



Notes to support using the video clips for staff training

When watching the video clips, remember you do not have to agree with what is happening – indeed, the clips have been selected to show somewhat different approaches, occasionally giving contrasts. For instance, guided writing in Matt Custance's class at St George's, Battersea, takes place in a small, side room where the children work quietly and concentrate with his support. By contrast, children at Yew Tree, Birmingham are working in the playground where the noise level is higher. Whilst the session is not as controlled, the children are happily experimenting. The video clips are there to stimulate thinking about what works. We share these videos in a spirit of professional support and collaboration – opening up our classrooms so that we can all have the opportunity to think about how we teach and how children learn. In the end, it is not so much how we teach that matters but what is the effect of our teaching on children's learning. Please remember that at the time of filming these were very successful schools.

It is worth sharing the video clips in groups and use them to stimulate discussion about teaching and learning. The teachers and settings/schools represented have been successful in raising achievement but tackle Talk for Writing in slightly different ways. However, they all share certain features:

- a belief that all children can learn;
- the use of assessment to focus teaching/intervention;
- high expectations;
- the importance of getting an early start for learning;
- the importance of play to explore, extend, revisit and internalise the imaginative world of story as well as the language;

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- the need for direct teaching for the youngest children;
- the importance of ensuring higher achieving children are challenged while the less confident have scaffolds to help them learn;
- a belief that everyone can succeed;
- the need to develop positive work habits such as ‘trying hard’;
- the use of actions to make language memorable and drawing maps to capture what we say visually.

One of the key aspects of these schools is that they have developed their approaches thoughtfully without listening to other people’s dogma. For instance, some children in a nursery will be able to learn basic phonics and spell simple words such as ‘shop’. Of course, many children may not be able to do this. These teachers are discovering that sensitive and thoughtful teaching means that many more young children can learn stories and rhymes as well as beginning simple reading and writing than perhaps is commonly thought. These are teachers and schools who defy the common view. It is, therefore, worth putting aside your beliefs and prejudices about teaching and learning. Watch the video clips and think about what there might be in these approaches that could supplement your repertoire as a teacher.

Talk for Writing is about play. ‘Imitation’ helps children internalise language and will build the imagination. ‘Innovation’ is structured play and ‘invention’ is free play. If the adults involved tell stories and rhymes, and read and write with children, then the children will play at these things. As the children begin, then we can help them start to acquire the skills that they will need through direct teaching. This does not mean that we bore children or excessively drill them. It does mean that we plan, recognise and seize the moment to model, instruct and support the next steps.

Chapter 1

Clip 1. The centrality of language development

Pie begins by emphasising the importance of teaching vocabulary to support children’s language development suggesting that vocabulary is often ‘the least taught thing’. He demonstrates how connectives, the conjunctions and adverbials that allow you to link your ideas, are key to fluency. He then explains why having the words to express your thoughts is so essential and the importance of providing a language rich environment so that everyone can make progress.

Discuss: Which points are particularly relevant to your setting?

Clip 2. Why narrative and story reading is so important

In this short clip, Pie demonstrates why it's so important to read stories to children and why 'Can you tell me a story that you know?' is such an important baseline question. Hearing stories gives children an imaginative world peopled with characters, settings and possibilities. It gives them the language and phrases with which to tell stories. They start to be able to talk like a book.

Discuss: Why reading stories to children is so important.

Clip 3. Why enriching young children's language matters

Key points from the film:

- Children primarily learn language by hearing it and saying it.
- Storytelling and Reading: 70–80% of vocabulary comes from reading. Therefore, we need to read quality literature to children and not just 'phonic readers' which may be necessary for early reading but do not provide great literature and a range/depth of vocabulary.
- Story is a key indicator of educational success – children who are read to, and who read to themselves a lot, are the most likely to succeed.
- Story gives children vocabulary, effort, concentration – it helps them to sit, listen and join in – also story equipment (characters, settings, possibilities) vocabulary, sentences, as well as developing the imaginative world ... and it develops abstract thought. Children who are read to a lot can think about things that are not actually there – this helps them understand abstract concepts across the curriculum.

The clip then focuses on how to help children develop language through:

- Modelling language: it is important to model the language that we want the children to acquire, e.g. the narrative architecture. We need to model key language and sentence patterns in different situations. It is helpful to listen to ourselves, and others, to see whether we actually do model language and sentences.
- Recasting language: we need to notice immature utterances and be in the habit of gentle recasting – repeating what a child has said and putting it into a mature standard form and reflecting it back. This is not 'correction' just calm recasting.
- Extending: we also need to repeat what has been said and add a bit – developing children's ideas.

