

Getting Ready to Write in Key Stage 3

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Context

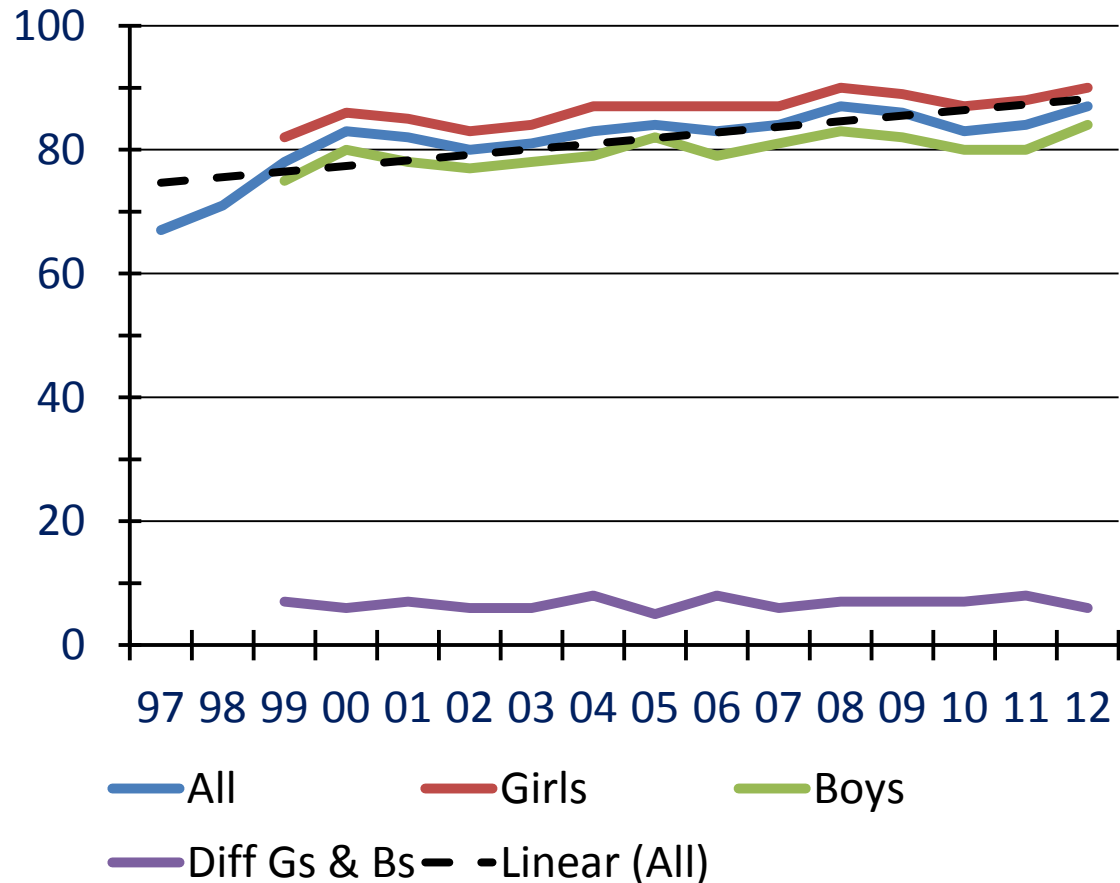
Over the last decade in England there have been:

- **Concerns about the level of achievement in literacy.**
- **Additional concerns about the level of writing performance overall.**
- **Specific concerns about performance of boys.**

