

Evaluation Summary	
Age range	Primary (Year 3 and 6)
Number of pupils	c.360
Number of schools	10
Design	Pilot using matched comparison group
Primary Outcome	Writing

EVALUATION OF 'TALK FOR WRITING'

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TEAM MEMBERS

Professor Julie Dockrell (project leader)

Dr Chloe Marshall

Professor Dominic Wyse

Research assistant to collect writing data and enter writing data

Description of the 'Talk for Writing' project

The aim of the '*Talk for Writing*' project is to create a structured programme, based on the work of Pie Corbett, to train and coach primary school teachers to enhance pupils' writing skills. The programme adopts a threefold and cumulative approach, aiming to enhance writing skills by 'imitation' (learning texts and stories by heart, and discussing and dissecting them); 'innovation' (guiding children to adapt stories and write their own versions); and 'invention' (where children create their own text, with varying levels of support). The project aims to effectively change teacher behaviour and embed the approach in classrooms to improve children's writing skills. During the second year of the project a programme of training with relevant materials and resources will be created.

The current evaluation is designed to work in collaboration with the project delivery team to capture the feasibility of the programme for wider dissemination. The evaluation aims to examine the impact of '*Talk for writing*' at three levels: pupil, teacher and writing product.

THE EVALUATION PLAN FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The project aims will be examined through a combination of (1) quasi-experimental data collection from teachers and pupils, (2) observation work and interviews with schools, and

(3) a rigorous evaluation of the project materials in relation to previously published peer-reviewed studies. Each of these dimensions is addressed in detail below.

The *'Talk for writing'* project evaluation is a preliminary study to assess the feasibility of a wider scale randomised trial and to allow further development of the materials. As such the design does not translate into a randomised control trial and cannot meet the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials. Nonetheless a quasi-experimental design using a comparison group is essential to draw conclusions about the potential impact of the programme and, hence, a justification for a subsequent RCT. Quasi-experimental designs can provide a robust understanding of program practices and features and provide initial evidence of programme efficacy. To evaluate *'Talk for writing'* a comparison group is needed

- i) To evaluate the claims about the impact of the *'Talk for writing'* programme for teachers and pupils and
- ii) To monitor the potential confounds arising from the changes to KS2 writing assessments in 2013, which now include a spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and grammar assessment and are likely to impact on the teaching of writing in schools.

A quasi-experimental design is utilised where schools in the locality, who are either waiting to engage with the *'Talk for writing'* programme at a later date or schools matched for size and attainment serve as a benchmark for changes in teachers' knowledge and perceptions and pupils' performance.

Differences evident in pupil performance between the intervention and comparison schools will point to the potential impact of the writing programme. However, a quasi-experimental design will only provide indicative evidence to inform whether there is value in attempting an RCT. It will be unable to identify causal mechanisms of change (1). Complementary process evaluation will allow for the analysis of barriers and drivers of change and thereby provide an assessment of issues raised from implementation of writing interventions in typical school settings.

Methods

- a) The project is premised on "a lack of focus on writing and specifically composition skills" in schools. As such, teacher-reported behaviour and teachers' attitudes to writing instruction will be sampled in target and comparison schools prior to the project start and again one year after the initial roll out. This will provide baseline and comparative data on reported practices.
- b) The project specifically aims to address composition skills through a range of activities at word, sentence and text level. To mirror these dimensions pupil's writing will be assessed at these levels. Baseline measures for all children in Years 3, 5 and Year 6 will be collected in target and comparison schools prior to the project start and six months after the project has been rolled out and for year 3 and 5 pupils again one year later (January 2014). Year 3 is used as the lower age group as there are no standardised writing measures for pupils below

the age of 8, reflecting the significant variability and difficulties in written text production before this age. We will, however, request KS1 SATs results for writing from all schools in the project for comparative purposes. Schools will be asked to provide to Key Stage 1 and 2 assessments from previous years and for Year 1 of the project writing for comparative purposes.

- c) Assessing writing: Writing will be assessed in four ways: handwriting fluency, idea generation, sentence combining and written text to a prompt. The text will be scored both analytically and holistically. Holistic scoring will be derived from the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test II scoring frame. All texts will be anonymised prior to coding.

