

Written evidence

Members of the Oracy APPG will consider written, verbal and audio-visual evidence and oversee oral evidence sessions. All evidence will inform the final report.

The extended deadline for submitting written evidence is 20th September 2019. We would appreciate if the submissions would follow the following guidelines:

- Be in a Word format
- No longer than 3000 words
- State clearly who the submission is from, and whether it is sent in a personal capacity or on behalf of an organisation
- Begin with a short summary in bullet point form
- Have numbered paragraphs
- Where appropriate, provide references

Please write your evidence below and email the completed form via email to inquiry@oracyappg.org.uk with the subject line of 'Oracy APPG inquiry'

Judith Stephenson

Full name:

Barbara Priestman Academy

School or Organisation:

Lead Practitioner – Teaching and Learning – Thinking Schools Lead

Role:

Written evidence:

- As an academy for students with ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder/ complex needs, we believe that the development of oracy skills is a fundamental part of our students' learning and impacts positively on their reading and writing levels as well as increasing their confidence, enjoyment and their ability to engage in learning with increasing confidence
- All children from nursery to the end of their schooling should have oracy as part of their curriculum
- Reading, writing, Speaking and listening should be given equal focus within the curriculum
- Oracy skills, especially dialogic oracy skills, enable students to become better thinkers which in turn enables them to develop skills needed both within the classroom and throughout their future employment
- Effective oracy skills can impact upon other key areas, including the area of Mental Health and encouraging young people to participate more fully in social action which enables young people to become more active global citizens

Provision and access

Where can we identify good practice and can you give examples?

1.

I have chosen to begin with the provision and access section of guidance as I can address many aspects of the value and impact section through our work as a school and can also address some of the barriers that may be faced especially in terms of our special school setting.

I have been in my current school for eleven years now and it is unrecognisable to the place I stepped into all those years ago. When I first started, a number of our students were passive learners and the delivery of our curriculum led to students being given information in order to pass exams but contained little opportunity for learners to discover things for themselves; to become motivated in their own learning and to want to challenge themselves.

Many students with ASD are very black and white and like things to be right or wrong; they often find it difficult when there isn't a definitive answer; in the past they had a fear of failure and were often reticent to volunteer an answer in case they were deemed incorrect. The majority of our students see subjects as very separate entities and compartmentalise skills, and as such were often unable to transfer skills between curriculum subjects and this was something we wanted to address. In addition to giving our students concrete tools to use to aid their thinking, we also wanted to challenge them further in the difficulties they had with empathy and seeing things from other people's perspectives.

I had heard about the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach and have undertaken extensive training with this in order to embed it throughout school. Introducing P4C into our curriculum has enabled us to use this approach; not only to focus on students' speaking, listening and communication skills which is of paramount importance but it has also allowed us to foster their curiosity and to develop their sense of awe and wonder. Comments such as, "I'm confused." "I wonder why...?" "I think... because..." are now common occurrences in sessions but are also appearing in other lessons on a daily basis which is fantastic to see.

Through P4C we have explored together the criteria of what makes a good thinker and a good enquirer and we are collectively responsible for ensuring that the guidelines we generated together are adhered to. This ownership has been key to students creating the ethos they have during enquiry sessions and enables them to have frank, honest discussions where they have built trust between their peers and have created a space where they feel safe to share some often very personal experiences and this is what sets it apart from other general classroom discourse. Presentational oracy skills are often taught in school but to us, it has been the more complex dialogic oracy skills; those skills we use when creating joint ideas, negotiating in groups, eliciting and attending to others' points of view etc. which have had the most impact on our students. These are the skills which become unconscious, tacit and make us able to express the ideas we have, rather than focussing on how we express them; the skills which help us develop in confidence and become engaged with topics and issues in the world around us.

Can you provide evidence of how oracy education is being provided in different areas/ education settings/ extra-curricular provision, by teachers but also other practitioners that work with children?

2.

Through my P4C training, I have met people who work with children and young people in various ways, from Brownie leaders to someone working for Oxfam who works with students in schools looking at Global citizenship. Without exception, everyone has come to the training because they feel passionately about the importance of enabling young people to develop effective oracy skills in order to help them to find their place in the world and to become active global citizens; to be able to stand up, with confidence, for what they believe in and to make a difference within society. You only need to look at young people like Greta Thunberg, to see the power and impact good oracy skills can have.

Value and impact

1- Should spoken language have the same status as reading and writing in our education system?

I think it should have **at least** equal weighting. I often think when we talk about children learning to read and write we mean learning the actual mechanics; the decoding of words in reading and the forming and sequencing of letters to make meaning in writing. Many of our students find the process of reading and writing extremely difficult but if you read to them and explore the language and concepts with them, they can access quite complex texts. They find writing laborious, but ask them to share their thoughts and you scribe for them and the results can be phenomenal and far more creative. I worry that in our constant rush to do things better and earlier we are potentially damaging our children's early language development by teaching the mechanics of reading and writing too young and not only that but we risk turning them off English as a subject. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that it is through language used in social contexts that children learn to take control of their thinking and are helped to fulfil their intellectual potential and that we cannot write without being given sufficient time to think and **talk** to develop our ideas. The value of talk is not a new thing yet we still expect children to be able to read and write without first being able to speak articulately.

