HOW TALK BECOMES TEXT: INVESTIGATING THE CONCEPT OF ORAL REHEARSAL IN EARLY YEARS'

CLASSROOMS.

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Abstract:

The principle that emergent writing is supported by talk, and that an appropriate pedagogy for writing should include planned opportunities for talk is well-researched and well-understood. However, the process by which talk becomes text is less clear. The term 'oral rehearsal' is now commonplace in English classrooms and curriculum policy documents, yet as a concept it is not well-theorised. Indeed, there is relatively little reference to the concept of oral rehearsal in the international literature, and what references do exist propose differing interpretations of the concept. At its most liberal, the term is used loosely as a synonym for talk; more precise definitions frame oral rehearsal, for example, as a strategy for reducing cognitive load during writing; for post-hoc reviewing of text; for helping writers to 'hear' their own writing; or for practising sentences aloud as a preliminary to writing them down.   Drawing on a systematic review of the literature and video data from an empirical study, the paper will offer a theoretical conceptualisation of oral rehearsal, drawing on existing understanding of writing processes and will illustrate the ways in which young writers use oral rehearsal before and during writing.

Introduction

The principle that writers, and especially emergent writers, benefit from opportunities to talk before they write is a well-rehearsed pedagogic fundamental for teaching writing. It may seem obvious that a learners' spoken language resources provide a rich reservoir for the challenges of creating written text, yet the process of moving from talk to written text is not one that has been the subject of substantive empirical investigation. Theoretical understanding, therefore, of the process by which ideas become written text is scarce and '*there has been too limited an amount of research into the connections of writing and oral language*' (Shanahan 2006:174). This article reports on a research study, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation which set out to investigate the trajectory from talk to text. Specifically, this article explores the concept of 'oral rehearsal', a teaching strategy currently advocated in English policy documents for literacy, both through reviewing available literature on the concept and through presenting the outcomes of the exploratory study of oral rehearsal as it is realized in the classroom.

Current theoretical perspectives on the role of talk in learning owe much to Vygotsky's (1978) work. For Vygotsky, language is central to learning and the interrelationship between thinking, talking and learning is paramount: the process of verbalizing gives substance to thinking. As Corden puts it, '*thought is not merely expressed in words – it comes into existence through words*' (Corden 2000:7). Through talking, we can *formulate* ideas for the first time, crystallizing inner thoughts into substance and shaping our ideas into existence; we can *reformulate* our ideas so that our thinking and understanding is clarified, focused or modified; we can *communicate* our ideas with other people through interaction and feedback; and we can *reflect* upon our learning through talk (Howe 1992). Vygotsky's (1978) belief that all learning appears twice '*first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)*' (1978:57) provides a good theoretical basis for arguing that talking with others about writing before engaging in an individual act of writing is a beneficial strategy. Social talk about writing supports individual learning about writing.

Certainly there is evidence that creating classrooms where children can talk about and collaborate in the process of writing supports the development of individual students' writing. The substantial meta-analysis of strategies which support writing instruction by Graham and Perin (2007) found a strong positive effect size for collaborative writing, where writers work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions. This way of working

promotes talk about writing throughout the process and may develop metacognitive understanding, which is itself a key factor in writing development (Martlew 1983; Kellogg 1994; Wallace and Hayes 1991; Butterfield et al 1996). The studies by Topping, Nixon, Sutherland and Yarrow (2000) and Yarrow and Topping (2001) into paired writing, where writers work interactively on a piece of writing, found both improved writing achievement and increased self-esteem for those in paired situations. Hodges (2002) suggested that collaborative writing helps writers to cope with the intellectual demands of writing, and decisions about content and style, substantive and rhetorical issues because in collaborative writing, *'the tension must be resolved explicitly so that there is not only the deepening of reflective thought through writing but..a deepening of reflective thought about writing as well' (*Hodges 2002:9).

Vygotskyan perspectives on talk, therefore, can indeed inform our understanding of one aspect of the relationship between talking and writing. Contexts which create opportunities for students to talk about writing and work with others in generating text appear to support learning about writing and achievement in writing. They endorse the advocacy of teaching writing in classroom settings which values talk and actively foster talk as an instructional strategy for writing development. But important though these ideas are, they do not directly address the place of oral rehearsal in a writing classroom, nor do they address with adequate sufficiency the specific trajectory from ideas in the head to words on the page, the movement from talk to text.

