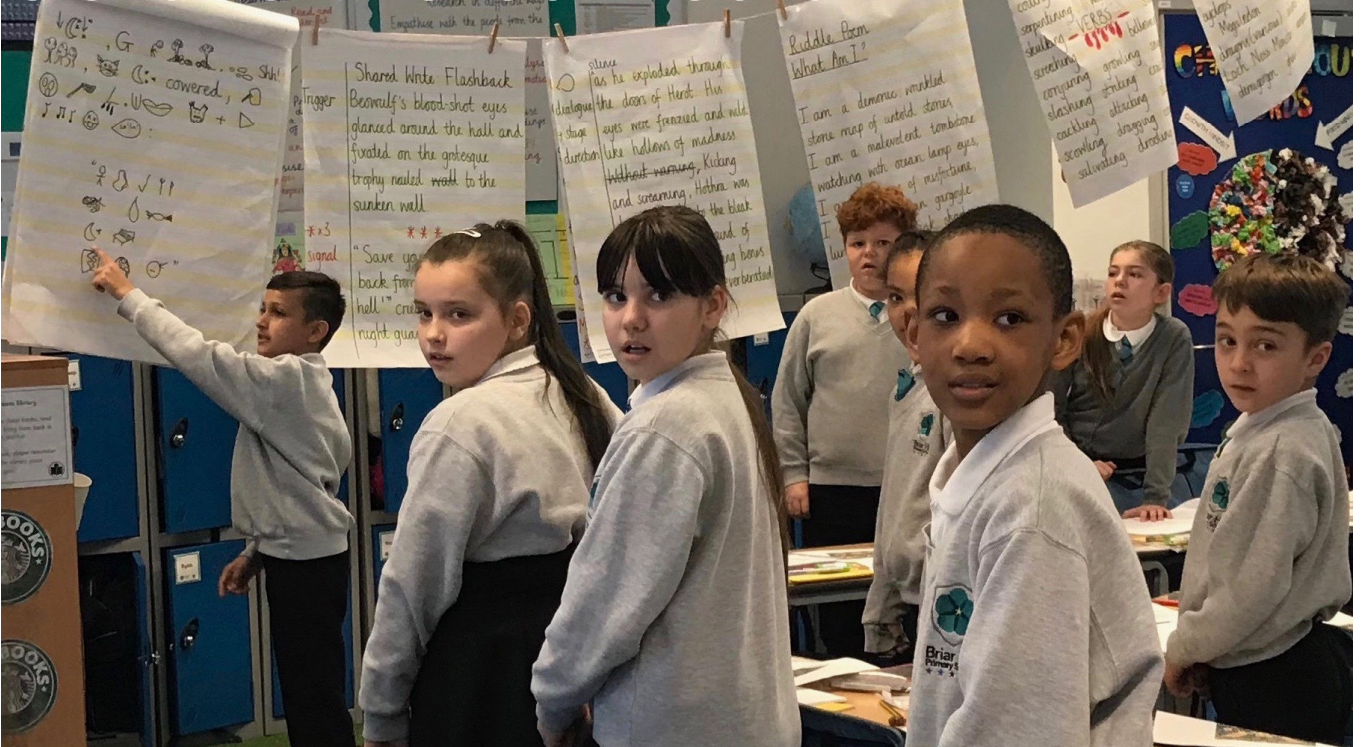


Transforming learning across the curriculum



Julia Strong explains how the Talk for Writing approach lays the foundations for talking your way to an understanding of any subject. This is the focus of Pie Corbett and Julia's latest book *Transforming learning across the curriculum* released in September 2020.

This is the key that unlocks the door to language across the curriculum: the key to helping all children make progress; the key to closing the learning gap.

Flashback 45 years to 1975, and *Language for Life* (aka *The Bullock Report*) told primary and secondary schools in England to develop a policy for language across the curriculum. In theory, it sounded all very constructive. It was hoped it would help solve the great divide in our education system which, sadly, is a perfect illustration of the Matthew Effect: poverty is linked to slow language development; the linguistically rich get richer, the linguistically poor, poorer. The divide grows and grows. Research released in August 2020 suggests that the literacy gap was widening even before it was exacerbated by Covid 19.

Creating a meaningful approach to language across the curriculum in practice has proved to be as elusive as closing the learning gap. This unsolved problem haunted me until, in 2005, I watched Pie Corbett involve his audience in

how to help children internalise a model text: 'Once upon a time, there was a boy called Charlie who lived in a big, big city ...'.