The Bullock report (1975) identified that in the primary years especially, a child's ability to speak and listen is nearly always more developed than their ability to read and write; sharing their work with others through talk, can benefit children by helping them to develop their thinking in all curriculum areas. This is supported by the research of Robin Alexander (2004) who maintains that in dialogic classrooms children don't just provide brief factual answers to 'test' or 'recall' questions, or merely spot the answer which they think the teacher wants to hear. Instead they learn to narrate, explain, analyse, speculate, imagine, explore, evaluate, discuss, argue, justify and they ask questions of their own. He further identifies that children in dialogic classrooms also listen, think about what they hear, give others time to think and respect alternative viewpoints. This research is over 40 years old and more current research is still promoting the importance of talk, yet there is still a huge discrepancy between findings and what teachers are encouraged to do in their classrooms.

Ritchart (2015), states, "A culture of thinking is a place where a group's collective thinking as well as each individual's thinking is valued, visible and actively promoted as part of the regular day-to-day experience." One of the areas he looks at is the language of community and how by simply using the pronouns 'we', 'our', and 'us' we align our belief that learning is a social endeavour and that we are in the learning experience together; where students see themselves as part of a community of learners, rather than being disassociated and cites the work of (Davies and Harre 1999; Langenhove and Harre 1999) "Language works to position people in relation to one another."

The more we encourage children to talk and to see things from multiple perspectives, the more they begin to see and understand others' viewpoints.

One of the challenges that children face today, especially with the increase of technology, is how to make sense of the many messages they receive via home, school, peers, the media and what they themselves think of the many issues that concern them in their immediate community and the wider world. More than ever, children receive a bewildering range of conflicting messages about the choices they face and we need to help them meet these challenges by helping them develop moral and social values; enquiries around these issues helps build their capacity to become active and effective citizens and helps them to develop awareness of others and their sense of self.

2. – How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school & what is the benefit on other key agendas?

In school we use Dramatic Enquiry which is a fusion of P4C and drama where staff and students enquire together in role. This way of working has really engaged our students and helped them with their flexibility of thought. They are more easily able to put themselves in other people's shoes and emotionally engage with a situation which is pertinent to their everyday lives but because they are in role we have found they are less reticent in sharing their thoughts and ideas. We address issues that arise in school or stem from the interests of the students and for some children they may never have the opportunity in other contexts to explore issues that concern them so it is imperative that they are given the opportunity to do so in a safe non-judgemental environment.

In this day and age, the immediacy in which we can make a comment and the ease in which it can be posted on a number of social media sites, means people often don't take time to reflect on the far-reaching consequences of that action. Children seem to be very aware of their rights and the freedoms that are protected but don't always see the responsibility that they have and how they go together hand in hand.

Many people today misunderstand what is meant by everyone having the right to freedom of expression; they interpret that as being able to say whatever they like, without thinking about how it affects the rights of others. If we do not explicitly teach children that they have the right to freedom of speech as long as it is within the parameters of the law, then this could cause them difficulties when they find themselves in other social situations. We only have to listen to the news on a daily basis to hear horrific stories that stem from the inability of people to be tolerant towards others.

The sooner we start exploring complex issues with children and encourage them to think about their place in the world and enable them to explore and calculate the impact and consequences their decisions may have; the more equipped they will be when confronted with ethical problems as they grow older and this can only be done through having the opportunity to develop their oracy skills through high quality dialogic talk.

Another government key agenda is that of young people's wellbeing and mental health. According to a report earlier in the year, the number of

children seeking help from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Camhs) in England, has more than doubled over the past two years.

The Mental Health Foundation state that mental health problems are a growing public health concern and that they are prevalent both in the UK and around the world. How many times, do we hear on the news that families and people close to suicide victims had no idea of how they were feeling?

For many young people, the pressure put upon them in teenage years is huge; add to that their struggles with discovering who they are as a person can lead to many suffering from a range of mental illness. Add other disabilities on top of that and being able to talk about how they are feeling is a real struggle for many of our students.

Talking about how we are feeling is very difficult for a lot of people and research has shown that men in particular, find it difficult to say how they are feeling. Being given a safe environment with people they trust and being taught how to talk and express their feelings from a young age, would hopefully break down the stigma of it being seen as a sign of weakness, in males especially, if they were to admit to feeling overwhelmed by life and needing some support. Daniel Goleman (1996) states that it is not just IQ that determines how we do in life but also emotional intelligence that matters. "Children need to explore their own emotions and the emotions of others."

In school we use a number of methods to help students recognise how they are feeling and to think about strategies they could use to help them regulate and manage their emotions including mood boards and scales which invites the person to say how they are feeling but also gives the person asking the question a place to begin and opens up the conversation.