National performance

Reading

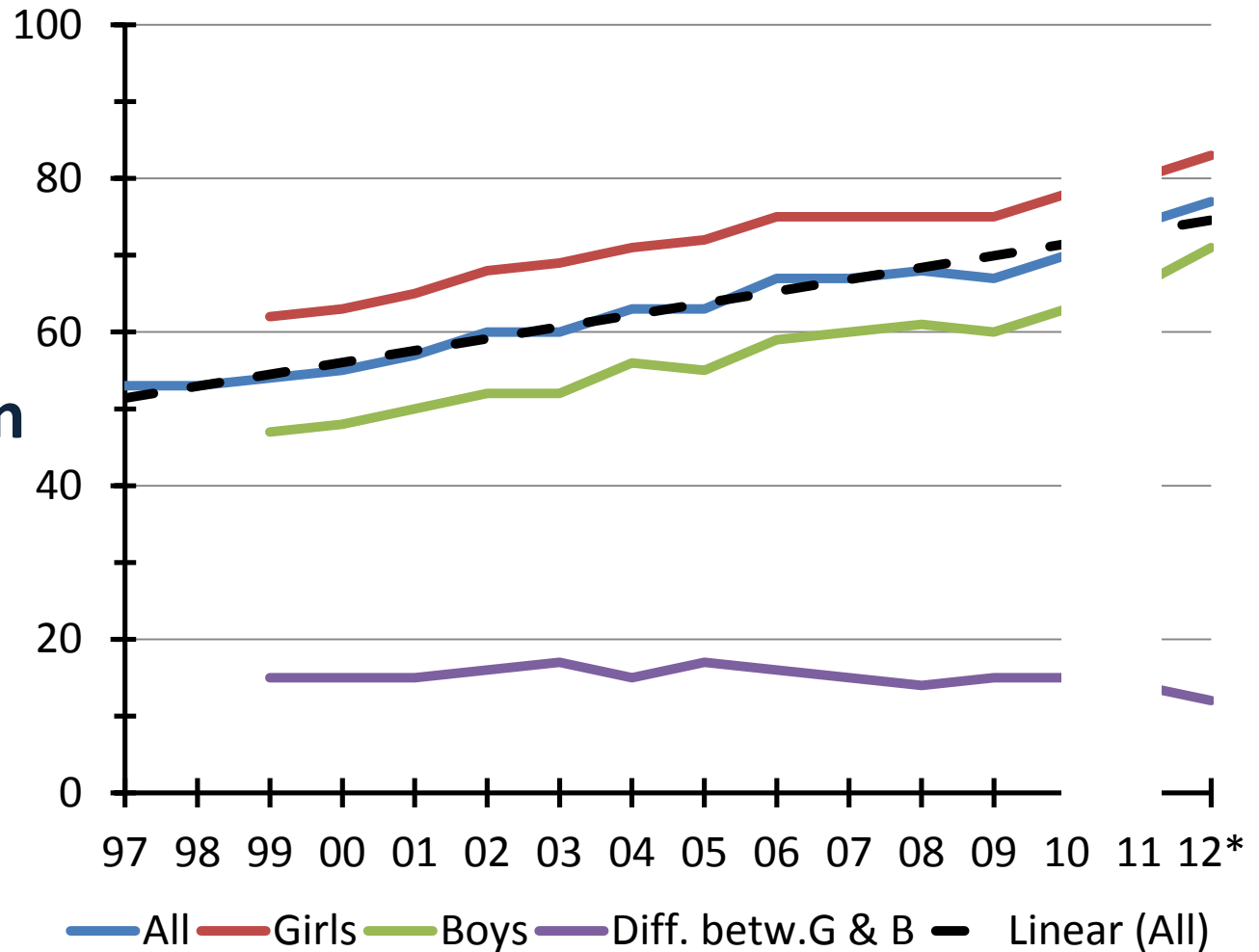
Percentage of children achieving at least Level 4 in National Assessments for Reading at KS2



National performance

Writing

Percentage of children achieving at least Level 4 in National Assessments for Writing at KS2



Level 4

Pupils' writing in a range of forms is lively and thoughtful. Ideas are often sustained and developed in interesting ways and organised appropriately for the purpose of the reader. Vocabulary choices are often adventurous and words are used for effect. Pupils are beginning to use grammatically complex sentences, extending meaning. Spelling, including that of polysyllabic words that conform to regular patterns, is generally accurate. Full stops, capital letters and question marks are used correctly, and pupils are beginning to use punctuation within the sentence. Handwriting style is fluent, joined and legible.

**This all about the quality of the texts – not
about what it is for.**

- **Generally concerns about writing relate to the English curriculum.**
- **Yet most writing in schools does not relate to the English curriculum.**
- **Writing is a cross-curricular activity.**
- **We have to ask ourselves why we require children to write – i.e. what is writing for?**

Human Information Processing Model

- **Limited capacity**
 - Finite capacity for processing information
 - If a complex task makes too many demands on the system then aspects of the task may suffer.
- **Control mechanism**
 - This mechanism has an executive function for overseeing the processing, retrieval, storage and utilisation of information.

