Oracy APPG

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'

Alison Margaret Peacock
Full name:

The Chartered College of Teaching
School or Organisation:

CEO
Role:

Written evidence:

I am providing this evidence as a personal account of the impact of oracy on my teaching and leadership over a lifelong career. The views expressed are not necessarily those of The Chartered College of Teaching.

Value and impact

In January 2003, I took on the headship of The Wroxham Primary School in Hertfordshire. The school had been in Ofsted 'special measures' since 2001 and no progress had been achieved in terms of termly HMI reports. Under my leadership the school moved out of 'special measures' in October 2003 and in March 2006 was judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding'. This 'outstanding' judgement was repeated in 2009 and 2013 with a survey maths inspection in 2016 carried out due to exceptionally high results.

When I took up headship I told the community that we would become a 'listening school'. The progress of the school is written about extensively in 'Creating Learning without Limits' (2012). The key focus of our school improvement was to see learning as a collective endeavour and within that to value the voice and agency of all members of the community.

1.   Circle meetings. Instead of an elected school council we ran weekly mixed-age Circle Meetings for all five-eleven year olds across the school. These meetings were soon chaired and noted by Year Six student teams with members of staff as participants within the circles. Themes for discussion were agreed weekly by a mixture of children's ideas, staff / governors' suggestions. Everyone was encouraged to contribute their thinking during the fifteen minute meeting. All members of the circle were treated with respect and valued for their responses. The meetings embodied a whole-school approach to collective decision-making and democracy.

2.   Learning Review meetings.   These meetings replaced the traditional family consultation meetings twice a year. Children in Year 5 & 6 prepared four powerpoint slides for the fifteen minute meeting with family, teacher and headteacher. The slides summarised challenges and successes in learning and formed the introduction from the child to the meeting. Meetings took place in the headteacher's office with the child seated at the desk on the headteacher's swivel chair. These meetings were very high status and provided invaluable information about progress and next steps for learning for all concerned. National curriculum levels / grades were not mentioned but specific areas for future development were discussed with reference to exercise books. Even those children with additional needs were able to participate in these meetings and were able to take the lead. In some cases, children visited the headteacher's office if necessary prior to the meeting to ensure that they would be familiar with the environment. All families were very proud of their child's capacity to evaluate their learning and to explain with clarity areas where everyone could help them to achieve more. I have a filmed example of a Year Six Learning Review meeting that I will share with the APPG.

3.   Child reports. In the summer term, children completed their reports into progress across the curriculum using laptops. These reports were saved so that teachers could add their comments. Children also chose photographs from class records to illustrate examples of learning. The youngest children (Nursery – Year One) were interviewed by the teacher, nursery nurse or teaching assistant for their comments. In some cases older children worked with younger classes to help them upload their comments. This involved the children looking through their work as an aide memoir. Older children helping younger peers also had a brief

curriculum summary from the teacher to support their conversations. Families were pleased with the personal nature of the reports, often stating that they could 'hear' their child's voice shining through.

4. Assemblies. Children became used to contributing to assembly discussions which on occasion were organised as whole school debates.

5. Learning Partners. In class children were organised not by 'ability' but were randomly assigned learning partners that changed each week. There were often talk partner activities within class and this meant that every child got to know every other child within the class. Within mathematics, for example, learning partners might engage with a task / problem individually before sharing their thinking. Some children would be asked by the teacher to explain their mathematical thinking to the whole class. Similarly children may work with their partner to explore responses to writing or to discuss their reading or evaluate musical performance etc.

6. Behaviour incident forms. When I arrived at the school there was a great deal of conflict and bullying on the playground that often carried on in classrooms. Extreme behaviour incidents in the early days included chair throwing and running off site. This quickly changed through establishing fair ways of listening to the children's views of what happened prior to, during and after, behaviour incidents. A Behaviour Incident form was introduced which was completed by all children involved. This meant that everyone had an opportunity to explain their perspective and to be heard. In the very early days when behaviour incidents were frequent I spent a lot of time listening to children explaining real of perceived 'unfairness'. Rapidly the number of serious incidents declined but children knew that every incident would be recorded and discussed. Incidences of bullying declined and the central record system meant that monitoring was undertaken.