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- Learning language through – ‘memorable, meaningful, repetition’ – we need to use words at least 6 times in different situations for children to begin to acquire words – and, of course, they then need to be in situations where they start to use these words. So the stories and rhymes have to be repeated.
- Storytelling – making it memorable with actions and maps. Keep repeating a loved story or rhyme.
- Making it meaningful – Talk for Writing will not work unless children understand what they are saying when they tell the stories. Generative grammar is the brain’s ability to generate new utterances on the back of familiar patterns – it only works when children understand what they are saying.
- Building in similar patterns to the stories as well as adding new ones, e.g.
 - *Once upon a time there was a little red hen who lived on a farm.*
 - *Once upon a time there was a little old lady who lived by a stream.*
- Internalising the pattern so the children can then use it for themselves, e.g. *Once upon a time there a little boy called Gary who lived in Oxford.*
- Reinforcing key language patterns: Once upon a time, ... who ... ; One day/morning/afternoon/night; First; Next/Later on; After that; Unfortunately; Luckily; so; then; finally; ... happily ever after; but; as; when; because ...
- Developing understanding: by working with the story – drama/role play, costumes, discussing what happened, using objects from the story, re-enacting with toys or puppets, practical activities such as baking gingerbread, so that the children understand the words.

Discuss:

- How are we helping the children to develop their language skills?
- Why is ‘I goed’ a key moment for a child talking in a second language?

Janet Hilary, Headteacher of St. George’s Primary, Battersea, explains why enriching young children’s language matters

At the time of filming, Janet Hilary was the head of St George’s Church of England Primary School in Battersea. In their ‘outstanding’ report in 2011, Ofsted noted that the early years was ‘*a haven of fun and excitement for the youngest children ... indoor and outdoor areas are packed with*

tempting activities ... the writing table is beautifully presented and includes glue and sticky tape to encourage the children to write and seal up secret letters and cards ... they are spellbound during phonic lessons ... phonic lessons are ... a joy and filled with giggling, gleeful responses.' It is worth returning to these words from Ofsted after watching the video clips from this school later on in the DVD. Ofsted is not a body always known for the way it bubbles with enthusiasm but certainly, in this case, they found a touch of magic mixed with real rigour and high expectations.

Context – St George's is in the 4% of the most deprived areas nationally. 64% of children are on free school meals and over 50% work in a second language. They arrive in school at least a year behind on entry to the nursery. When Jan and her deputy arrived, it was in special measures. The nursery was described by Ofsted as '*utterly woeful*' – it was making no difference.

How well does it do now? At the time of writing, this school was inspected in 2011 and rated 'outstanding'. In the last 4 years, they have achieved 100% level 4+ in reading, writing, maths and grammar each year (except one year when 1 child did not make it). They get about 96% on their phonic screening check in year 1 each year.

Attitudes to learning are outstanding and progress in foundation is astonishing.

Key points from the clip:

- They teach from day 1
- Whatever the children gain happens in school
- Leaving children without teaching or direction leads to developing poor habits
- They expect all children to participate
- They develop the talk, so children can 'own their own voice'
- 'We see the light in their eyes when they are in the story world'
- The story world exists in all parts of the curriculum
- They build up a build a repertoire of stories
- They use puppets, acting out, etc. ... 'so through the story they exist, and are significant, and contribute to effect their world' ...
- The approach helps to develop their imagination and creativity

Discuss:

- How relevant are these points to your setting?
- '*All of the mark making and finding your own way*' was creating *bad habits.*' – In your setting, how do you avoid children developing unhelpful habits with early writing?

Chapter 2

Clip 4: Creating a learning ethos

- Discuss why the notion of children coming into school or a nursery having ‘high ability or low ability’ is an unhelpful notion.
- Find out about the work of Carol Dweck and Shirley Clarke.

Some key points from the film:

The three conditions for children making progress are:

- Effort and motivation (trying hard)
- Sensible learning strategies
- Feedback and teaching (knowing what to work at next)

Talk for Writing teachers believe that all children can learn and everyone can improve. They avoid labelling children at a young age as it is counter-productive.

A key point to note is that extensive research has shown that small children need a warm relationship with an adult – they do not flourish if they are with adults who seem punitive, uncaring and lack warmth.

When organising children, they should be in mixed achievement groups so that the children may learn alongside, with and from each other because, if you cannot speak well, then you need to be with others who can speak fluently.