Knowledge telling and knowledge transforming

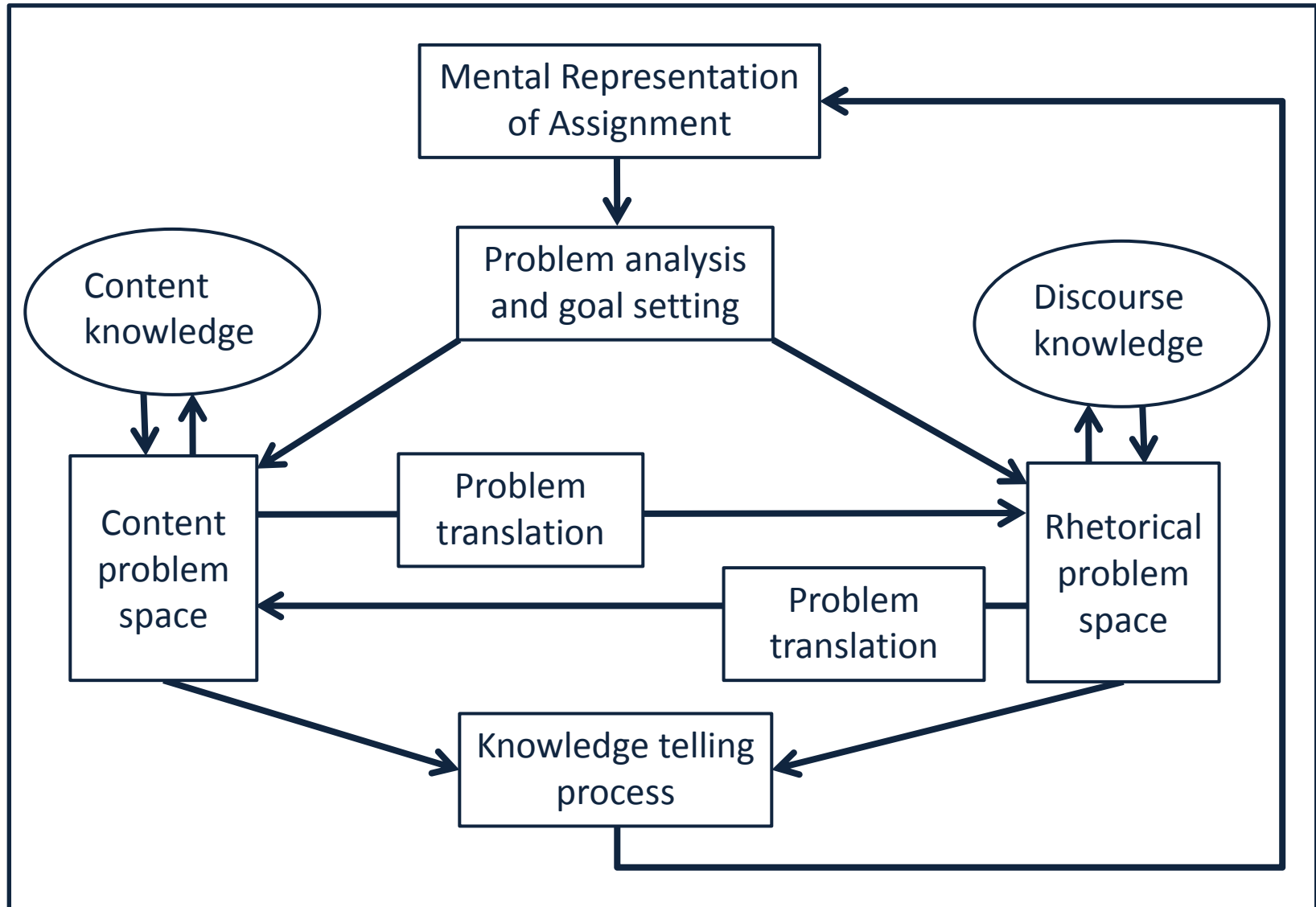
(Bereiter and Scardemalia, 1987)

- **Knowledge telling**
 - I think it; I write it
 - Knowledge telling relies on content and discourse knowledge to provide the retrieved information that will go in the text
 - If what is retrieved seems appropriate it goes in
 - Very much a linear process
 - There is little or no monitoring and evaluation of the content or the problems being solved

- **Telling is efficient and effective**
 - It is less demanding of cognitive resources

