



University
of Exeter

***Developing a pedagogy for
dialogic metalinguistic talk***

Ruth Newman

R.M.C.Newman@exeter.ac.uk



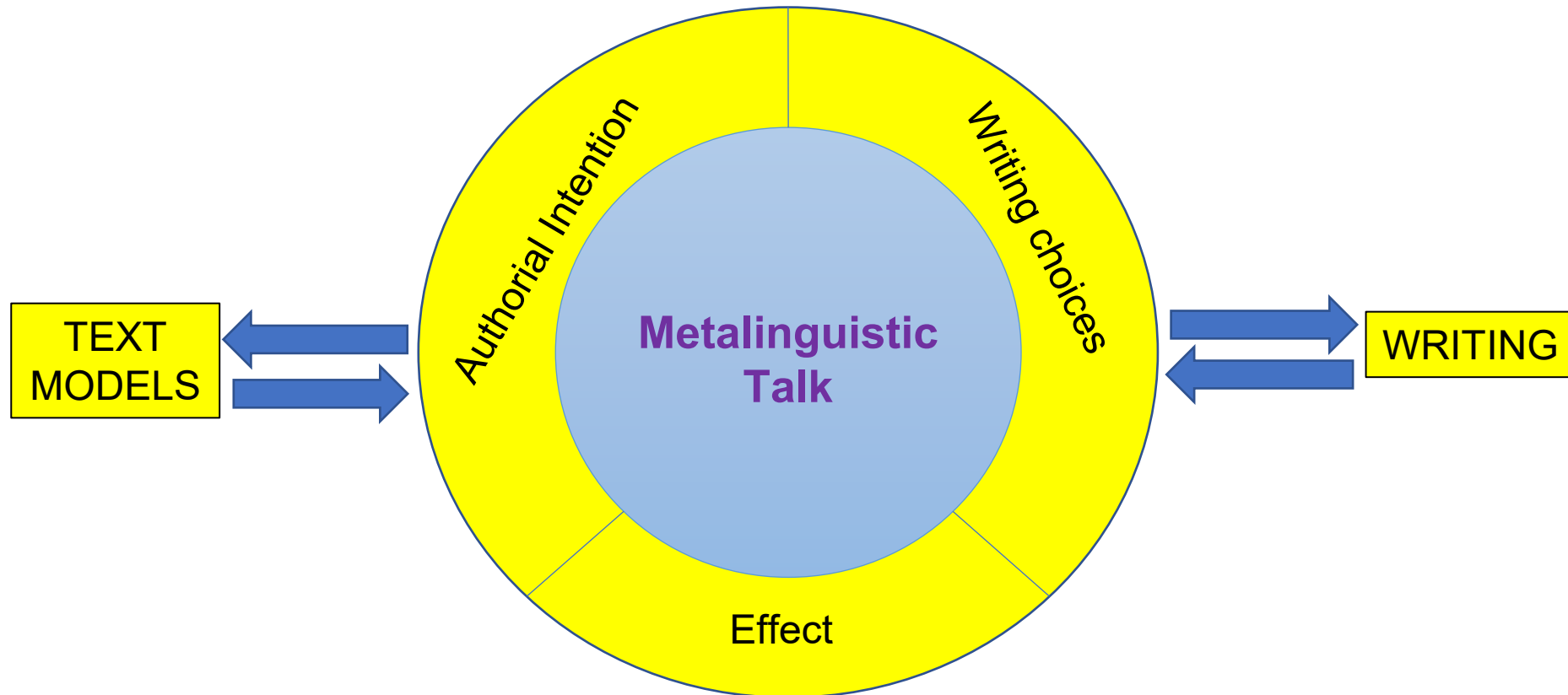
Economic
and Social
Research Council

Dialogic Metalinguistic Talk



- **Metalinguistic talk** promotes thinking and understanding about writing.
- Metalinguistic talk develops specific (*metalinguistic*) understanding of the relationship between language choices and making meaning in writing (Myhill & Newman, 2016, 2019; Newman & Watson, 2020).
- Metalinguistic talk is a **pedagogical tool** which, through enabling and encouraging this verbalisation of choice, allows teachers to determine and extend the level of thinking and understanding that students have developed.
- This talk is **dialogic**: it can be used to '*open up discourse space for exploration and varied opinions*' (Boyd & Markarian, 2015, p. 273).

Metalinguistic Talk: A Mediating Mechanism



Managing Metalinguistic Talk

- **Teachers' management** of metalinguistic talk is critical in framing learners' capacity to think about language choices.
- It is **challenging** to implement and manage, demanding linguistic and pedagogical expertise (Myhill et al., 2020).

A study to develop an evidence-based pedagogy for the development of metalinguistic talk and explore the impact of this talk on the development of metalinguistic understanding and writing.