Chapter 3

Clip 5: Learning the model text orally – *The Little Red Hen*

Key points that could be noted from the video clip:

- Don’t make the model story too long
- Perform it communally – all together
- Children should map and retell – some in their own words
- Build in activities to help children understand the words
- Learn the stories together so all the adults know the stories well
- At first, not all the children will join in
- Notice how Pie gradually withdraws from the retelling as the ‘class’ becomes confident

- Notice, too, how he joins in in order to pick up the pace at one point and to give more expression
- Be wary of becoming too 'chanty' in case the children lose the expression and meaning
- Make sure the children know what the words mean
- The retellings should be full of expression and joy
- The children's retellings will reflect the teacher's version
- On the film, the teachers are seated – when teaching children, have them stand and move to the retelling
- Retell with costumes, masks, drum beats ...
- Make the storytelling something of joy and respect the story!
- Once the children know the story, invite parents in before the end of the day so they can sit with their children, do the story together and the map can go home for more retelling
- The stories have to be 'over-learned'
- Start with 'participation' – children beginning to join in – move to 'communal' – children saying the words together – and a few may move through to more 'independent retellings' – where the children retell individually in their own words.

Chapter 4

Clip 6: What babies and young children learn from being read to

Key points from the video clip:

In the film, we see Rosie and her 18-month baby, Sid. Watch the clip and think about or discuss: what is the baby learning and why is being read to in this shared fashion significant?

Then discuss: how can this be replicated in an early years setting? Obviously, you cannot exactly replicate what is happening – however, the atmosphere and the interaction with a loved story can be replicated in a classroom. Is this being done?

This is a list of the sort of things teachers often comment upon:

- Both adult and baby are focused on the book
- There is a loving relationship between mum, baby and the book
- The baby is learning to 'look' at the book

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- The baby is joining in and completing sentences
- Rosie leaves a space for Sid to fill in the rhyming word. But she also tries out leaving the first word and waits to see what happens.
- Rosie leaves a space for the words – it is a routine for them – and she repeats what the baby says, showing gentle pleasure in the words, e.g. ‘tiny’
- Rosie reads with rhythm which can make language more memorable
- Rosie uses expression, e.g. ‘grumpy’
- The baby is learning to look from left to right
- The baby is learning that the words in books are always the same
- There is evident pleasure – a love of reading is being developed
- Baby and mum also move to some words
- Some of the reading is gentle and some more boisterous
- Sid notices the ‘tiny’ dinosaur and points to it
- Sid notices an apple – and Rosie takes the word and puts it into a sentence

Implication 1: In a nursery/reception class, do the adults take every opportunity to read with individuals or small groups, to develop a real joy of reading?

Implication 2: Do we use Big Books with larger groups/a class to share a love of reading and to teach the basics of understanding how books work, e.g. front/cover, author, prediction, commenting on what is happening, discussing preferences (what we liked or didn’t like), relating the book to our own lives, wondering/ raising questions, reading from left to right, ‘joining in’ with the words, applying phonics to help read, discussing meaning, etc.

Implication 3: Is guided reading just about decoding or is the meaning also discussed?

Discuss:

- Are there books that have become ‘favourites’?
- Do the children interact with the book and adult?
- Are the books available of sufficient quality?
- Do parents know how to share books with their children? Have you used Shhhh by Sally Grindley with parents because the way the book is written shows the parents how to read a book with a small child?

- Is there enough 'being read to' in your nursery or reception class?
- Is there a good 'read aloud programme' built around sharing quality literature?
- Do we have enough men reading to children and being involved in reading and writing activities? If not – how can you ensure that boys and girls see that men love reading/writing as well as women?

Clip 7: Baseline Questions

Key points from the video clip:

- It is important to use assessment to focus our interventions and teaching.
- You are trying to find out about both composition and transcription:

Composition: The two key questions to ask are:

- i. Can you tell me a story that you know?
- ii. Can you make up a new story and tell it to me?

These questions will help you discover much about children's ability to reproduce and create narrative. You should also collect evidence from observing the child playing at stories as many children will say more when they are busily wrapped up in playing.

Transcription

You should also be concerned about the child's ability to turn what they say into words on the page. You will need to observe and gather samples so that you understand what the children can do in relation to:

- Pencil grip and letter formation
- Mark making – playing at writing
- Phonics – what can they do orally and through writing
- Drawing story maps to represent what they say

7a-c: Lava telling a story/ retelling a story/ telling her own story

It is worth listening to the three recordings (a, b and c) and discussing what Lava can do and what she needs to help her develop.

7a. In the initial sample recorded in September, there is silence.

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7b. In the Summer retelling of the three bears, she uses a complex sentence with a relative clause and self corrects (who). She uses the immature form of the past tense for 'go', they goed outside, etc. It is worth noting that, in the main, she is speaking like a book in sentences.