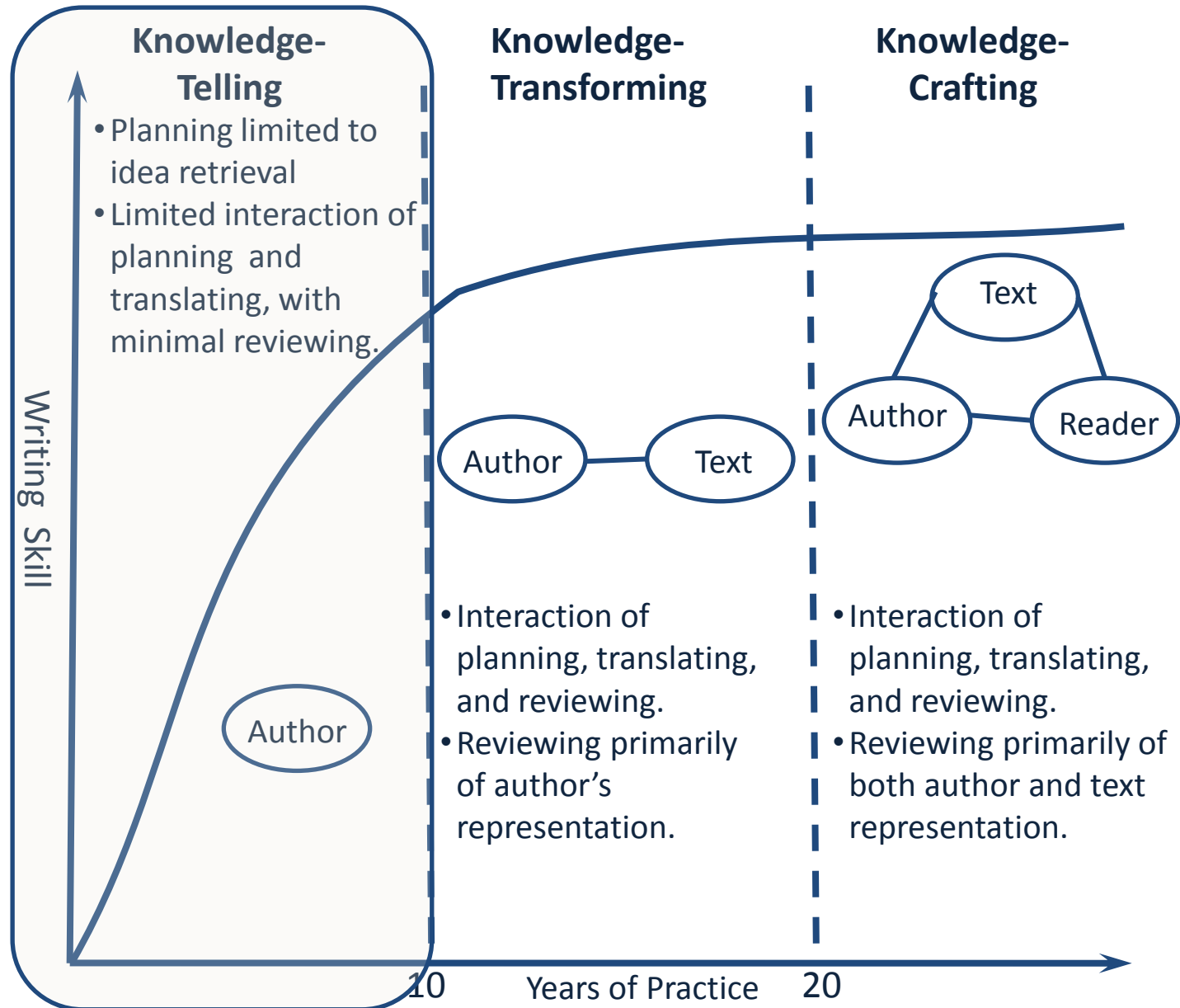
- **Knowledge transforming**
 - Writing that “thinks”
 - Beliefs, knowledge and understandings are “transformed” as a result of the writing process
 - Writing is a problem solving activity

Knowledge transformation model adapted from Scardamalia & Bereiter (1987)