Oral Rehearsal: What is it? Reviewing Policy and Research Literature

Given that the initial impetus for exploring oral rehearsal had been policy documents for the English National strategies, a search for the term was undertaken on the Department for Children, Schools and Families *Standards* website (http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/). This located 453 references to oral rehearsal, of which the first ten referred exclusively to oral rehearsal in the context of writing, as did 22 out of the first 30; thereafter, the links found tended to refer to rehearsal in the context of other subjects.

- ❑ Using writing partners and **oral rehearsal**,
- ❑ After **oral rehearsal,** write explanatory texts independently from a flowchart or other diagrammatic plan, using the conventions modelled in shared writing.
- ❑ **Rehearse** sentences **orally** before writing and cumulatively reread while writing

- The trainer repeatedly models **rehearsal** of sentences in speech before committing them to paper… The importance of **oral rehearsal** and cumulative re-reading…

- Oral rehearsal before writing

- **Rehearse** sentences **orally** before writing and cumulatively reread while writing

- A range of drama and speaking and listening activities that support appropriate **oral rehearsal** prior to the written outcomes.

- **Oral rehearsal** prior to writing…. In pairs, children **rehearse** phrases and sentences, using some of the ideas suggested.

- Scribe the sentence, modelling its **oral rehearsal** before you write it.

- **Oral rehearsal**: in particular, those children who have poor literacy skills; for children with poor language skills.

It was not possible to find an explicitly stated definition of oral rehearsal in the policy documents, and several of the references above do not make it clear what the nature of the oral rehearsal activity is (for example, '*After oral rehearsal'*). There are multiple references, however, which link it with the rehearsal of sentences implying that oral rehearsal plays a particular role in supporting the production of written text prior to transcribing the text onto paper or screen, and, in general, this notion of using oral rehearsal to practise the shaping of sentences seems the dominant one throughout the policy documentation. There are, nonetheless, other references to oral rehearsal supporting reflection, to the use of oral rehearsal to support language development in second language learners, and to the use of oral rehearsal to talk through the ideas for writing, which suggests the term is poorly conceptualized at policy level.

Internationally, there is very little reference to oral rehearsal in policy or professional literature, although those that do exist indicate similar ambiguity about its pedagogical role. Zurich International School (2005) website for parents of Early Years writers informs them that *'Talking is "oral rehearsal" for writing'* (2005:12) and advises parents to talk with their children about what they have done together. The Ministry of Education in British Columbia (2000) in its guidance on early years writing reiterates this view, maintaining that '*The conversation is an oral rehearsal for writing*'. Common to both perspectives is the belief that talking gives children an opportunity to talk about, develop and rehearse the content for their writing; in this way, oral rehearsal supports the creative generation of ideas. In contrast, the New South Wales Literacy and Numeracy Plan (NSW 2006) in

Australia argues that writers can '*acquire accurate and fluent skills in writing more complex sentence structures when these are taught in isolation through oral rehearsal' (*NSW 2006:103) and recommends the explicit teaching of different sentence patterns which are practised orally. In principle, this mirrors the dominant perspective on oral rehearsal reflected in the English policy documents.

Exploring Theoretical Insights into Oral Rehearsal

In order to establish how theoretical research can inform the conceptualisation of oral rehearsal, a series of searches were undertaken. The first search sought to elicit theoretical explanations of oral rehearsal: however, an electronic search in the British Education Index, ERIC, and the Australian Education Index for 'oral rehearsal' and 'writing', and for 'oral rehearsal' alone both produced the same four results, all linked to writing in English as Second Language context. A further search for 'oral' and 'rehearsal' located 46 results, but it was clear that separating the two terms moved away from any concept of oral rehearsal and writing to more generalised notions of rehearsing in a multiplicity of contexts, and wider considerations of oral performance.