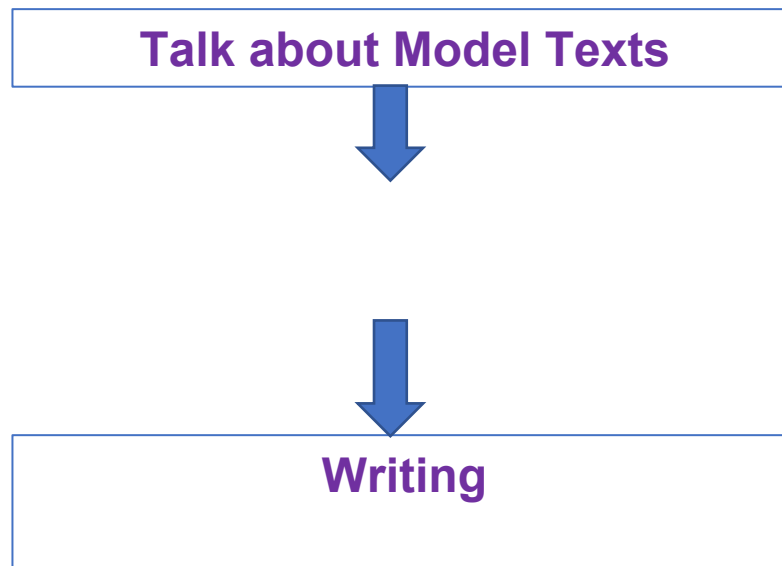


- A sample of 7 English teachers and their KS3 classes (21 classes; students aged 11-14, range of prior attainment), from 7 different secondary schools in the South-West of England.
- As a teacher-researcher team, we:
 1. explored metalinguistic talk in the context of teachers' classrooms;
 2. using strategies developed, teachers designed lesson sequences for their own content and contexts;
 3. underpinned by the arising principles, interventions were co-constructed and implemented.
- Data capture: Audio/ video of lessons; audio/video and live writing of sub-sample student dyads; students' writing.
- By the end of this project, we will have negotiated theoretically generated pedagogical principles for promoting metalinguistic talk.

| Pedagogical Principle | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Talk about Model Texts | Talk about model text stimulates metalinguistic thinking, emphasising different linguistic possibilities and effects; model texts as springboards for students' own writing. |
| Metalinguistic Modelling | Explicit modelling of writing supports learners to transition from talking about a model text, to the act of writing. |
| Writing Conversations | Discussion which prompts learners to verbalise their writing choices extends metalinguistic thinking and learning. |
| Modelling Metalinguistic Talk | Explicit modelling of metalinguistic talk supports learners to transition from writing, to talking about and reflecting on their writing choices. |

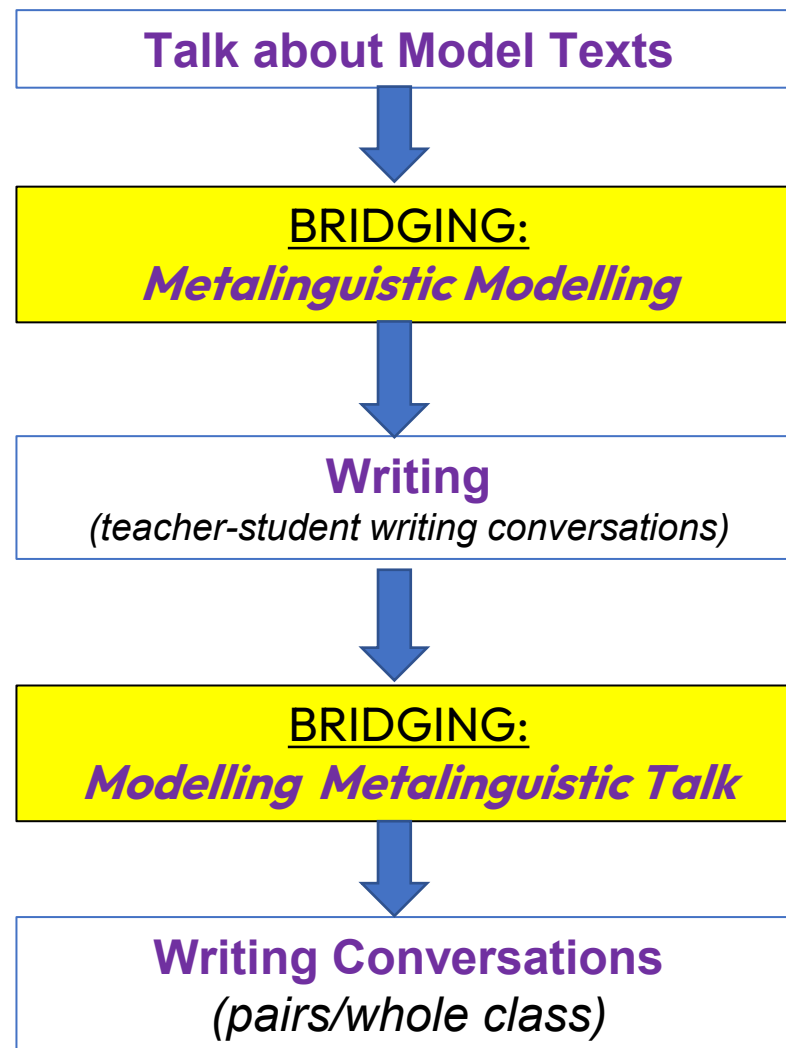
| Pedagogical Principle | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Talk about Model Texts | Talk about model text stimulates metalinguistic thinking, emphasising different linguistic possibilities and effects; model texts as springboards for students' own writing. |