I suddenly thought that this was a gloriously simple solution that could make language across the curriculum meaningful. The very simplicity of talking the text could enable any learner of any age or level of attainment to familiarise themselves with the tune of whatever subject they were learning, not just the tune of storytelling. The tune of a subject is its underpinning generic phrasing and technical vocabulary (academics sometimes refer to this as *disciplinary literacy*).

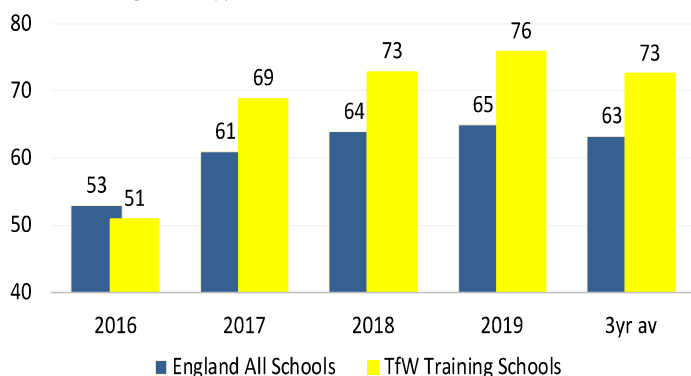
This is the key that unlocks the door to language across the curriculum: the key to helping all children make progress; the key to closing the learning gap.

2019 KS2 combined attainment

Increase of 25% points 2016-19 (England Schools +12%points)

Double the national rate of improvement. Just over 3/4 of Year 6 children achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2019

Talk for Writing cohort approx. 880



And so, from that moment on, Pie and I have worked together on developing the Talk for Writing (TFW) approach not just in English lessons in primary schools, but in all subjects and for all ages.

Just look at the graph of the combined results of the TFW primary training schools, illustrated here, compared with the national average results. The results in maths, reading and writing are impressive. This is even more remarkable when remembering that the intakes of most of the TFW schools are very challenging. Something is happening to enable the very children who are often doomed by the poverty-related, postcode lottery that has haunted this year's exam results to shine through and develop their full potential.

Transforming learning across the curriculum tells the story of how this was achieved by taking the reader through how to adapt the TFW approach to suit the needs of any subject area for any age group. (Readers not familiar with the approach in English can find out all about it at talk4writing.com.) We initially concentrated on how to write creative English and then further developed the approach to embrace non-fiction within English. For English, the process usually focuses on expression, particularly through internalising the tune of a model text and analysing its structure and language features.

In any other subject, expression is still important but, without an understanding of content, there is nothing to express in science, history, maths, etc. Therefore, the process has been adapted to suit the needs of the content-based subjects. Here you can see that the content of any subject can be warmed up by focusing on its vocabulary, key phrases and concepts, alongside text

mapping it, acting it out and, most powerfully of all, explaining it to others – all ingredients of the TFW process. In such a manner, pupils talk their way to an understanding of the content of subjects before internalising a model text or process to help them write or perform in the appropriate tune of the subject. In effect, they can talk like a mathematician, a scientist, a historian ...

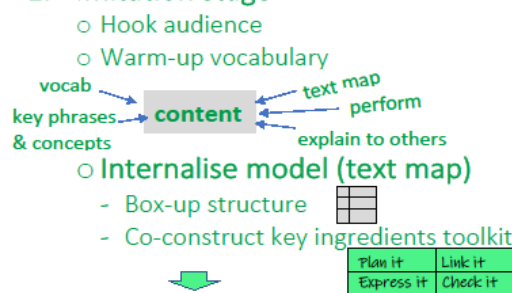


Talk for Writing process across the curriculum

Planning stage

- Cold-task baseline ← 1 week before unit
- Adjust model text & planning

1. Imitation stage



2. Innovation stage



3. Independent-application stage

- Complete hot task on own
- Reflect on learning: compare cold/hot tasks
- Decide next steps

The opening chapters of the book take you through this process, including how to ensure that you get the model text right, alongside the centrality of focusing on the technical vocabulary that underpins the content and the linking phrases that will help the pupils express their ideas coherently. It explains how to ensure that understanding is co-constructed so the learner can explain what they have learnt clearly. This is followed by a wide range of chapters written by teachers showing you how the approach works in practice. The book is accompanied by over 60 online videos plus teacher's notes to support schools in using the material for staff training.

Though the focus is on upper KS2 and secondary, there are lots of references to KS1 and some film clips from KS1 too – so it is easy to see how the approach can be developed right through primary school.

Some of you will already be familiar with the work of TFW teacher and trainer Jamie Thomas because of the free greater-depth TFW units he wrote to support schools, children and their parents during lockdown, along with his blog based on the lessons he did at home with his children (www.jamiethomasconsulting.com/blog). Jamie has contributed a chapter to the book called *Transforming creative writing in primary schools* which outlines a unit of work including two model texts and a whole range of related short-burst writing, drama, toolkit and grammar activities to build pupil skills.