Further systematic reading of the literature disclosed a handful of additional references to oral rehearsal, again indicating little conceptual consensus. Chaffee (1977) views oral rehearsal as a post hoc process to reveal error once a text has been written, whereas Murray argues that writing '*oral rehearsal drafts in conference'* helps students to '*hear their own voices'* (Murray 1979:16). There are several advocates of oral rehearsal as some form of support for idea generation, be that through orally rehearsing ideas in groups (Cleary 1996:55), through the '*collaborative talk, oral rehearsal and refinement'* that can occur in play settings as a natural precursor to writing (Clark 2000:70), or through using oral rehearsal with students with language difficulties to allow them to express their ideas before beginning writing (Hirschhorn 2007). What is evident is, that in the research literature, oral rehearsal is not a common term and is differentially conceptualized in different contexts.

There are, however, a range of theoretical insights on talk and writing which may provide useful lenses through which to consider conceptualising oral rehearsal more appropriately. These relate to the differences between talk and writing as modes of language production, drawing largely on linguistic research, and to the cognitive demand of writing and the process of translation, informed by cognitive psychology.

Differences between talk and writing:

There is a long and well-established body of research in linguistics which has investigated the differences between speech and writing. The syntactical structures of writing are different from speech: in general, the syntactical units in writing, such as noun phrases and clauses, are both longer (Chafe 1982; Drieman 1962) and more embedded (Czerniewska 1992; Kress 1994).   Writing is more lexically dense, with a more varied vocabulary and uses the passive with higher frequency (Perera 1984; O'Donnell 1974).   It is important to note, of course, that these differences are most obvious when comparing informal talk with formal or literary writing and that formal speeches (which are often written first) have many of the characteristics of writing, just as informal writing, such as messaging, has many of the characteristics of speech. The linguistic differences between speech and writing occur because of the differing communicative contexts of speech and writing and the different affordances of the two modes. Crystal (1995:291) draws attention to the many contrasts that occur as a consequence of the phonic nature of talk and the graphic nature of writing – including the presence of contextual cues in speech which are absent in writing; the permanence of writing set against the transience of talk; and the communicative power of prosody in talk which is hard to replicate in writing.   Olson (2006) succinctly summarises these talk-writing differences thus:

> *In speaking orally, a speaker has a richer range of resources at hand than does a writer; writers must invent or learn lexical and grammatical functions to compensate for such paralinguistic features as facial expression and tone of voice. Psychologists point out that one's 'writing vocabulary' vastly exceeds one's 'speaking vocabulary'. Writers draw on an enlarged vocabulary, a more formalized grammar, a more logically organized rhetorical structure. In addition, they exploit such graphic devices as punctuation, quotation marks to distinguish one's own from other's utterances, and an elaborated set of 'speech act' verbs such as* **assert, imply, claim, conclude** *to indicate how those utterances are to be taken.* (Olson 2006:140)

We know that one of the challenges for emergent writers is learning to be writers, rather than translators of talk into writing: to learn that '*writing is not simply the language of speech written down'* (Perera 1987:17).   In particular, although one very real challenge for emergent writers is learning the conventions of graphic representation and how to shape letters and build words, a further challenge is learning '*the structural and organizational patterns that characterise written language'* (Perera 1984:207) and avoiding making the act of writing '*a literal translation of oral speech conventions into written language'* (Pea and Kurland 1987:293).

Perera's (1986) research indicates that by the age of eight most children have grasped this and are no longer simply recording in print their spoken utterances. But the more subtle patterns of writing may take longer to acquire and there is evidence that the influence of speech patterns on children's writing development may be more sustained. Massey et al's study (2005) of writing at age 16 provides evidence of an increase in non-Standard forms in writing and they suggest that '*increasingly writing seems to follow forms which would have been confined to speech in 1980*' (2005:64)*.* This could be evidence of changing views of what is acceptable in writing, or as they argue, an inability to discriminate appropriately between the conventions of speech and writing. Likewise, detailed linguistic analysis of students' writing between age 14 and 16 (Myhill 2009a) indicates that one clear distinction between more and less successful writers is the ability of successful writers to shape text for communicative purposes in ways for which there is no model in talk.