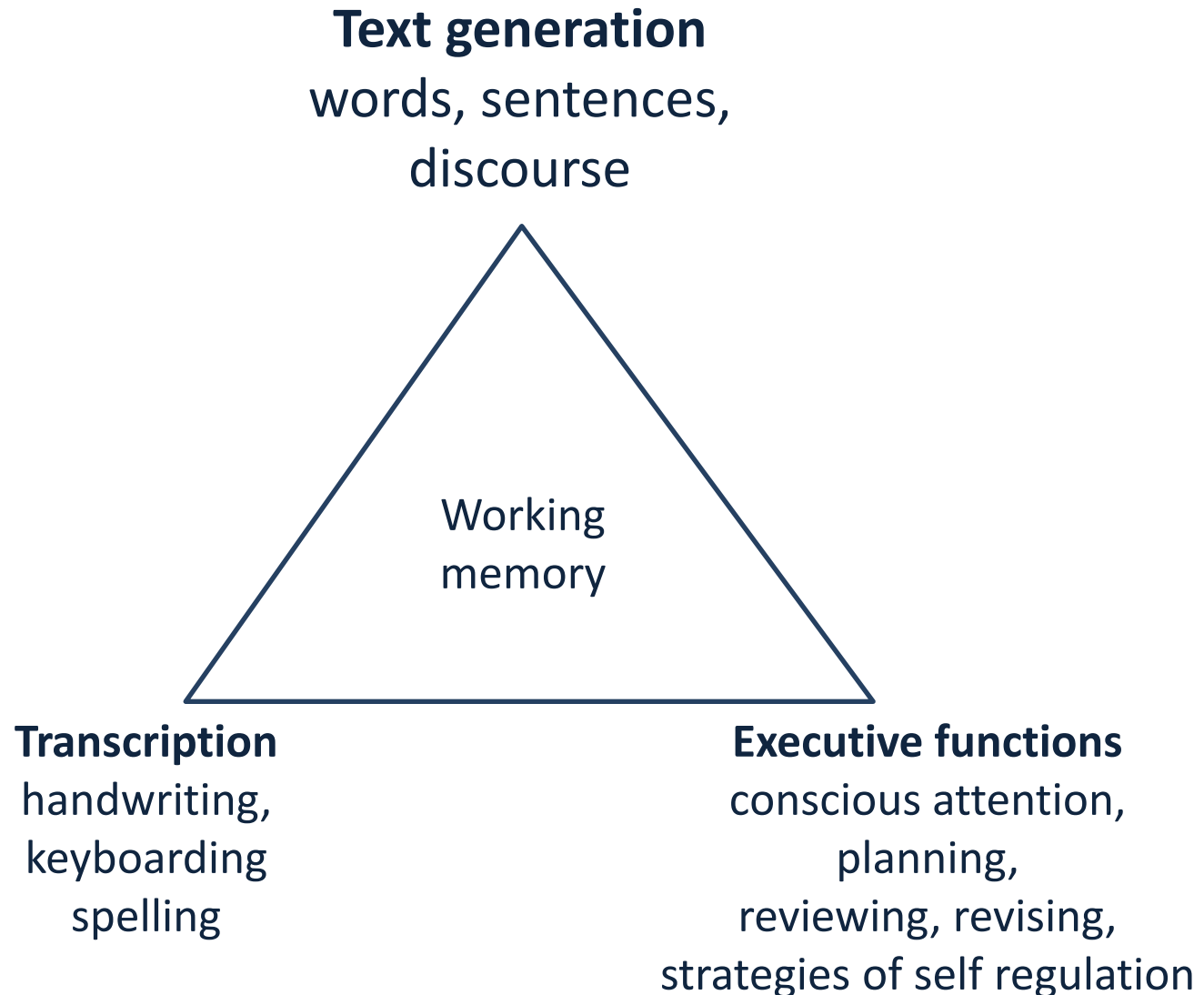
Macro-stages in the cognitive development of writing skill.

(Kellogg, 2006)



The Simple View of Writing

(Berninger et al., 2002)



Sub-skills

- **As with all complex tasks writing can be broken down into a number of different sub-skills**
- **To perform at optimum level each sub-task of the writing process needs to be developed as far as possible.**

- **Some low-level sub-tasks have the potential to be automated.**
 - **Transcribing**
 - **Handwriting/keyboarding**
 - **Spelling**
 - **?Punctuation?**
- **Automation of sub-tasks leaves capacity available for the higher order task of composing.**

Language and writing

- **The quality of writing is often determined by the level of fluency of use of syntax and the extent of the lexicon (vocabulary).**
- **Many aspects of syntax appear to result from becoming literate.**
- **Vocabulary and complex syntax may depend on exposure to print and practice with modelling and feedback.**

Implications

- **Because writing is a complex task learning cannot be left to chance.**
- **We need to be aware of the different sub processes that have to be orchestrated in order to produce texts.**
- **Transcription may prove to be a major constraint on progress.**
- **Acquisition of any skill requires opportunities to consolidate newly acquired skills to ensure automaticity is achieved where possible.**

A cross sectional investigation of the contribution of transcription skills to the quality of text writing

Participants

	Year 4 CA 8y 6m	Year 5 CA 9y 6m	Year 6 CA 10y 6m	Total
Girls	78	82	39	199
Boys	90	95	37	222
Total	168	177	76	421