It takes the reader step-by-step through how greater depth writing can be achieved.

Anyone who has been to a Talk for Reading conference will know the quality of the work of Tracey Adams from St Matthew's Primary in Birmingham. The online resources accompanying the book include two film clips of Tracey plus a fascinating chapter by her explaining how she has adapted the TFW approach to suit the demands of maths. These paragraphs from her chapter give you an idea of the wealth of practical ideas within the book:

'Integrating the pedagogy behind Talk for Writing into the way we teach mathematics has had a great impact on our children's ability to think and work mathematically, as it is a chance to encounter mathematical concepts and procedures through a successful strategy that they are very familiar with. Prior to this joined up way of thinking, teachers did not have a clear understanding of what children were able to do within a specific area of maths. This meant we needed a way to assess what children were bringing to the table and what they were able to do after a unit of work had been taught. The cold-to-hot-task process helped to bring real clarity to the data teachers had before beginning to teach and gave them the knowledge needed to develop connections as the teaching continued...

We had seen the way that unpicking particular aspects of writing, through boxing up and co-constructing toolkits, had a powerful impact on writing, and we wanted to apply this to maths. It gives children a chance to see a teacher model a particular procedure: then we are able to unpick how this was achieved and identify the steps we need to take and the related tools we need to use to resolve a mathematical problem and achieve an accurate answer ...

'The big concepts which teachers are trying to explore with children can be greatly enhanced by embedding them within the pedagogy of Talk for Writing. It supports the teacher in breaking down the learning into small chunks of teaching, with quality modelling and models at the core of developing children's understanding and application. It enables both the teacher and child to co-construct how to box up structure and create toolkits of key ingredients, which can then lead to independent application. It is a brilliant tool for promoting quality dialogic talk within mathematics and, with thought, can be used as a vehicle for writing in maths, as children's subject knowledge is so secure, they can create their own texts from a place of real confidence.'

The book also contains inspiring chapters from primary teachers on how to apply the approach to science, history, RE and art along with online video clips to demonstrate the approach in action, including a PE teacher with a Y3 class showing how moving from imitation to innovation to independent application underpins good practice in PE. All the teachers comment on how having one underpinning pedagogy helps the children transfer their learning from one subject to another, and helps get rid of the blank-page syndrome. Now they know how to begin: they know how to plan and link their ideas and express themselves appropriately.

A chapter from Selby Community Primary School demonstrates how a year 5 class, by the end of the unit, automatically started their dissection of any history source with the key questions:

What is it?

What does it tell us?

What does it not tell us?

As a result, the children showed huge improvements not only in their writing attainment, the structure of their work and subject-specific vocabulary, but also in their grasp of what it is to think and write like a historian. And this, of course, has raised the children's confidence as well as their interest in history, as these comments reflect:

• *'I found it so much easier to write about the sources when we had the stems to help us organise what we could see and what we couldn't see. I also became really involved in thinking about the lives of others in different times in history.'* – Olivia.

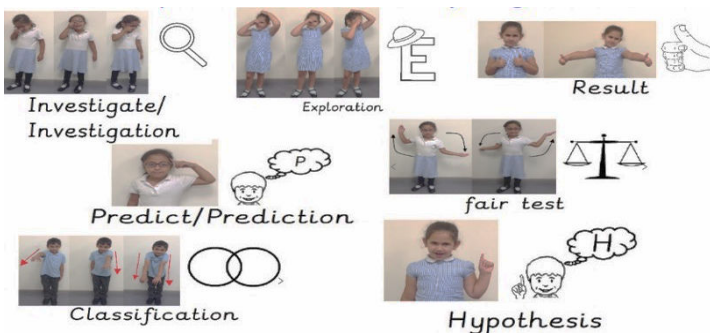
• *'I loved this unit because, even though I enjoy history anyway, this helped me look at sources and bias in a whole new way. It made me question whether we can really trust sources that we study. It became easier as*

we looked at more sources too because I knew how to look at them.’ – Joe.