These understandings about writing development and the significant inter-relationship between talk and writing may have relevance to the concept of oral rehearsal. In essence, if, as Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982:2) argue, '*the oral language production system cannot be carried over intact into written composition... it must, in some way, be reconstructed to function autonomously instead of interactively',* it may be that the oral rehearsal of written structures prior to writing supports this reconstruction of spoken ideas or thoughts into forms appropriate to written text.

The cognitive demand of writing:

Kellogg (2008) likens the complexity of writing to playing chess in terms of the demands it makes upon cognitive resources and, in particular, upon working memory, '*the means by which we mentally store and process information'* (Sharples 1999:92). Negro and Chanquoy (2005:107) note that many researchers argue that the management of writing processes is dependent upon working memory: McCutchen (1996) signals the particular dependence of writing upon verbal working memory, whilst Ransdell and Levy (1999) demonstrated that a larger capacity in working memory is associated with better writing. The demands imposed upon working memory by writing are indeed considerable. As we write, the central executive in the working memory is required not simply for '*language generation'*, but also '*for planning ideas, reviewing ideas, and coordinating all three processes'* and for '*maintaining multiple representations of the text in working memory'* (Kellogg 2008:3). At the most sophisticated level, expert writers are simultaneously juggling what they want to communicate with how best to communicate it in written form. For beginning writers, especially, who are managing the effort involved in both

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transcription and text generation, the demands '*can overload their ability to hold much information in memory'* Shanahan 2006:173). Equally, the process of articulating ideas into language requires more cognitive resources for writers with less linguistic experience than for writers with more linguistic experience (Chenoweth and Hayes 2001).

In the context of developing a theoretical understanding of oral rehearsal, the work of Bourdin and Fayol (1994; 2002) is salient. They have investigated whether written or oral language production are more cognitively costly, and have concluded that written language production is indeed more cognitively effortful, particularly for young writers for whom '*graphic transcription may create an important load on working memory'* (Bourdin and Fayol 1994:593). The effort involved in transcription, before it becomes an automated process is significant, and young writers' cognitive attention to transcription may limit their capacity to devote attention to the text itself. Fayol (1991) argues that this cognitive load accounts for the fact that oral text composition by young children is often superior to their written composition. Even for well-educated adults, in whom the processes of transcription and lexical retrieval are relatively cost-free, the cognitive demand on working memory was greater than oral production (Bourdin and Fayol 2002) because of the increased sophistication and strategic management of the writing process.

Both Hayes and Chenoweth (2006) and Cleland and Pickering (2006) observe that there remains uncertainty about the precise ways in which working memory is involved in writing, though there appears to be acceptance of the principle of high cognitive demand incurred by the act of writing. A recurrent theme in the research on working memory is the argument that cognitive load on working memory is reduced in two ways during writing: firstly, as processes, such as transcription or spelling become automated; and secondly, by partitioning attention to different aspects of writing, rather than attending to them all simultaneously (Hayes and Flower 1980:40; Kellogg 2008:3). It is possible that the use of oral rehearsal prior to and accompanying the process of creating text may function to reduce the cognitive demand. Indeed, Aubry (1995) writes of oral rehearsal as a pre-writing strategy for high school students with difficulties in retrieval, and from a professional, rather than a theoretical perspective, Sharkey (2005), in recommending teaching children to rehearse orally what is to be written before writing it down to develop and maintain sense and to remember the sentence while they are writing it, seems to be suggesting that oral rehearsal is reducing cognitive load. More specifically, Hayes (2006:29) draws attention to the articulatory rehearsal process, a sub-component of working memory which is akin to speaking to oneself,

which '*has the effect of increasing the time that material can be maintained in the short term store'.* If oral rehearsal is a form of articulatory rehearsal, then this suggests that it may well have a role to play in supporting cognitive capacity. Oral rehearsal may be a strategy for testing out or modelling written ideas before proceeding to the process of translation, akin to the internal rehearsal more common in older writers '*when a sentence or clause can be entirely mentally planned before its graphomotoric execution'* (Alamargot and Chanquoy 2001:30).

