Big Writing

Talk the Big Talk; Raising Writing Standards; Writing Voice and Basic Skills

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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; 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.

Raising Writing Standards

Aimed at senior management, Raising Writing Standards is a meaty resource that outlines what Big Writing is, offers advice on effective leadership, invaluable assessment support, and provides detailed case studies. There is also a CD-ROM full of useful policy documents, support for assessment and planning and yet more examples of good practice.

This book contains everything you need to know to implement Big Writing in your school and would be a constant source of reference and inspiration. The Criterion Scale is at the heart of the Big Writing approach and has been generated from a range of sources and standardised using over 20,000 pieces of children's writing. Never has there been a more important time to set clear targets for individual pupils and the Criterion Scale will prove to be invaluable.

Writing Voice and Basic Skills

The class teacher's guide to Big Writing, Writing Voice and Basic Skills provides lots of practical tips and lesson ideas to use, adapt and extend accordingly. If you have never used Big Writing, then the chapter on implementing an action plan will bring it all to life through the 24 activities on offer. There's also advice on how to choose a stimulus for writing, text types, preparing a class, marking, levels, securing basic skills, and how to assess.

Included in this book are six lessons for making quick progress – designed for Y2 and for upper KS2 children; an eight week impact strategy; and excellent lesson support materials.

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.