•‘I feel so much more confident with my historical vocabulary now like, chronological, bias, primary and secondary sources. I feel like if I had to do a task like this again, I would know exactly how to tackle it. My hot task was so much better than my cold task, so I feel really proud about that too.’ – Sofie

Most of the children attending Yew Tree Community Primary in Birmingham have English as an additional language, but the way TFW underpins learning across the curriculum means that the children learn to speak confidently across the curriculum. The chapter on science from Yew Tree explains that:

‘The key aspect of our science curriculum is to build up the children’s skill in scientific investigation. The enquiry game is key to developing the children’s understanding. This is a very quick-paced introduction at the start of every session in which pupils identify the 7 key enquiry types, and link these to actions. A quick memory game ensures children know the enquiry type and can give an example of how it is used. This kinaesthetic approach supports our pupils in using the key scientific vocabulary of enquiry. The image here shows the actions that pupils have internalised from Y1-Y6.’



It is impossible not to be charmed by the video clip that shows a Y1 class from the school internalising technical vocabulary relating to invertebrates. Such an approach boosts the children’s understanding as well as their interest in science so that, by Y6, Awaal could use the text map here to explain his understanding clearly. He could talk like a scientist:

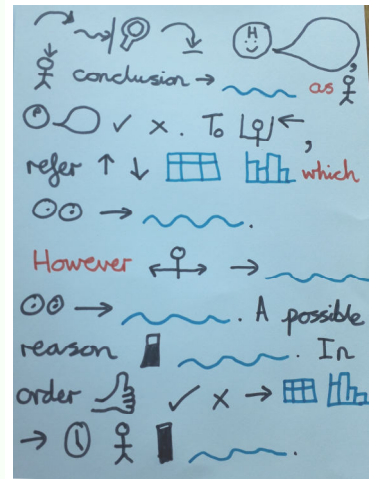
‘After conducting an investigation, based on the hypothesis that the plant that bears the fruit with the greatest mass will have the strongest tendrils, it is my conclusion that the pumpkin had the strongest tendrils as I predicted correctly. To support this, please refer to the table above which shows clearly that the pumpkin plant held a mass equal to 1kg.

However, if you compare this to mass held by the tendrils

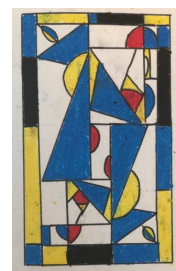
of pea plant, you will see that it only held a mass of 300g. A possible reason for this is that the pea produces very light pods and therefore has not evolved to withhold greater weights.

‘In order to check the accuracy of my hypothesis, I will repeat the investigation with three different plants that differ in the mass of the food they produce.’

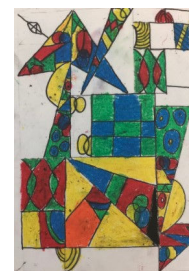
Oral explanation by Awaal, Y6



The chapter from Briar Hill outlining how the approach has revolutionised the quality of teaching and learning in art may surprise some teachers who, perhaps, think that the process isn’t relevant in practical subjects. But, again, art is based on the key stages that underpin learning, as the paintings below by a Y5 pupil demonstrate. This unit on Theo van Doesburg began with pupils concentrating on learning some of the skills that underpin the artist’s work, just as an English unit may begin with short-burst writing to begin to hone the skills that the pupils will develop across the unit. The children then put the skills into practice, first by imitating a Doesburg painting, then innovating on it and, finally, using the skills they had learnt to create their own independent painting.



Imitation



Innovation



Independent application

This chapter explains how the school has structured its art curriculum around two art units per year, per class, to give the children the opportunity to develop their understanding of art and artists alongside developing their own artistic skills. As a result, the school has been awarded the nationally recognised Artsmark, Gold Status, for the quality of its art teaching. Most importantly, the children and their teachers now love

their art. These comments from teachers at the school speak for themselves:

• *'It has helped me really understand how to teach progression in art and teach in a way that supports all children to reach their full potential.'* – Hollie Tranter, Year 2 teacher

• *'This way of teaching art is so powerful. Children as young as 8 years old are given the scaffolds to be able to analyse famous pieces of art like Salvador Dali's Galatea of the Spheres – it's astonishing!'* – Laura Allen, Arts Lead and Year 3 teacher

• *'Talk for Writing in art has revolutionised the way I teach art! It gives the children a richer and more meaningful experience of art. From the '3 Is', to the children's outcomes, to the models and boxing up of art analysis, art Talk for Writing style covers it all when planning deep, rich and meaningful art lessons.'* – Katie Cross, Year 5 teacher & Assistant Headteacher.

Sadly, there has long been a divide in England, and perhaps across the whole of the UK, between the work of primary schools and secondary schools. But we have found, not surprisingly, that the sectors can learn so much from each other. Secondary school English teachers have told us that the work they see in Year 6 in Talk for Writing primary schools sometimes outshines the work their Year 11s achieve. One grammar school English teacher commented, interestingly, that she felt they were just asking the students to write rather than teaching them how to write. The Talk for Writing

approach enables pupils to build up their skills in any subject step by step.