Measures

- **Text writing**
 - Spontaneous text writing from the Test of Written Language (TOWL) (Hammill & Larsen, 1988).
- **Spelling**
 - Single Word Spelling Test (SWST) (Sacre & Masterson, 2000)
- **Handwriting**
 - Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting (DASH) (Barnett, Henderson, Scheib & Schulz, 2007)

DASH

- **Standardised on UK population**
- **Generates overall standard score based on performance on four subscales:**
 - **Copy best (2 minutes)**
 - **Copy fast (2 minutes)**
 - **Alphabet writing (1 minute)**
 - **Text writing (10 minutes)**

Results

TOWL

Mean percentage scores

A significant main
effect of gender

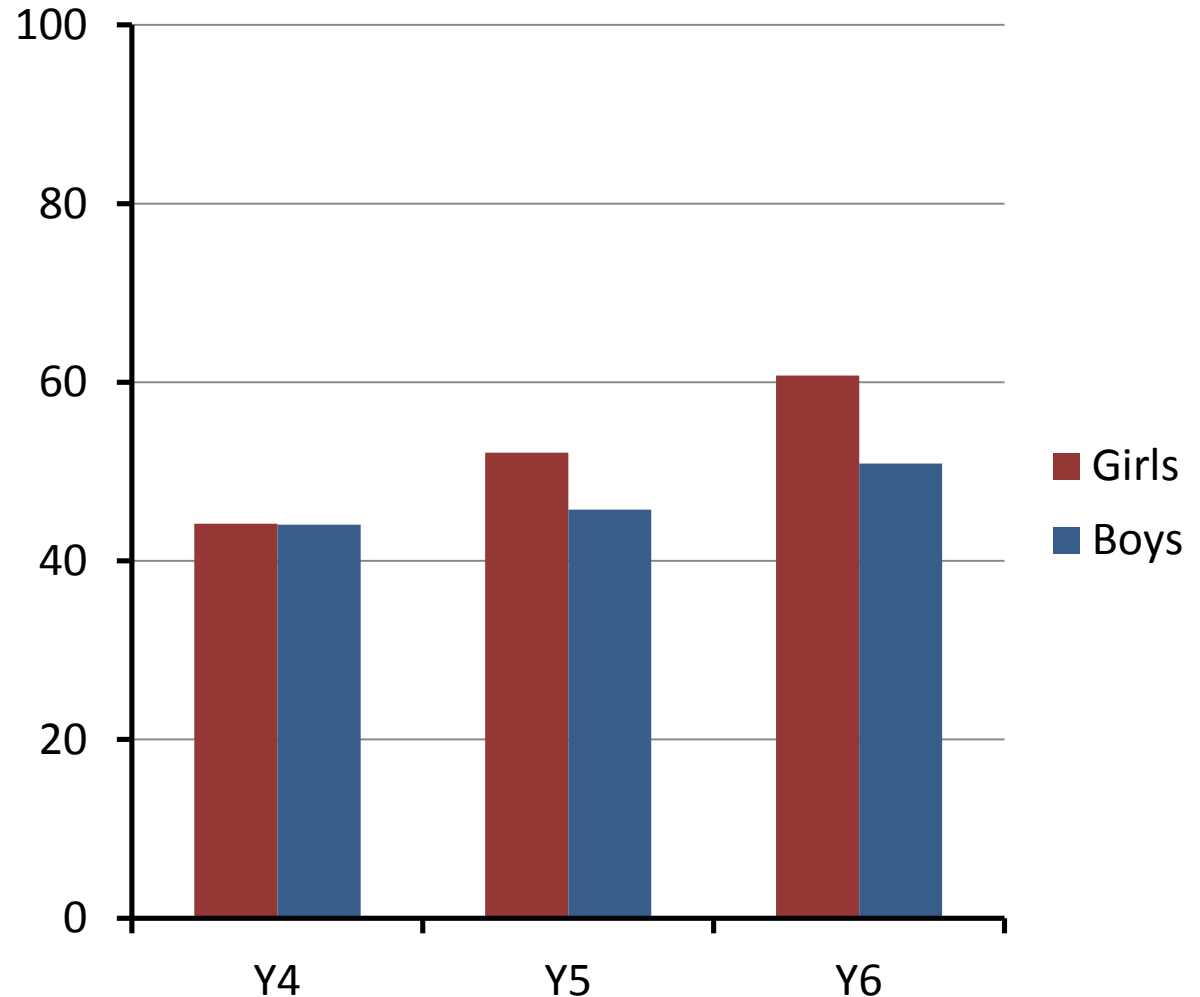
$$F(2, 415) = 17.58, p < .001$$

A significant effect of
year group

$$F(2, 415) = 23.89, p < .001$$

A significant
interaction

$$F(2, 415) = 2.50, p = .004$$



Spelling

Mean standard scores

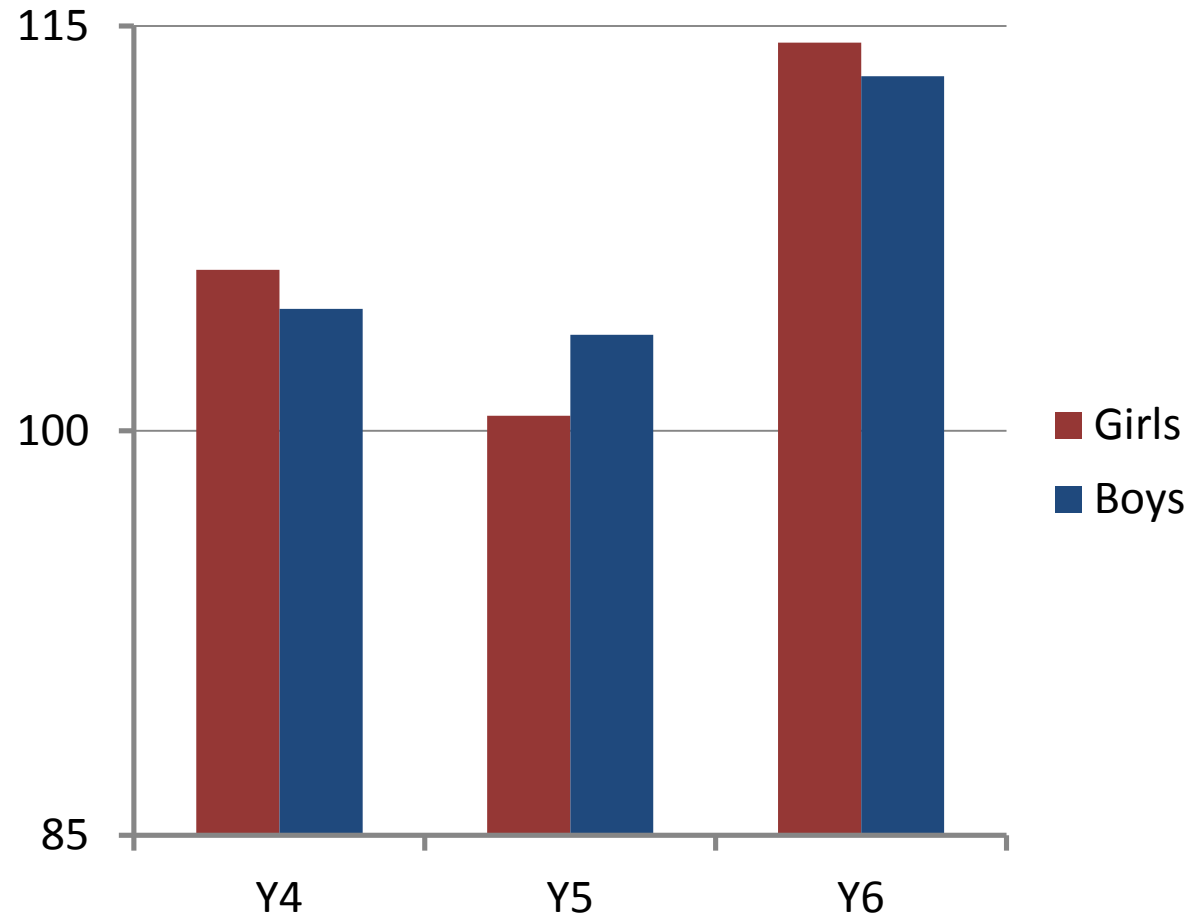
