring more and more vocab as well as adjectives to enrich himself in his conversation." - James Toh (Parent)

"It has helped my child practise his English in many different ways. He likes to draw a story map after he has heard a story and tries his best to write it down. He now likes to tell the story to us and make his own. TFW has helped my child learn English in a good way." - Jade Yan (Parent)

Parent's comments about TFW.

Moving forward

Looking to the future, our main goal is to continue to build on the strong foundations and progress from this year. Our immediate plans include recruiting more UK staff with a background in TFW as well as offering more training to our existing staff, with the aim to improve our independent writing and incorporate more non-fiction writing.

Long term, we aim to use TFW to help us work smart. Teaching in a bilingual, inquiry-based school with a bespoke curriculum means our daily schedule can be tight. Integrating TFW in our inquiry units and specialist subjects will enable us to offer our unique curriculum in deeper and more time efficient way.

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