From talk to text:

To date, research on written language production has not confidently addressed the processes by which talk becomes text, and has tended to rely on cognitive models of oral language production, such as that proposed by Bock and Levelt (1994) and Bock (1995). These focus principally upon the mechanisms by which a speaker converts thoughts into spoken utterances and have assumed that the movement from thoughts to written text operates in the same way. In the Hayes and Flower (1980) model of the writing process, for example, the generation of written text is termed as 'translation', and the absence of any sub-processes identified for this movement from ideas to text suggests that it is viewed as a straightforward process. Later research does begin to identify sub-processes within translation, and the concept of *formulation*, defined as the shaping of pre-verbal messages into words (Alarmargot and Chanquoy 2001:65) appears to address the talk to text transition. Formulation is, however, conceived principally as an automated process which involves '*the application of fixed rules'* (Negro and Chanquoy 2005:106), an unproblematic and linear process of linguistic conversion of ideas in the head to words on the page.

However, these are problematic assumptions. Firstly, such assumptions do not sufficiently take account of the increased cognitive cost of writing. Fayol and Bourdin's work (2002), reported earlier, has shown that writing makes greater cognitive demands than oral language production, even with older writers. For younger writers, the challenge is compounded by the additional demands that transcription imposes upon working memory: Secondly, writing, as discussed earlier, is different from speech and employs different linguistic structures. Moving from talk to text is not a reproductive process of linguistic conversion but '*a transformative act'* (Myhill 2009b) constrained by the communicative goals and rhetorical demands of the writing task and *'the challenge of creating text which is not simply speech written down'* (Myhill 2009b). Writers have to meet the needs of a distant reader and receive none of the instant feedback, verbal or paralinguistic, from which conversation partners benefit; they have to '*elaborate semantic content voluntarily and consciously, and select syntactic*

structures carefully' (Lacasa, Campo and Reina 2001:135) projecting and anticipating the reader's response. More recently, Alamargot and Fayol acknowledge that writing '*cannot be regarded as the straightforward transcription of the phonological form of an utterance, even if the production of written words shares several stages with oral verbal production'* (2009:83). It is certainly true that for young writers in the Early Years, learning to be a writer involves learning literary demands of text production which differ from spoken conventions, the process of writing is cognitively costly, thus managing the formulation of text from verbal thoughts or pre-verbal ideas is challenging.

The Study

In the light of the policy and theoretical positions outlined above, this paper reports on data from a study which was exploring how talk becomes text in young writers. Six classes were involved in the study (n=172) and the children involved ranged from age 5-7. The study considered three conceptual elements of the transition from talk to text:

❑ The role of oral generation of ideas in supporting writing (idea generation)
❑ The role of practising reading/composing text aloud in supporting writing (oral rehearsal)
❑ The role of talk in developing children's ability to reflect upon their writing (reflection)

The research team and the teachers developed classroom oral activities which focused on each of these strands. During this process of development of teaching materials, it became evident that although teachers used the term 'oral rehearsal', their understanding of what it was reflected the ambiguities in the policy documentation. A further aim of the study, therefore, became to explore what oral rehearsal looked like in practice and to develop a more coherent conceptualisation of the term. For the purposes of the empirical study, we distinguished between the free-flowing and spontaneous talk which is used to generate ideas and discuss the content of writing and the more 'presentational' talk arising from oral activities which encouraged writers to rehearse the written form of their intended text orally prior to writing. The children were introduced to the three concepts using child-friendly language. So teachers talked to children about '*getting ideas'* (idea generation), about the technique of '*say it, write it'* (oral rehearsal) and about '*thinking about writing'* (reflection). Video recording was used to capture these different types of talk in the classroom. In all, 25 hours of video footage was captured and was subsequently analysed using the Atlas ti software package. Table 1 below outlines the

concept being explored and its definition, the child-friendly definition, and examples of activities which addressed that concept.