7c. The Summer invention transcribed reads as follows:–

Once upon a time there was a bear, a warm bear. He was called Linny. Then he go to the shops but suddenly a pirate came. So a fish, a kind fish, came to save him. Then they go to the castle. Then they had a ice cream. Then they have ... lived happily ever after....

What do we notice? In the main she is using Standard English sentence patterns, has the concept of a 'goodie' and a 'baddie' and the story follows the story mountain arc perfectly. How did this happen?

Clip 8: Assessing progress using the baseline as a yardstick

In September, ask the children the two questions as suggested:

- a. Can you tell me a story that you know?
- b. Can you make up a new story and tell it to me?

Record each child and make a transcript in a special story record book – repeat every half term or end of term to track progress – can they retell and can they invent? This will provide evidence of progress and should be used to think about how to help children develop as storytellers and speakers and creators.

The example from the notebook of a reception teacher in Montgomery shows the benefit of the Nursery doing stories because now they come up into reception with rhymes and stories. You can visit Montgomery and other Talk for Writing training centres – look on the website: www.talk4writing.com/training-centres/.

Use assessments to focus your modeling: to tweak and build in descriptive language and turns of phrase and connecting words and phrases into the stories that the children learn.

Clip 9: Phrases that connect

Agree on a common bank of actions – take photos and display – use in many situations – gradually add more – pass the connectives up each year.

Start with – *once upon a time, ... who ... / one day, ... / unfortunately, ... / luckily, ... / finally, ... happily ever after, ...*

Chapter 5

Clips 10 & 11: Getting to know the text really well

In this section, Pie focuses on the hook and the creative context for a story unit.

The hook – this is the exciting stimulus that introduces the story and gets the unit of work going, e.g. chalky footprints appear, someone dresses up as a character from a story and appears in the classroom. On film clip 11, you see Captain Kim asking the children to get to know ‘The Ugly Duckling’ (imitation) and then write versions of the story (innovation) for his children – as they have been stranded on a desert island!

The creative context – this involves all the activities that happen to enhance the story so that children inhabit the world of the tale as if they were characters in the story. It helps them become familiar with the language and events. It would involve establishing a role play area, drama, using toys and costumes, baking gingerbread, having a chicken in the classroom, a farm visit, etc.

Discuss: Why is the hook and the creative context important?

Clip 12: Shan Holland with her nursery class at Whitley Park

Primary, Reading

Watch the video clip and discuss. This video clip was made very informally on a simple phone camera and captures a daily routine for this group in this ‘outstanding’ nursery. The situation is not ‘set up’ and comes warts and all. It is worth thinking about ‘What is being learned?’ by the children through this activity, e.g.

- Identify the language that is being learned, e.g. *suddenly*
- Identify the different things aspects of stories that the children are learning about, e.g. characters
- Vocabulary being taught, e.g. naughty, angry/cross
- The ability to chant in time, keeping a rhythm/beat
- The language of size
- Counting up to 19
- Listening to each other
- Joining in with a group
- Using actions to match language

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- Speaking and singing together
- Looking at the map
- How the story words are always the same
- Using time connectives, *once upon a time, first, next, so*
- Contrasting language, e.g. *too hard, too soft, just right*
- Learning and enjoying a story

Clip 13: The importance of storytelling

In this clip, Pie leads the teachers in telling *Mr. Wiggle and Mr. Waggle*, a well-known nursery story. It is a simple one to start with if you have never tried teaching children a story. Since the film was made, Pie has added a new bit in as his characters go, ‘up the hill and down the hill and up the hill and down again and round the roundabout’ (which is said rhythmically and you make a circular action with your hand).

The children are learning sequencing, the underlying pattern of a narrative, listening to each other, and story language. On the film, the teachers find it hard to list the language patterns. Here are the ones that Pie has noticed:

Once upon a time, there were ..., open/close, early the next morning, so, then, open, up, down, in, out, all the way to ..., questions, and, all the way home, until.

Pie also mentions the importance of having a daily rhyme, ‘Rhyme of the Week’, so that the children build a bank of rhymes and songs.

He emphasises the importance of story language patterns and having a system across a school so that the children cumulatively build up and internalise a bank of story language to use in their own stories.

Clip 14: Children in Neath, Port Talbot, presenting stories

In this clip, we see a range of children retelling stories – some are imitations, some innovations and some are inventions. There are classes, groups, threes, pairs and individuals. This came from a sustained attempt to establish Talk for Writing across the authority. This film and the one of Charlie retelling the Enormous Potato is taken from the film, *‘Talk 4 Writing – Storytelling and Reading into writing’, made with the children of Tywyn Primary school and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council © 2011 Pie Corbett*. I am grateful to Mandy Thomas, the inspiring local advisor, who led the project with her team Jenny and Alison as well as Richard Jones from the Library service who made the film.