No effect of gender,

$F(1, 415) = 1.80$, NS

A significant effect of
year group

$F(2, 415) = 9.48$ $p < .001$

No interaction



Handwriting speed

Mean standard scores

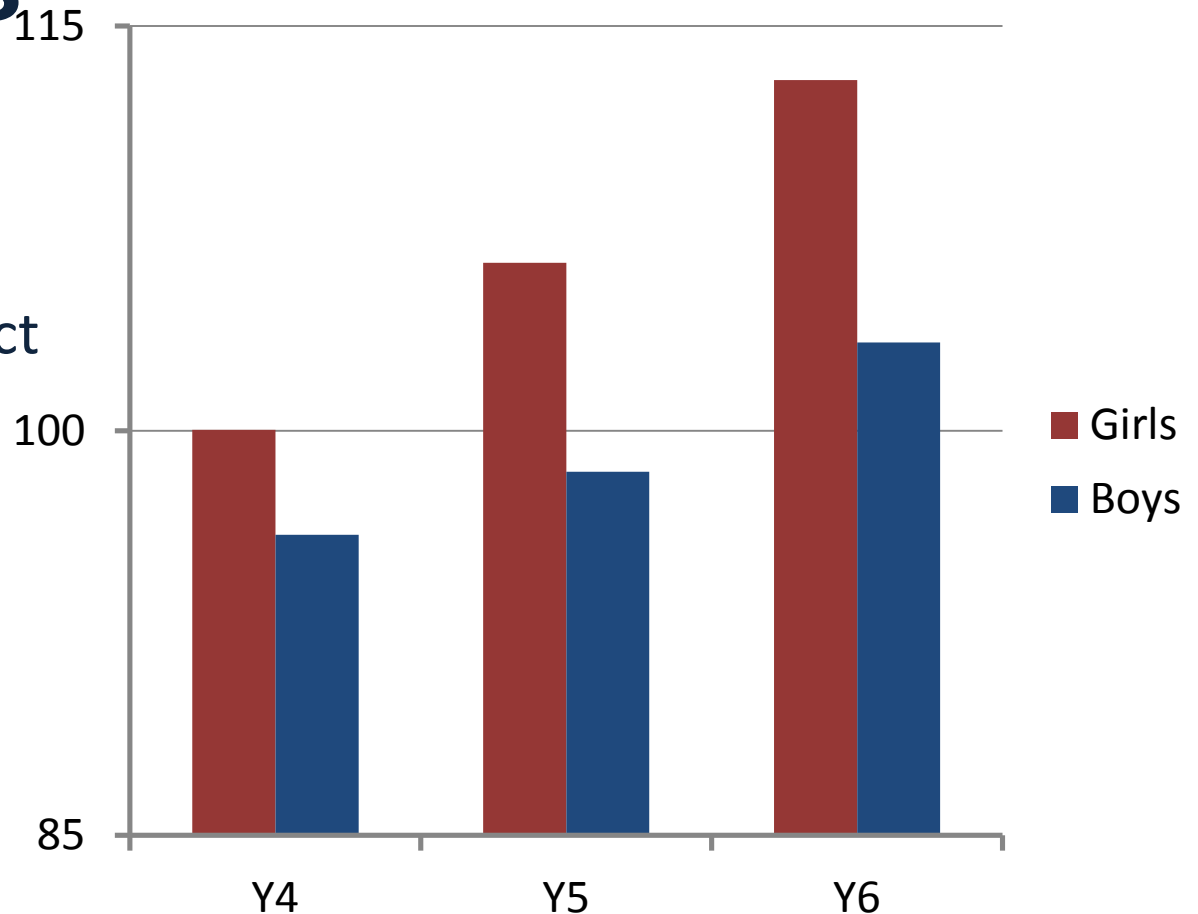
A significant main effect
of gender

$$F(1, 415) = 22.23, p < .001$$

A significant effect of
year group

$$F(2, 415) = 12.08, p < .001$$

No interaction



The contribution of transcription skills to the quality of written texts.

A standard multiple regression analysis was conducted on the data to assess the contribution of the transcription skills to the quality of the texts.

DV was TOWL score

Age at test was entered first followed by SWST and DASH

	Tot. var. expl.	Spelling		Handwriting	
		β	Var. ex.	β	Var. ex.
All	29%	.29***	6%	.27***	4%
Y4	17%	.32***	8%	.16 ⁺	3%
Y5	23%	.32***	7%	.24**	4%
Y6	33%	.25*	5%	.41***	14%

⁺ p = .053; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Conclusions

- Transcription skills have a significant impact on text writing in this age group.
- Boys' performance is poorer than girls in overall text writing and handwriting.
- The contribution of handwriting speed was more not less significant in the older age group.

- **Spelling is a focus of explicit teaching.**
- **Handwriting is directly taught.**
- **However – this is primarily for legibility.**
- **Children are not explicitly helped to write quickly.**
 - **Lack of speed implies lack of automaticity.**
- **Boys lack of speed is a potential barrier to developing writing skills.**

Implications for transition to KS3

KS2

- Ensure that the transcription skills have been covered so that the possibility of them compromising writing ability is reduced.
- Establish awareness that through writing comes understanding.

KS3→

- Use writing as a tool for learning and not just for assessing learning.
- Establish writing as a demanding task that can be enjoyable.