We feel confident that subject teachers in secondary schools will find the chapters from primary subject specialists useful, just as we are sure that primary school teachers will find much that they can adapt from the chapters written by secondary teachers. Anyone looking at the film clip of Year 9 pupils from Slough and Eton confidently text mapping the content of complex scientific text will see how the approach could be adapted to help pupils remember content and engage with its meaning in any subject.

You may think that an explanation on how an A-level philosophy teacher has used the approach to co-construct understanding of the ideas of Plato and Aristotle isn't relevant to a primary teacher, but this work was inspired by work on the Fire of London, which was originally done for primary children.

You may think that an explanation on how an A-level philosophy teacher has used the approach to co-construct understanding of the ideas of Plato and Aristotle isn't relevant to a primary teacher, but this work was inspired by work on the Fire of London, which was originally done for primary children. The underpinning process is simple and effective; the complexity of the text being accessed can be altered to suit the needs of any class. If anyone on your staff thinks Talk for Writing just suits KS1, a glance at the chapters from secondary teachers should cure that. In the words of history teacher Stu Gray from The John of Gaunt School in Trowbridge:

'Text mapping is both really fun and really powerful: it bridges the gap between vocabulary and understanding. You can't begin to draw an image to represent the meaning of a word or phrase without understanding what the word means, and the picture stays in your mind, but you can write it down without any understanding. It's a great way of underpinning understanding and increasing retention. It's been brilliant and makes it a pleasure to teach, so I hope what I've written helps to explain the beauty of Talk for Writing.'

Hopefully, teachers will find the book as inspiring as these endorsements suggest:

'Who'd have thought Talk for Writing could make such a difference to maths, PE and science? Packed with riches, the powerful TjW approach is applied in this book to the entire curriculum by the experts Pie and Julia, with outstanding results. You will find everything you need to be transformative in developing students' language acquisition and confidence in writing, no matter what the subject. Detailed rationale, links with cognitive science, endless practical examples across the upper primary and secondary curriculum and exemplary chapters written by teachers: get started!' Shirley Clarke, Formative Assessment Expert

'In Transforming Learning Across the Curriculum, Pie Corbett and Julia Strong offer a compelling and eminently practical approach to mobilising effective writing in the classroom. This book is packed full of useable strategies, whether it is for English or maths, or in primary or secondary school classrooms. A wealth of interesting school case studies bring alive the thorough, step-by-step 'Talk for Writing' approach for the teacher-reader. Highly recommended!'

Alex Quigley, National Content Manager, Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

Transforming learning across the curriculum can help every school to develop a practical and meaningful approach to language across the curriculum. This, in turn, should raise standards across the curriculum for all our children and wipe out the inequalities of the postcode lottery. The final words should be Pie's. In his foreword to the book he wrote:

'If we are to transform the life opportunities of every child, then teaching subjects through this approach is vital. After about half a century, we now know what language across the curriculum looks like and how to use it to raise standards. The aim of this work is about whole school transformation and, therefore, the transformation of students' lives.'

Talk for Writing in the Early Years (Open University Press, 2016 & 2020)

Talk for Writing Across the Curriculum (Open University Press, 2011, 2017 & 2020)

Jumpstart! Grammar (David Fulton, 2014 & 2016)

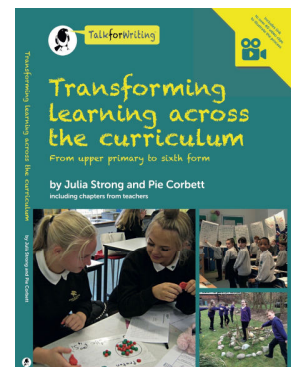
Creating Storytellers and Writers (Talk for Writing, 2017, 2018 & 2020)

Transforming Learning Across the Curriculum (Talk for Writing, 2020)

Julia Strong is a former English teacher, deputy headteacher and Deputy Director of the National Literacy Trust. She is an outstanding trainer for secondary schools, and is also the author of a number of best-selling books including the *English Frameworking* series, *Literacy Across the Curriculum* and *Talk for Writing Across the Secondary Curriculum*.



Pie Corbett is an inspirational trainer, poet, author and editor of over 250 books. A former teacher, headteacher, lecturer and English inspector, Pie is famous in the education world for the transformational Talk for Writing approach. He has been working with Julia Strong on developing this approach since 2005. Pie and Julia have co-authored the following books:



Available from the Talk for Writing bookshop:
<https://www.talkforwritingshop.com/>

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- Talk for Writing in KS2
- Secondary Level