Clip 15: Internalising the text

It is important to move from whole class down to groups down to pairs – gradually removing the scaffolding.

Ways to vary the retellings include – babble gabble, mime it, tell it round a circle, tell it up and down a line, tell it to others, perform for assembly, retell as a mirror or take turns in retelling word by word or chunk by chunk (don't worry about sentences). Remember to keep the maps – this is not a memory test. It doesn't matter if the children alter the tale – in fact some alterations add to the story!

Clip 16: How to help children retell, read and understand a story

What are the conditions for learning a story or poem or non-fiction text orally:

- Hear and say it many times – auditory
- Draw it and look at the map – visual (remember to draw the maps in front of the children)
- Perform with actions – kinaesthetic (get consistency with the key connectives so everyone uses the same).

It also important to use expression and joy when retelling so that the children associate story with pleasure.

You will need other activities that help children understand the text – this may involve drama, using picture, toys, miming words, using film clips, discussing what happens and so on.

Processing the story in different ways means that almost every child can learn. Pie offers a word of warning – don't make the maps too cluttered – keep them simple - and don't use too many actions. The children need to focus on the story rather than remembering actions.

Reading – when they know the story well, turn it into a Big Book so that everyone can read it and notice how it is written down. Of course, you might be using a picture book such as *Dear Zoo*.

Reading as a reader – this involves talking about the vocabulary and oral comprehension. Ideally, you would want to also read other versions, magpieing ideas and language – drawing on other versions to build language and story equipment, ready for the innovation. In this way, we broaden the realms of possibility.

Clip 17: Using a roll of wallpaper as a text map

In the film, you see the conference using a roll of lining paper. This has the advantage of moving from left to right (like writing) but also can be

placed on the ground. Children can then walk along, taking a step for each time they say a new sentence, stamping out the punctuation.

The story is *Cat, Bramble and Heron* that Pie picked up in a school in South Wales. It is based on a fragment of a story held in the National Museum of Wales. Obviously, a teacher or teller has elaborated the tale and so it has been passed on. Of course, when innovating, the teacher can easily change such a long map by using Post-its to change or insert new ideas.

Clip 18: Reception teacher explaining the impact of the approach on children learning English as an additional language

Listen to the film, take notes and then discuss as a group what Katie says.

Katie emphasises that the school backs up the Talk for Writing approach by using ‘Communicate in Print’ picture symbols which allow a visual image to represent words – this is, of course, rather like drawing a map. She talks about the need to give them a ‘firsthand experience’ of the story so that they understand what has happened. She warns against the idea that children might ‘parrot’ words that they don’t really understand, creating the illusion of understanding. She also emphasises the need to repeat the story and process it in many ways so that the children understand and internalise. She also explains how knowing their version really well releases cognitive space.

Chapter 6

Clip 19: The innovation stage

Be thorough in covering the imitation stage as you cannot innovate on patterns that are not secure. Overlearning the story is needed. Only innovate when the story is really well known.

Ways to innovate:

- a. Simple substitution – just make a few simple changes to characters, settings, objects
- b. Addition – adding in description, e.g. adjectives. Move on to adding in sentences and whole scenes. Don’t be afraid of being playful
- c. Alteration – make playful and interesting changes that have consequences
- d. Change of view – retell from a different character’s viewpoint
- e. The sequel – tell the next story. Mr Gumpy ends with an invitation to tell the story of what happens on another day

Basic process for innovating:

- a. Draw and retell a new class map
- b. Children then draw and retell their new version

Provide banks of possibilities, e.g. toys or images to choose from. Spend time building up a bank of possible changes. The weaker they are, the more they need to retell.

Moving into writing

Children should only settle down to write when they know what they are going to say. This releases cognitive space so that the brain can focus on recording their writing.

- a. Work on composition – retell so that you know your story really well.
- b. Transcription – now shift the focus onto writing it down so the children can focus on handwriting, using phonics for spelling as well as using a spelling card to secure common spellings.

Stage the writing over time

Each day, the teacher uses shared writing to record the next part of the story: this can be followed by the children recording their version. Some children may be drawing maps, others will draw an image and write words or a sentence. Some, in reception, will be able to write the whole story over a number of days, especially by the Summer term.

When writing, they need to be able to see the class shared-writing version to support them – and it is also useful to see the original so that they have two models to look at. They should also have spelling/sound mats. Ideally, they will be writing in a quiet area with the support of an adult to ensure that children develop positive habits and can think without a background noise of thunderous play!

