

What is the study about?

This ESRC funded study will investigate the impact of high quality classroom talk on children's writing. Writing is a particularly demanding activity because it does not simply involve transferring words-in-the-head to words on paper, but involves making deliberate choices according to audience, purpose, and rhetorical effect. Although research suggests that metalinguistic understanding (knowledge about language) underlies writing competency, because it helps writers to control and craft their writing, very little is known about how it is developed. This study will build on research which suggests that metatalk (talk about writing) may be important for the development of metalinguistic understanding. While there is extensive evidence that high quality classroom talk supports learning, very little research has examined the impact of talk on writing specifically. In an educational context of persistent underachievement in writing, this study aims to make an important theoretical contribution.

What will the project look like?

We intend to work closely with 6 teachers from 6 different schools to investigate the impact of high quality classroom talk on KS3 students' writing. The study will not require teachers or students to diverge from the requirements of the KS3 National Curriculum for English. Each teacher will work with three different KS3 classes across three school years: one class for exploration in phase 1, one class for development in phase 2, and one class for intervention in phase 3. In phases 1 and 2, sub-samples of 4 students (with a gender balance and spread of attainment) will be selected from class lists for focused qualitative data collection. The sub-sample students in each class will be paired during lessons for episodes of student peer-to-peer metatalk. Phase 4 will involve outreach activities, including developing pedagogical and professional development materials.

What will data collection involve?

The study will involve the collection of audio and video recordings of whole classes, and of a smaller number of sub-sample students working in pairs. To capture the audio, teachers and sub-sample students will be asked to wear a small, un-intrusive digital recorder. Small cameras will be used to capture video footage, and 'HandSpy' pens will be used by sub-sample students in phase 2 to photograph 'live' writing. In addition, writing samples will be collected in phases 1, 2 and 3.

What will happen to this data?

The data will be collected and stored according to the requirements of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR 2018). All the information we collect will be used to write reports and articles, perhaps a book, about metatalk for writing. The audio and video recordings of lessons and students will only be seen by the teacher-researcher team. Writing samples will be copied and returned to teachers. PDF copies of the writing samples and lesson observation transcripts will be anonymized and stored safely, and may be stored for other researchers to use in the future. The research team will treat all personal information as confidential and make every effort to preserve anonymity.

What commitment does this project require?

Teachers will be asked to commit to participating in the whole of the study, which spans just over 2 years, from March 2022 – July 2024.

Participating teachers will also need to:

- Attend 10 whole day meetings with the teacher-researcher team (dates to be negotiated)
- Attend regular review meetings with the research team: each appx 30-60 min, online
- Select a KS3 class for participation in phases 1, 2 and 3
- Select a KS3 class in phase 3 to act as a control group

- Assist the research team in securing student and parental consent
- Allow the research team access to collect data
- Allow the research team to administer writing assessments during phase 3
- Contribute to data analysis and outreach activities

The timeline below shows: the anticipated dates of each phase; the data collection planned for each school in each phase; the anticipated number of teacher-researcher team meetings; the supply cover costed for each teacher in each phase.

Phase	1: Exploratory	2: Development*	3: Intervention*	4: Impact & Engagement
Dates	April-July 2022	September 2022 – March 2023	April 2023 – Dec 2023	January -July 2024
Data Collection and Activity	2 x Whole lesson recordings 2 x recordings of 2 student pairs Writing samples	9 x whole lesson recordings 9 x recordings of 2 student pairs Writing samples	Writing assessments and samples Appx 4 whole lesson recordings	Practitioner Conference
Number of meetings	2 whole day/ 2 individual review	6 whole day/ 3 individual review	1 whole day/ 2 individual review	1 whole day/ 2 individual review
Supply cover	4 days	9 days	3 days	2 days

*We anticipate that schools will opt for data collection in Autumn or Spring term 2022-23; and Summer or Autumn term 2023.

What are the benefits of participating?

Students

The new pedagogical approaches developed in the study are likely to benefit students, including those not participating directly in the study, both in terms of classroom practices and in improving their writing proficiency. The pedagogical approaches which improve metalinguistic understanding of writing should lead to improved attainment in writing, with potentially significant implications for students' economic, social and personal wellbeing.

Participating teachers and schools

Participation in the study is likely to be of direct benefit to the teachers in terms of their own professional development. They are likely to enrich their pedagogic subject knowledge about writing metatalk, leading to changed professional practice. In particular, the study will involve developing teachers' understanding of the role of metatalk in writing, and the co-construction of scaffolding strategies which support metatalk. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the project will build teachers' understanding of research processes, and their capacity to engage in knowledge exchange activities with other teachers and researchers. The schools of participating teachers will also benefit more widely from sharing practice and findings.

This is a rare opportunity for deep, sustained professional development in the teaching of writing.

Finances

Schools will be entitled to claim the cost of 18 days of supply cover for each teacher across the project, as detailed in the timeline above.

If you would like to know more, or if you have any questions, please contact Ruth Newman (r.m.c.newman@exeter.ac.uk)