- insert Table 1 here -

The outcomes of the study:

The coding process analysed both teacher to child and child to child talk and attempted to categorise the nature of the talk activity observed. Five codes were initially identified as relating to oral rehearsal:

- ❑ Children support oral rehearsal together
- ❑ Child uses oral rehearsal to capture thinking
- ❑ Child re-forms sentence orally
- ❑ Child says sentence as they write
- ❑ Teacher supports oral rehearsal

It is worth noting here that talk which was defined as oral rehearsal occurred much less frequently than talk to generate ideas. Even when the teaching activity was intended to promote oral rehearsal, it was often realized in action as an idea-generation strategy, or was introduced with insufficient clarity, suggesting that teachers are less confident or comfortable with the concept of oral rehearsal than with talk as a stimulus for ideas for writing. For example, in one teaching session which was planned by the teacher to focus on oral rehearsal, the teacher never made it fully clear to the children that what she was asking them to was to create sentences aloud. The task instructions for the oral rehearsal were 'obscured' by a lot of other teaching inserted into the dialogue: about checking the content of their writing, reminding them of the form of their writing, and reinforcing prior community knowledge about what writers should remember when writing. Likewise, the modeling of oral rehearsal for the children was masked by other dialogue. In fact, the transcript indicates that of the 216 lines of dialogue setting up the oral rehearsal task, only 11 were explicit modeling of the process. A different teacher's reflections on her lesson indicated that she had used oral rehearsal, not as outlined, but as a content generation strategy: she recalled that she had '*used pictures of stages of building a house as stimulus … with partner discussing what was going on in the pictures'* and suggested that this allowed the children '*to orally rehearse what was going on'*.

Because teachers themselves were less confident in teaching and managing oral rehearsal, it became evident during data analysis that some of the coding of oral rehearsal was not actually oral rehearsal in terms of

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practicing/ reading text aloud but was simply because the teacher had termed the activity 'oral rehearsal'. Therefore, having identified and coded all the incidences of oral rehearsal in the video data, a further layer of analysis was undertaken on the video clips to distinguish authentic oral rehearsal events. This looked closely at the nature of the oral rehearsal and the interactions which accompanied it and provided a more fine-grained, nuanced picture of oral rehearsal in practice. Listening to the video data, it was evident that one thing which distinguished oral rehearsal from other talk was that the prosody altered from the rhythms and intonations of natural speech to a slower, more deliberate delivery which was more like reading aloud than conversation. As this often occurred in snatches within longer utterances, all examples of oral rehearsal in the transcripts quoted below will be represented in bold type. This secondary analysis led to the creation of four themes relating to oral rehearsal:

❑ Using oral rehearsal to vocalize text

❑ Using oral rehearsal to practise shaping sentences

❑ Using oral rehearsal to support the process of composing text

❑ Using oral rehearsal to co-construct text

Using oral rehearsal to vocalize text:

One of the most frequent ways in which these young writers used oral rehearsal was through vocalizing their intended text prior to committing it to paper. Typically, this was an individual activity rather than a collaborative process and such oral rehearsal may be a precursor to the internal mental rehearsal common in more experienced writers. This could be seen as a form of composing aloud. In the extract below, Kate and her partner are supposed to be working together, but despite Kate's request for feedback after rehearsing her sentence, she receives none. The teacher's intervention gives her an opportunity to repeat her sentence which she does with greater confidence and fluency than on the first occasion. This second rehearsal of the sentence is also imbued with considerable expression conveying the unfairness of the situation described.

Kate   *(Partner writing his letter throughout. Kate sits chewing pencil and looks as though she is thinking what to write.)* **Dear dad**

(*Long pause – hears other children's talk off – then starts to rehearse beneath her breath. The full sentence is not wholly audible.* **Mum** ...**won't let..me play football... she'll let....it's not fair**). Yes, that's OK (*spoken to partner who does not respond*)

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Teacher	(*coming across from another table)* Can you say what your first sentence is going to be?
Kate	Yes
Teacher	Tell me what it is then.
Kate	**Mum won't let.. won't let me play football but** and then I'm going to do a full stop alright **but she will let Laura play tennis. It's not fair.**

The mid-sentence aside to the teacher about using a full stop may reflect Kate's awareness that this is something the teacher will expect, but perhaps it is also a recognition that punctuation marks are unvoiced during speech.

Using oral rehearsal to practise shaping sentences

In other examples of oral rehearsal, there was more emphasis on the practising and rehearsing potential of talk. In such cases, emerging sentences were being re-phrased or amended orally, and the process was recursive, with elements of the sentence being revisited and re-shaped. In the extract below, the children are writing an instructional text on how to write instructions and Libby is very evidently using the talk process to move from the idea she wishes to communicate to a well-articulated sentence. Her efforts are characterised by hesitations and false starts as she puts words to her ideas.