Weaker writers should use the scaffolds and hug closely to the original text only making a few simple changes. More confident writers will move away from the model embellishing and altering.

Provide a spelling card for common spellings such as ‘once’ and ‘was’ to develop good spelling habits.

Clip 20: Using Post-it notes to innovate before shared writing

Some people use Post-its, others cross out things on the map and some teachers draw a new map.

Pie models making simple changes to the story that the conference has retold using the lining paper.

Notice that the ‘teaching assistant’ is ‘banking’ the words – with very young children this could be a bank of drawings with the words. In this way, all ideas are accepted and valued and written/ drawn up.

Notice the point when someone points out that penguins do not fly – small children will often come up with ideas that might not seem – logically – to work. However, it is important to enjoy their ideas and not worry too much about the real world. In stories, anything goes.

Pie models making the changes with the help of the delegates in the same way as you would with children. This would then be retold a number of times before the children make their changes and have a go at retelling their versions in pairs.

Then he moves into shared writing. He makes the point that lists of vocabulary and ideas as well as spelling reminders should be displayed. For young children, the main focus is on handwriting and spelling, remembering to leave a finger space. As they become more experienced at writing, you may begin to ‘tweak’ the story at the point of composition as new ideas pop into your mind. However, stick to the basic storyline or you run the risk of confusing everyone!

Notice that the session is fun but the story is gradually emerging. On the flipchart, your handwriting will need to be in the school’s style. Using paper with lines will help to improve your handwriting as it is hard to write on blank sheets.

Notice, too, how Pie savours the words and ideas, repeating them so everyone can hear and enjoy the words. If children do not enjoy words, then they will never love reading and writing. He also re-reads the writing. This is important because the sentences must all flow into each other so you need to model rereading. You will also notice how he sneaks in terms such as alliteration and simile.

A final point is that, during the shared writing, the teacher is training the children how to generate ideas and then choose. It is the inner reader that helps the writer choose what ‘works best’. Pushing for alternatives also encourages children to get into the habit of activating their dormant language.

Clip 21: Moving from imitation to innovation

Katie Hanson and her reception class at Porter Croft, Sheffield, imitating and innovating *The Three Little Pigs*

On the film you see Katie Hanson working with her children. First, they do a retelling of *The Three Little Pigs*. At the start, she puts up some clues which are sentences written with words and using images from ‘communicate in print’. After the retelling, she moves the children into a simple innovation and retelling. Watch the film and discuss. Obviously, you would need to spend time learning the story and building up to the innovation.

Clip 22: Charlie innovating on a story orally

This is a recording of Charlie retelling his first story innovation at the end of September, *The Enormous Potato*. He uses his story map and the teacher gently nudges him along, especially by using hand gestures to remind him of the key story language that he needs to keep the story going – *so*, *next* and *but*. The ending is delightful, as he knows that he has reached the part of the story with the big surprise. Of course, the funny thing is that his teacher taught him the story in the first place! However, he is aware of his audience and tells the story with such joy.

Clip 23: Reading and early writing in nursery

Pie first explains how important it is to help children hold a pen properly.

The following clip from an earlier conference is then introduced by Pie in a croaky voice! He makes a mistake when he says he has ‘never seen this in an infant class’ – he means ‘in a nursery’ (obviously, we have seen many shared writing sessions in key stage 1). However, it is very rare in nurseries – and yet how can children begin to play at something that they have never witnessed?

Clip 24: Lisa Powell doing simple shared writing with nursery children at St George’s Battersea

When we took this film, the teacher first sang a song with the children: this was followed by the children and teacher chanting the story with the help of the story map and actions. The group on the film stayed to join in with the shared writing whilst others went off to play.

We also saw a group playing at the story using a 3D map on the floor, using toys. Other activities included the full range of expected play activities.

When looking at the film clip, think about what the children are able to do – and how this might have been learned. While this is a formal session, it is interesting that children from a challenging area are able not just to join in with such a session but have evidently begun to learn much about early writing and reading. Some teachers feel that this work is too formal but I believe that we should take notice of this because in this school almost every child leaves at the expected level or above. In other words, whatever we think and however we react, this school is one of the most successful schools in the country and we should take notice and confront our own prejudices. As Pie says, ‘We have to be open minded,’ and consider ‘what can be learned from this?’