These measures will allow us to establish writing levels at baseline for target schools and also provide comparative data at follow up for the intervention and comparison classrooms. The measure will allow us to profile pupils' writing in terms of mechanics, vocabulary, organisation and structure, and as such will provide important information in relation to the development of any subsequent materials. The writing assessment will be administered by a member of the research evaluation team

- d) During the roll out period whole day observations of two or three classrooms in all the target schools will *take place*. These observations will focus on the implementation of the approach including the use of resources across different year groups. Observations will be semi structured focusing primarily on the teachers' fidelity to the aims of the programme, and in particular to the ideas of imitation, innovation and invention. They will also document some basic elements of the classroom environment. Observations will be recorded as field notes either by hand or on tablet computers. Semi-structured interviews with teaching staff about the lesson, the utility of the approach, particularly the concepts of imitation, innovation and invention, will take place at this point in time. The key person who has overall responsibility for implementation of '*Talk for Writing*' in the school (perhaps head teacher, but not necessarily so) will also be interviewed.

- e) During the second year of the project the processes that are used by the schools to embed the programme within the curriculum will be examined. The materials which have been produced will be evaluated against recent meta analyses and controlled trials (3-8). Where appropriate we will relate this to curriculum and policy developments but the the main focus will be empirical studies providing evidence of effective interventions. As the materials are based on a programme which has not been evaluated the final documentation will be mapped to the current evidence-based criteria to examine which aspects of the writing process are included in the programme and whether the approaches advocated have, at least, indicative to support their inclusion in the teaching of writing at different phases of primary school. Interviews with the key person who has overall responsibility for implementation of '*Talk for Writing*' in the school will also be

interviewed about their overall perceptions of the project- what worked well and what changes could be made to improve impact.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was received from the IOE's ethics board.

Data collection and analyses

Quantitative data will be collected at teacher and pupil level. To ensure that relevant moderator effects can be addressed, data on free school meal status, special educational needs and English language status will be required for all pupils. We anticipate collecting teacher data over the internet using Survey Monkey, thereby allowing the immediate processing of the results. Pupil data will be entered manually into SPSS. Sample sizes will have sufficient power to detect differences across schools and, as appropriate, normalised gains scores can be used to track progress between from baseline to follow-up. Significant differences between target and comparison schools terms

Interviews with schools examining the process of embedding the programme in practice will be analysed using qualitative techniques, where relevant themes will be identified and similarity and differences across schools examined.

To justify funding a subsequent RCT we would expect

- a) Clear and measurable differences between target and comparison schools on teacher knowledge and reported behaviours;
- b) At least indicative quantitative differences in pupil performance on written composition as measured by our standardised measures;
- c) Positive evidence from the qualitative data that the programme entails significant pedagogy worthy of larger scale implementation in the context of the new national curriculum in England.

Risks to the evaluation

We have identified four main risks to the evaluation: lack of engagement of comparison schools, problems with online questionnaire and target schools partial or non-involvement in the project. We would aim to identify additional comparison schools to ensure that loss of data due to drop-out would be minimised. In addition we would offer all comparison schools relevant feedback about pupil data and questionnaire data in the summer term following the final data collection point. We have piloted the use of online questionnaires and this has worked successfully in the past. Where schools request a paper version of the questionnaire this will be provided. We will be depending on the schools supplying the relevant SATs data and as such will need to ensure a system of anonymity. Collection of our own writing measure ensures that we will have data for children at least at two time points on a standardised measure. Should a target school opt out of the project we will endeavour to interview key staff to ascertain the reasons for this. There will be sufficient pre and post data collected to provide results if one school were to discontinue their involvement.

Overall evaluation

The impact of the programme will be addressed by examining relative changes in teacher reported behaviour and student writing performance between target and comparison schools. Process evaluation will be addressed through observation of embedded in the classroom activities and the planning and organisation of the management team in relation to *'Talk for writing'*. In addition the intervention package will be assessed by a comparison with the extant evidence base matched to developmental phases of writing.

Notes:

Julie Dockrell will manage the project, liaise with stakeholders (including attending necessary project meetings) design and analyse the questionnaire and undertake some school visits.

Chloe Marshall will take a lead in creating the classroom observation schedule, complete some school visits and support Julie in the analysis of the quantitative writing data.

Dominic Wyse will take major responsibility for collecting and analysing school process data and complete some of the school observation visits. The research assistant will administer, score and enter into the appropriate statistical package all the standardised assessments of writing and, where appropriate merge these with KS2 SATs writing results.

The final report will drafted by Julie, Chloe and Dominic. All three will undertake any necessary dissemination of project results.

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