> *Libby grabs Robert and directs him to task*.)
> Come on, Robert... **Don't say please, don't say..in...in don't put please in instructions in..**
> **at.. in..the... um.. the ...um... at the... of..a...a..instruction.... start of a sentence.**
> **Don't put please at the start of a instruction.**

One teacher's reflections on her lesson showed awareness of this practising element of oral rehearsal. She had used oral rehearsal herself '*in modelling how a prediction [sentence] would sound in their heads and look on the page*'. This involved using a firm framework for predictive sentences which began with '*I think that this material be best for making a brick because* ….' modelling both an appropriate initiation and the use of because as an explanatory subordinator.

Using oral rehearsal to support the process of composing text

Many of the activities set up by the teachers involved working with a partner, and the video data anaysis was able to illuminate some of the subtle ways in which this partner talk was being realised. Indeed in many instances this indicated the partner talk did not occur at all and one partner was left talking to himself or herself. However, one cluster of oral rehearsal interactions revealed how the dyadic relationship was often asymmetric, with one partner offering support to the other as a sentence is developed. In these exchanges, a peer leads the process asking questions or providing suggestions which support the individual composition of the partner. The transcript below illustrates Kylie and Jack, whose task is to write a first person piece from the viewpoint of a rainfrest animal in danger of extinction. Jack supports Kylie's efforts to generate a sentence – when he realises that she does not know how to end her sentence he offers her a model as an example, and the whispered prompt leads her to successful completion. It is worth noting that Jack's model reformulates slightly Kylie's attempt (from '*Because they're chopping down all the leaves'* becomes '*All the trees have been chopped down'*). but Kylie retains her version when she completes her sentence. The supported oral rehearsal process evidenced here is not mere imitation.

Kylie   ...umm.. **In the forest..**

Jack   Why are you becoming extinct? (*reading from his sheet, then turns to look at her*)

Kylie   **Because they're chopping down all the leaves.. and the trees and stuff ...and ...and ...**
(pause)

Jack   Have you forgotten the last bit? (*laughs*)

Kylie   *(laughs)* Yes

Jack   So... **All the trees have been chopped down so I can't live in the shade...** and things like
      that. That's the thing you've ....

Kylie   **They're chopping all the leaves down and ...**

Jack   *(Whispers to prompt)* ...**and there's no shade left.**

Kylie   **and there's no shade left.**

What is not evident from our data and which would be worth researching further is whether the asymmetry in such interactions is fixed, with the same peer always acting as a strong support for the other, or whether the support positions reverse and inter-change.

<u>Using oral rehearsal to co-construct text</u>

A final cluster of oral rehearsal interactions show how partners use the opportunity to collaborate in the generation of text. Unlike the peer support outlined in the previous section, in these interactions the peers work very much as equals sharing the process between them. In the first example below, Tim and Alice are each writing their own version of a narrative, based on a story they have heard. Alice begins by stating the idea which they are going to convey in a sentence. Then, with a very evident switch in prosody, she rehearses the first part of the sentence, pauses slightly, and then in unison Tim and Alice rehearse the next chunk of the sentence. Finally, Alice completes it and they both turn to write the sentence down.

Alice   (*To her partner; spoken as though it is a framing of an idea rather than a rehearsal.)* It's going to
             go to the house the same day as he wrote the letter in the afternoon.

Alice   *(said very deliberately)* **He delivered ...the ... the letter to the giant** ...(*small pause*)

Tim   **the same day he wrote it** } *in unison*

Alice   **the same day he wrote it** }

Alice   **in the afternoon**. (*they both write*)

In a different example of this co-construction of text, May and Luke are working on writing an instructional text providing guidance on how to write. May initiates the sequence by asking Luke for a suggestion, which he offers. They then share the process of orally rehearsing different possibilities for the sentence until May arrives at the one she wants to use.

May   (*To partner*) What could I use for my last idea?

Luke   **Look at what you're writing. Look..at..what**...

May   (*moves to start writing*) **Think what you're going to write** (*looks at Luke*)

Luke   **Look what you're writing. Look at what you write**.

May   **Think what you are going to do**.