However, sometimes there are occasions where our students don't want to talk to another human.

In such situations, we use our PAT (Pets as Therapy) dog. He is used to support our students in a range of ways but one of the ways is to help our students express their feelings. One student who had huge anxiety issues but CAMHS had found it impossible to get him to engage, will sit and talk to Ollie as he knows he won't tell anyone.

Often therapeutic work is carried out in clinical setting which can be very off putting for our students, the dog goes to them in whatever environment

they are comfortable. They will often take him to a room in school which is set out like a flat with beanbags and kitchen facilities. They can sit with him on the beanbags or talk to him while making a cup of tea; they will even just talk to him while walking him around the school grounds. The dog has enabled a number of our students to begin to recognise the effect their emotions have on others where previous work around this emotional intelligence has failed and I think other agencies working in the area of Mental Health could really utilise this method. Sometimes, people just need to talk; they aren't always ready for, or need, the interaction. Talking in itself is enough to make them feel better.

Barriers

What are the barriers that teachers face to providing quality oracy education, within the education system and beyond?

1.

There is much evidence to support the fact that the more young children are spoken to, the quicker they acquire language skills and the greater and quicker their vocabulary develops. Those children who come from homes where they hear talk all the time, who are read to on a regular basis, who are encouraged to be curious and ask questions, arrive at school with far more advanced language skills than those who don't; this immediately impacts on oracy skills in the education setting. Children with special needs may also have to overcome greater barriers in terms of developing their oracy skills and this can be a challenge for teachers but as I have addressed there are ways in which this can be overcome.

2.

The emphasis that is put on speaking and listening skills in the secondary curriculum is on presentational skills. Under the Spoken Language section of the GCSE specification for English Language, it states,

This GCSE specification in English Language will require students to study the following content:

- presenting information and ideas: selecting and organising information and ideas effectively and persuasively for prepared

spoken presentations; planning effectively for different purposes and audiences; making presentations and speeches

- responding to spoken language: listening to and responding appropriately to any questions and feedback

They are not assessed on the dialogic skills mentioned earlier in this response.

Although Spoken Language is an assessed part of the English Language GCSE, students only gain a grade –Pass, merit, distinction; it carries no marks towards their exam. This penalises students who may struggle with reading and writing but who are very articulate. All three components should carry an equal weighting. With the pressure on teachers to make sure students achieve the highest grade possible, why would they give as much time to the spoken language when it carries no marks and why would students feel the need to do well in that section when a pass is serves the same purpose as a distinction?

Best approach

The EEF and the University of Durham undertook a study on P4C in primary schools. Below are some of the findings.

- There is evidence that P4C had a positive impact on Key Stage 2 attainment.
- Overall, pupils using the approach made approximately two additional months' progress in reading and maths.
- Results suggest that P4C had the biggest positive impact on Key Stage 2 results among disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for free school meals).
- Teachers and pupils generally reported that P4C had a positive influence on the wider outcomes such as pupils' confidence to speak, listening skills, and self-esteem.

They are now carrying out a further study and the results will be published in Spring 2021.

Using a structured approach that develops **dialogic** oracy skills seems to me to be the way forward.

Additional guidance:

Value and impact

1. Given many teachers recognise the importance of oracy, why does spoken language not have the same status as reading and writing in our education system? Should it have the same status, and if so why?
2. What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?
3. What is the value and impact of quality oracy education at i) different life stages, ii) in different settings, and iii) on different types of pupils (for instance pupils from varied socioeconomic backgrounds or with special educational needs)?
4. How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?
5. What is the impact of quality oracy education on future life chances? Specifically, how does it affect employment and what value do businesses give oracy?
6. What do children and young people at school and entering employment want to be able to access, what skills to they want to leave school with?
7. What is the value and impact of oracy education in relation to other key agendas such as social mobility and wellbeing/ mental health?
8. How can the ability to communicate effectively contribute to engaging more young people from all backgrounds to become active citizens, participating fully in social action and public life as adults

Provision and access

1. What should high quality oracy education look like?
2. Can you provide evidence of how oracy education is being provided in different areas/education settings/extra-curricular provision, by teachers but also other practitioners that work with children?
3. What are the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education?
4. Where can we identify good practice and can you give examples?
5. What factors create unequal access to oracy education (i.e. socio-economic, region, type of school, special needs)? How can these factors be overcome?
6. Relating to region more specifically, how should an oracy-focused approach be altered depending on the context?

Barriers

1. What are the barriers that teachers face in providing quality oracy education, within the education system and beyond?
2. What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?
3. What accountability is currently present in the system? How can we further incentivise teachers to deliver more oracy education to children and young people?

4. What is the role of government and other bodies in creating greater incentives and how can this be realised?
5. What is the role of assessment in increasing provision of oracy education? What is the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills?
6. Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to deliver high quality oracy education?
7. What is the best approach – more accountability within the system or a less prescriptive approach?
8. Are there examples of other educational pedagogies where provision has improved and we can draw parallels and learn lessons?