Example Lesson Sequence:



| Pedagogical Principle | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Talk about Model Texts | Talk about model text stimulates metalinguistic thinking, emphasising different linguistic possibilities and effects; model texts as springboards for students' own writing. |
| Metalinguistic Modelling | Explicit modelling of writing supports learners to transition from talking about a model text, to the act of writing. |
| Writing Conversations | Discussion which prompts learners to verbalise their writing choices extends metalinguistic thinking and learning. |
| Modelling Metalinguistic Talk | Explicit modelling of metalinguistic talk supports learners to transition from writing, to talking about and reflecting on their writing choices. |

Example Lesson Sequence:



Principle in Practice: Talk about Model Texts

*'A little way up the hill, for instance, was a great heap of **granite, bound** together by masses of aluminium, a vast labyrinth of precipitous walls and crumpled heaps, amidst which were thick heaps of very beautiful pagoda-like plants – nettles possibly – but wonderfully tinted with brown about the leaves, and **incapable of stinging.**'*

The Time Machine, by H.G.Wells

Just from this paragraph, what impressions do we gain of the future world?

'Incapable of stinging'. So, it's giving the impression of not being able to sting.

Pretty much, Utopia.

So, nettles can't sting...so suffering isn't in the world.

It's kind of been left for a long time...granite, bound.

S: I just noticed that it says Winston '*made*' for the stairs.

T: Yeah.

S: That almost says he like *made* for the stairs, like he's being *chased*, like someone's chasing you because you *run* for the stairs to get away. I only just noticed that and I thought it was a bit weird.

T: No, it's a really interesting choice, isn't it, because if it said Winston walked... or walked towards the stairs, it wouldn't have that same sense of dread. So, actually made for the stairs, that specific choice there, it's like it's a rush, isn't it, like you made for the stairs, really, really lovely point.

*'Winston **made** for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours.'*

1984, by George Orwell

Principle in Practice: Metalinguistic Modelling

Teacher: So, I'm going to show you what I came up with. I'm very proud of this. Okay, so I chose the buffalo. So, I changed it to a snorting giant crashed into the circle. It was Tofu, the short-sighted buffalo. Alright, so I'm going to talk to you about some of the choices that I've made...so I wanted to give this impression of the buffalo that he was... quite clumsy and a little bit uncaring about others around him. So... whereas Bagheera, we want him to be quite athletic and we want him to be sinuous and beautiful, he dropped into the circle, **I want my character to be really different so he crashed into the circle, and I picked that word crash because I wanted to show how much damage he was doing, but also because of the sound of crash as well, so I like the sound of the word too, so that's why I picked that verb. And I chose... that he was a giant to demonstrate how big he was, that's quite a simple choice really for my noun, but I just added into the noun phrase a snorting giant because I wanted to give the impression that he was quite annoyed about something..** So, that's me talking through some of the choices that I made.

Teacher: Is there anything that you would want to ask that I could explain a little bit further?

Dylan: Why did you choose short sighted and why not something like, more like, intimidating?

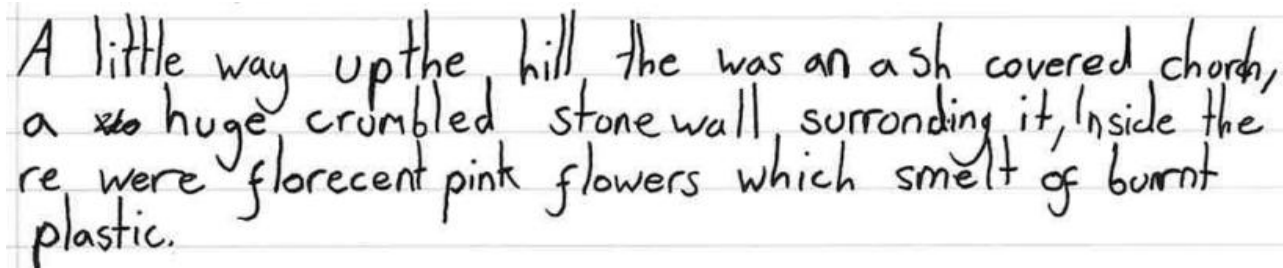
'A *black shadow* **dropped** down into the circle.'