The combination of oral rehearsal and the peer interaction appear to offer constructive opportunities for practising textual possibilities, without removing ownership of choices from the author.

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Discussion

This article set out to investigate policy and theoretical insights into the concept of oral rehearsal and to report an exploratory analysis of oral rehearsal as it operates in early years' classrooms. The review of policy and research literature highlights that there is no clear theoretical conceptualisation of oral rehearsal and that policy documents offer contradictory guidance. Indeed, the teachers in our study did not possess a shared pedagogical view of what constitutes oral rehearsal or its learning purpose. However, the classroom study provides evidence that young writers are able to use talk successfully to rehearse their, as yet unwritten, text. The teachers in the study who used oral rehearsal as a strategy to help their young writers practise their written text were very surprised by the results. One teacher noted that she '*couldn't believe how imaginative they have been*' and noted that even low-attaining writers had improved their writing. She attributed this improvement to the fact that oral rehearsal allows the children '*to think about before writing it down*' and that oral rehearsal makes it '*easier to change it [writing] in talk than when it has been written down'.* It is, of course, important to reiterate here that the empirical data on oral rehearsal reported here remains exploratory because of the relatively small amount of data generated specifically using oral rehearsal.

However, the review of the policy and research literature and the exploratory study do enable the articulation of a clear conceptualisation of oral rehearsal, which might verified and refined in further studies. The empirical data shows that oral rehearsal can be a process of genuine *rehearsal,* in which writers are able to practise the form of their written text through speech and can shape and re-shape phrases or sentences prior to beginning conventional writing on paper or on screen. Furthermore, a significant and very observable characteristic of oral rehearsal is that it sounds very different from natural dialogue; its prosody is deliberate, with slower than usual speech patterns and it is more akin to reading aloud. The data also indicates that writers are able to use oral rehearsal both as an individual rehearsal process and as an interactive shared process with peers, and both appear to support the writer in moving from talk to text. **Oral rehearsal then can be defined as a process of oral composition which can occur individually or in dyads in which writers rehearse written text in spoken form, involving both the initial framing of a phrase or sentence and the oral revision of sentences.** It is also seems likely that oral rehearsal can only function at word, phrase or sentence level rather than longer linguistic units because of the difficulty of holding longer stretches of text in the working memory.

In the light of the above, it is possible that oral rehearsal may have a particular role to play in supporting the process of formulation by creating a first stage of formulation which is undertaken orally, and is followed by the written formulation. This may reduce the cognitive load incurred by writing because the phrase or sentence has been generated and shaped orally at the point at which the writer begins the transcription process. Given that thoughts do not exist in an ordered fashion, and may include visual images, half-developed thoughts and transient ideas, oral rehearsal may give young writers an opportunity to impose syntactic and linguistic coherence on their pre-verbal thoughts, drawing initially on the resources of spoken language production rather than those for writing. Thus oral rehearsal supports the transition from talk to text by reducing the cognitive cost of formulation and by making explicit the differing demands of spoken and written text creation. As noted at the outset, the view that talk supports writing is a commonplace pedagogical and theoretical belief, and as Lacasa et al suggest, researchers have assumed that '*dialogue can function as an ideal bridge to assimilate the monological and abstract features of writing*' (2001:134). It may be that oral rehearsal is the 'ideal bridge' between the creative, spontaneous, content-forming talk used to generate ideas and the more ordered, scripted nature of writing. The questions arising from this study have considerable theoretical and pedagogical implications and further empirical research, specifically designed to investigate, interrogate and verify the potentialities of oral rehearsal in writing instruction and development would prove a valuable addition to the field.

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Concept	Definition	Child-speak	Strategy
Idea generation	Providing children with the opportunity to talk about their ideas: content-focused	Getting ideas	Role play; drawing a picture; puppet play; using artefacts
Oral rehearsal	Giving children the chance to put what they want to say into words before they write it: language-focused	Say it, write it	Invisible writing; magic pen; rehearsing with a talk partner
Reflection	Giving children opportunities to reflect on their writing and on the process of writing: review-focused	Thinking about writing	Plenary points; peer observation; shared evaluation

Table 1: Summary of project concepts and definitions.