Teachers usually notice and comment on the following, the children:

- recognise the speech bubble
- are used to talking to a partner

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- can take part in a large group session
- listen to each other
- are working on developing the concept of a sentence, repeating and clapping out the words.
- are developing the sense of a 'sentence' and a 'word' and 'sounds'
- know the everyday word 'I' and can draw its shape in the air
- are enjoying the session and it is a familiar routine
- are aware of the need for finger spaces
- can hear the initial, middle and final sound in 'can'
- are used to rereading what has been written
- are used to the conventions of capital letter and full stop

Note, how cleverly the teacher talks about the adverb, the word that describes how he runs – 'fast'. To my eye, the session is quite short and well focused. While we might not all approach early writing in quite the same way, there is no doubting that the teacher has taught these children some very useful notions about writing that will stand them in good stead when they arrive in the reception class. They have made an impressive start and, as a result, the school has some of the highest standards in the country for a school in such a poor area. It is worth taking note.

Clip 25: Nursery Teacher Lisa Powell explains her approach to encouraging the children to start writing

This section shows the Nursery teacher talking about how she draws on her experience as a physiotherapist and teacher to help the children develop the skills they need to help with pencil control. Note that she says that within the first few weeks she starts modeling writing. Watch the film and discuss the points that she makes. For instance, she is very focused on planning activities in a 'mindful way' so that the foundations are laid so that children can develop positive skills and habits. Note, too, that parents are involved early on. What tips can be learned from this teacher?

Information about pencil grip and handwriting can be found in Alistair Bryce-Clegg's book *Getting ready to Write* (pub. Featherstone). Our experience is that if children are helped to hold a pencil in a gentle and supportive manner, then gradually, over time, they will begin to develop their grip. This is supported by plenty of gross motor skills and fine skills such as tweezing!

Clip 26: Nursery Teacher Julia Whitehorn helping children enjoy phonics for spelling and early writing at Warren Farm School, Birmingham

In this clip, we see a few children from the nursery class at Warren Farm. Look carefully at the phonic board – how the vowels and consonants are separated out with the middle pockets for spelling and reading. Note, too, that phonics moves from spelling into reading – the word is segmented and written before being blended and read. Note how, once again, the children can hear the three sounds (d – i – sh) and are used to the routine. They know that some sounds are vowels and some are consonants.

The phonic session is followed by the teacher going over how to hold the pen. The children are given some words to segment and write. They write the words ‘pit’ and ‘shop’.

Clip 27: Nursery children playing at writing at Yew Tree Community School, Birmingham

This session is outside – and there is quite a bit of background noise – but notice, as the children start drawing the beanstalk, how well they are already holding the pens and confidently controlling the marks that they are making with evident pleasure.

Clip 28: The importance of teaching basic writing skills systematically

Most of Talk for Writing in the early years is concerned with developing children’s ability to tell or retell a story or to talk about what they have been doing or learning. However, this is also accompanied by close attention to developing early pencil control and basic spelling, without which independent writing cannot flow.

It is important to work on gross and fine motor skills. Start making letter shapes on blank sheets of paper. Move to trying to sit a letter on a red line so that the line can clearly be seen. Then move to using two lines and, by the Summer term, a final shift may be made to 4 lines to give support to the body of the letters as well as ascenders and descenders. Use flipchart paper with the same lines and model careful handwriting. Be fussy!

Matt Custance, reception teacher at St George’s Battersea, with a guided writing group

This guided session focuses on a group innovating. It took place after a whole-class retelling of Jack and the Beanstalk, followed by whole-class shared writing. In the session, you will see the children looking behind them. On the wall, there is a list of possible ideas for changes to make to their stories. Watch the clip and discuss what you

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have noticed. Indeed, the clip is so rich with interesting pieces of teaching and learning that it is worth watching a number of times. Some key points that strike teachers are:

- checking they are on the right page
- 'Have you got sharp pencils, success checklist, small pink line to show where the story writing starts, sound mat and handwriting card?'
- 'Yes I can' – chanting a sentence (it is crucial to remember that many of the children do not speak in English sentences)
- the supports are there so they can be independent
- 'Today's a big day' = capital letter, full stop and finger space all by yourself!
- emphasis on doing things 'by yourself'
- start with the word 'Jack'
- concentration and settling quickly
- minimal background noise
- where do you need to look for ideas (just behind you), e.g. for characters
- teacher keeps quiet and watches for some of the time
- he emphasises that it is 'your story'
- make sure you describe the genie – give the reader more information
- he is hovering on their shoulder ...
- emphasise the need to check their work – capital, full stop, on the line and not missing anything out
- he gets children to reread word by word to check
- he uses a clap to hear the syllables (mar-ket) and uses 'my turn/your turn'
- then they sound the word out 'm' - 'ar' - 'k' - 'it' – and they discuss the spelling as an odd one, 'market'
- does it look like right?
- the teacher's manner is not patronising
- he models on the mini whiteboard so the child can copy accurately
- note the neatness of the handwriting