7. Peer mediation. The school was fortunate to be able to appoint a teacher, Roisin O'Hagan, who subsequently became a therapeutic support teacher with a postgraduate degree from the Tavistock Centre. Roisin introduced peer mediation. Children in KS2 were trained to become peer mediators who worked to a rota on the playground at lunchtime every day. These children were trained in trying to hear all sides and diffuse arguments before they became more serious. This training in active listening was very valuable.

8. Art therapy. An art therapist was employed to work at the school one day each week to provide individual children with the opportunity to talk whilst engaging in art. Counselling was also offered to members of teaching staff and to families in partnership with a Family Support Worker. Formal opportunities for children and adults to speak in a confidential trusted environment helped to increase containment.

9. Debating competitions and speech day. Preparing for a speech is an important discipline. This became a regular part of our curriculum and we also offered a competitive element with a school trophy. The formal skills of conveying information clearly, use of visual aids, humour and charisma were all practised.

10. Philosophy for children. Opportunities to regularly engage in class debate about issues of mutual concern and relevance were often part of the timetable. Where possible these discussions contributed to action. For example, the Year 6 class met with museum curators to evaluate their museum offer and to plan activities within the local museum for Year One children and their families. Through discussion and persuasion the older children were able to enact a day of historical learning where they taught the younger children in a carousel with activities ranging from percussion music to the rhythm of the water mill, an archaeological dig with buried Roman pottery, baking bread, herb garden trail, washing clothes the Victorian way etc. Through oracy the children were able to bring the museum to life for their peers and later to evaluate what it felt like to be placed in the position of 'teacher'.

All the examples above are illustrative of the transformative effect of a school culture where every child and adult knows they are valued. Oracy builds cognition. Explaining thinking and expressing ideas (metacognition) are key to creating learning that benefits all. It is important to note that the activities described above all required children to practice and build their use of spoken language as an integral part of their learning and as a means of contributing to the collective.

Provision and access

Ironically, creating a Listening School meant that very rapidly a culture of enhanced mutual respect and a feeling that learning was irresistible, began to emerge. This is ironic because it was the school that focused on 'listening' in response to the needs of the children and this in turn meant that children were far more able and ready to listen to the teachers.

For many teachers the idea of building oracy feels worrying as in some quarters this could equate to the teacher's voice and authority becoming diminished. A dialogic classroom, however, is the opposite to this with everyone's opinion becoming more deeply respected. The seminal work of Professor Robin Alexander is unrivalled in this area (see references).

The work that the Chartered College of Teaching is doing to bring greater awareness of a variety of pedagogical approaches and access to educational research means that teachers are more likely to encounter methodology that supports oracy via articles in the peer-reviewed quarterly journal *Impact*. The Chartered College is also gathering examples of classroom practice that help teachers to imagine other ways of teaching beyond those they have experienced as a learner. I will send an example of a 'windows into the classroom' film that focuses on oracy in a Salford school.

Barriers to improving oracy education

The main barriers in the past have been a perception that children learn more from direct instruction than from talking. In some classrooms children have been accused of engaging in 'idle chatter'. It is important that the teaching profession understands how best to support challenging learning that excites comment. My experience is that a well-structured learning environment where teacher-talk is highly valued alongside children's responsive discussion provides high quality opportunities for every child to engage with learning. Alexander's work on dialogic classrooms (2008) and recognising different types of talk articulates this brilliantly.

It is important to recognise that oracy should be integral to the curriculum rather than an 'add-on'. The promising findings of the EEF work on metacognition and self-regulation (2018) offer helpful signals to schools about ways in which oracy contributes to learning.

References
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Brooker, L. (2002) *Starting School – Young Children Learning Cultures.* Buckingham, England. Philidelphia US: Open University Press
Fielding, M., Bragg, S. (2003) *Students as Researchers.* TLRP. Pearson Publishing.
Hart.S., Drummond, M.J., Dixon,A., McIntyre,D. (2004) *Learning without Limits.* Maidenhead: Open University Press
Peacock, A. (2011) *Circles of Influence,* in Sanders,E (Ed) *Leading a creative school: Learning about lasting school change*. London: David Fulton
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Quigley, A., Muijs, D., Stringer, E. (2018) *Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning* Education Endowment Foundation
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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?