Silly question alert: are you looking for a teaching approach that is guaranteed to raise writing standards across your school? Do you want writing to be purposeful and fun? Are you searching for a way to develop speaking and listening and focus on core skills? Of course, every school is. But is there a methodology that can deliver all this? Well, yes, and it has become known as Big Writing.

Pioneered by Ros Wilson, Big Writing is a whole-school initiative to develop children into independent and expert writers by focusing on the basic skills of GHASP (Grammar, Handwriting, Spelling and Punctuation) and the four key aspects of quality writing known throughout thousands of classrooms as VCOP (Vocabulary, Connectives, Openers and Punctuation). It has become so well-respected that Big Writing schools have adopted and embedded the philosophy as a main priority within their school improvement plans.

Big Writing centres on teaching children the strategies and steps they need to develop from embryonic writers into emerging writers and then into mature, confident writers. If you are unfamiliar with Big Writing, or could do with a fresh look, new editions of the professional development guides to Big Writing are now available from OUP. There are three titles: Talk the Big Talk; Raising Writing Standards; and Writing Voice and Basic Skills.

Talk the Big Talk
If you are an EYFS practitioner then Talk the Big Talk is for you. It provides an overview of the importance of talk, a wealth of ideas for its promotion, and practical suggestions for developing ‘higher level’ talk as a basis for writing – along with two inspiring case studies that provide evidence of the impact of the active ideas in Big Talk.

Talk the Big Talk is a modified version of Big Writing for children not yet ready or able to write. It is a wonderful starting point and a place to find out more about talking to learn, talking about learning and learning to talk as part and parcel of a commitment to dialogic teaching – not to mention the idea that great writers are created from great talkers.

This book also reminds us of the supreme importance EYFS practitioners have in a child’s education and why most EYFS teachers are so good at talking with young children.

Verdict: A ‘big’ thumbs up
Ros Wilson and OUP are confident Big Writing works and give an absolute guarantee that if all the advice is followed, application of the whole approach will raise standards in writing by at least 20% in the first full year, and within four years standards will be at least 80% Level 4 or above by Y6. This promise has been proven by many schools, and Ofsted has quoted Big Writing in its reports as an approach that has made a significant difference to standards.

Big Writing does make a big difference, but it needs bags of enthusiasm, a solid appreciation of the process, high expectations and a belief that it can and will work. It gets a ‘big’ thumbs up.