It was *Bagheera* the *Black Panther*.'

The Jungle Book, by
Rudyard Kipling

Principle in Practice: Modelling Metalinguistic Talk

T: Let's explain our choices. **Let's have a go at doing this together. Let's have one volunteer to read out their sentence and then we can think about what kind of questions we might want to ask that person.**



A little way up the hill there was an ash covered church,
a ~~so~~ huge crumbled stone wall surrounding it, inside there
were fluorescent pink flowers which smelt of burnt
plastic.

T: So having heard S's sentence, could anyone give him a comment or a question about what he's written?

S: Why did you write 'burnt plastic'?

S: I didn't want to say directly that the flowers were artificial

T: Why did you choose a 'church'? **Let's ask the class?** What effect does that have on us, that it's a church?



Teacher: **You are writing about either a wolf...a water buffalo...Or an elephant.** So, really focus on your animal, think about your animal...**don't start yet...**you're picturing a wolf or the water buffalo or the elephant, and **they are going to enter the circle.** So, let's imagine there's a circle...**How does your animal enter that circle?** Think about your chosen animal, think about what impression, that first impression you want to give of it. **Do you want us to feel that it's mysterious, do you want us to feel that it's powerful and strong, do you want us to feel that this animal is dangerous and aggressive, do you want us to make us feel that this animal is clumsy and foolish...**

Dylan: (out loud, starts writing) **A white blizzard**



Teacher
continues ...



a white blizzard pounded into the circle.

Dylan: I put a **white blizzard** pounded
into the circle (continues to talk and
write simultaneously), **it was Flora the**
snow wolf.



a white blizzard pounded into the circle. it was, Flora the snow
wolf

I should have put flourishing white
blizzard, that would have been good.

Ava: (talking out loud) *dropped
delicately*

Dylan: delicate?

Ava: *delicately*

Dylan: delicately? Do you know how to
spell it?

Conclusions



- **Metalinguistic talk** a mechanism that mediates learning through and about writing.
- **Dialogic metalinguistic talk** encourages learners' **explicit verbalisation** and **exploration** of linguistic choice in writing (Myhill et al., 2022).
- In dialogic metalinguistic talk teachers are **responsive** to learners' linguistic confidence and textual experience.
- **Metalinguistic modelling** makes **explicit** writerly decision-making, **mediating** what learners can say about language and what they can do in their writing (Watson, Newman and Morgan, 2021).
- **Modelling metalinguistic talk** supports learners to **think** about their writing and to **interact** with the writing of others.
- **Probing learners' own writing decisions** serves to scaffold learners' ability to articulate what may initially be tacit language choices, bringing to the surface half-formed or sub-conscious choices (Watson & Newman, 2017; Myhill et al., 2016; Newman & Watson, 2020).
- Teaching approaches might acknowledge that **learners** may be 'moved' to write, verbalise and interact at various points in a lesson – not only in the spaces we permit – but the spaces they 'open'.

Key References



- Boyd, M. P., & Markarian, W. C. (2015). Dialogic teaching and dialogic stance: Moving beyond interactional form. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 49(3), 272-296.
- Mercer, N. and Littleton, K. (2007). *Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking: A Sociocultural Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Myhill, D. and Newman, R. (2016) Metatalk: Enabling metalinguistic discussion about writing. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 80, pp.177-187.
- Myhill, D. and Newman, R. (2019). Writing Talk – Developing metalinguistic understanding through dialogic teaching. In Mercer, N. Wegerif, R. and Major, L. (eds) *International Handbook of Research on Dialogic Education*. London: Routledge.
- Myhill, D., & Jones, S. (2015). Conceptualizing metalinguistic understanding in writing. *Culture and Education*, 27(4), 839-867.
- Newman, R., & Watson, A. (2020). Shaping spaces: Teachers' orchestration of metatalk about written text. *Linguistics and Education*, 60.
- Watson, A. M., Newman, R. M., & Morgan, S. D. (2021). Metatalk and metalinguistic knowledge: The interplay of procedural and declarative knowledge in the classroom discourse of first-language grammar teaching. *Language awareness*, 30(3), 257-275.

Reflective Discussion Point:

What can you do next with this idea of fostering (metalinguistic) talk in your context?