- his interventions are fairly quiet/ do not disturb the group
- he emphasises punctuation and sounding out for the spelling as well as the development of their own ideas – there is a balance between enjoying the ideas and ensuring the transcription is careful and accurate
- lots of rereading to then think about the next part of the story
- he draws attention to good ideas, e.g. Lily writing ‘on the way, Jack met a magic man’
- he emphasises, ‘Let's just check’ and rereads
- finally, Matt focuses on the past tense ‘grew’ or ‘grow’ and then uses my turn/ your turn for the spelling of ‘grew’, drawing the analogy with throw/threw. He writes grow (my turn) – and then asks the child to write ‘grew’ (your turn) and helps her.
- notice how carefully he writes the words – that is partly why the children write so neatly – they are copying their teacher.

The school uses the excellent phonic programme ‘sounds-write’
<http://www.sounds-write.co.uk>

Chapter 7

Clip 29: Moving from Innovation to Invention

This is the point of the whole process – making stories up. There are 3 key strategies that should be standard routine in nursery and reception classes:

- a. Daily making stories up through play – daily playing at stories with adults opening up the possibilities – provide equipment, toys, objects, costumes, story maps – adults play with them – model making a story up – open possibilities through making suggestions to broaden the possibilities. Watch each other doing this
- b. Every day a few children have their story recorded in a special book and shared. Later on it is acted out in a story square. See Tri-sha Lee’s book for more information (*Princesses, dragons and helicopter stories: storytelling and story acting in the early years* – published by Routledge). The more you do this, the more the stories grow. On the film, you see Ola making up a simple story with some toys. Note that smaller children are more likely to invent if they are holding toys – the story becomes concrete. Bruce also tells a perfectly shaped story. These can only arise from plenty of story-telling, modeling and participating.

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- c. Weekly group or class stories – The third key strategy is not mentioned on the film but is very important. This is the idea of the group or class making up a story together. This could be done once a week or you might wish to add another bit to a story and build it up over a whole week.

Two forms of invention

1. The children make up independently a version of the story that you have been imitating and then innovated upon.
2. The other form of invention is just to make a totally new story up – for this we need a character, in a setting, doing something and then something goes wrong.

Before children invent – think about whether you need to do any more teaching? Remember that the invention stage is about making stories up independently.

Clip 30: Independent invention of a story

On the film, Ava invents a story literally on the spur of the moment. The story draws on all sorts of stories she has heard – occasionally she pauses to look into her mind for what might happen next. If this invention was to be followed by her drawing a story map, she could begin to fix and shape the story. Several retellings would allow her time to refine the language until she had a well-honed version ready for telling to others or writing down. Ideally, inventions should be captured by recording them with an audio device or by writing them down. They could then be shared with the class. This encourages everyone to ‘have a go’ at making a story up. It also adds more ideas into the story pool of possibilities.

Chapter 10

Clip 31: The storytelling process as the key to family involvement

Pie mentions the need to involve families as it accelerates the rate of progress. Julia then introduces the film clip from the project in Sheffield.

Our original research questions:

- How do you get parents engaged and become involved?
- What do you do with the parents at the workshops?
- How do you keep the momentum going?

Over the 3 months trial, two of the teachers had involved everyone. The solution was easy – do imitation with the children so they are confident. Then at ‘collection time’ at the end of the day ask the parents to come 10 minutes early and join in. Invite the parents in and send the maps home to build confidence, language and relationships.

Clip 31: Parents and children innovating on *The Little Red Hen* at Lowedges, Primary School, Sheffield

This story is a wonderful blended story of *The Little Red Hen* and *The Enormous Turnip*. Working in this way, the teacher is able to teach the parents with the children – notice how happy they are!

Discuss what difference this might make to these parents and families.

Clip 32: Parents from Lowedges Primary School in Sheffield explain how and why the approach has helped them and their children

Watch this final film clip and discuss the implications. Teachers often mention:

- storytelling helps memory
- the map helps
- some children use actions at home
- it makes learning more exciting
- parents need to learn it as well
- the importance of all the parents coming in and watching – *not a little bit, all of it!*
- it helps you understand your child a lot better
- older children can help siblings at home
- it's fun
- saying the story together gives everyone confidence – you feel less vulnerable – children know people are listening – maps/actions all help
- the parents are confident in the approach

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- the stories are helping the families and bring joy into their daily lives
- it has an impact on everyone in the family
- children don't see it as learning, as a chore
- it's a form of game
- confidence growing – they seem to be talking more – there is something to share