# 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'

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Written evidence:

**Evidence to support the 'Speak for Change' Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry**
**1.1 Oracy**
Our entire constitution and system of government is dependent on the oracy skills of those involved. Without the opportunity to develop these particular skills in school we may be denying the next generation the opportunity to participate in their democratic rights and contribute to society in a meaningful way which is a fundamental British value, and a human right.
 https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/

## 1. 1 Oracy and learning in classrooms
Vygotsky drew attention to the value of talk in children's learning, highlighting the interrelationship between children's use of language in social interaction, and the development of their thinking. Social interaction therefore can be seen as crucial to learning.  In schools interaction is generated by children and teachers together (Nystrand et al., 2003) and research suggests that classroom dialogue contributes to children's intellectual development (Mercer and Littleton, 2007) and that pupil–to-pupil talk and teacher-child talk has the potential to facilitate learning and cognitive development (Alexander, 2000) as knowledge is co-constructed by a process of 'interthinking' . In addition to cognition and learning, talk is seen as linked to identity and a sense of self, and as important in building and maintaining social relationships and socio-emotional learning. Talk's capacity to empower both learners and teachers across all curriculum areas means it should be given its rightful place within the curriculum (Jones, 2017).

## 1.2 Linguistic diversity
Linguistic and cultural diversity is a fundamental and enduring feature of contemporary British society and is, accordingly, reflected at all levels within England's schools. However, the kinds of language (and literacy) currently privileged in schools, presented as the basis for educational success, may differ from those of the child's home and community experiences (Levy, 2011).  In this way, linguistic diversity, with its social and cultural roots, is transformed into one of the most acute problems of social inequality more generally. The challenge for an educational policy based on social justice therefore, is to acknowledge and value linguistic diversity in all its forms while providing the opportunities for all children to develop the linguistic and communicational means for a successful school career (Piller, 2016). Indeed, linguistic diversity and success in education appear to be a persistent problem (See Brice Heath, 1983; Gee, 2004, Brooker, 2011).  Brice- Heath (1983), for example, studied the relationships between sociocultural categories (cultural, linguistic, social, economic) and the language development of children and noted that certain kinds of language socialisation were more compatible with school environments and that this impacted, positively or negatively, on the child's success in literacy on entry to school. Heath's work highlighted the inequality of culturally valued resources as children enter school, influenced by their language socialisation. Similar concerns about the differential experiences of children from socio economic and culturally diverse backgrounds were raised by Brooker (2011).  Gee (2004) suggested that some children's home language experience supported strong associations between home and school that gave them an educational advantage.  Heath was keen to suggest that practitioners take time to understand and be empathetic towards a child's home and community socialisation in order to bridge home and school practices. Wheeler (2010)

illustrates how non-acceptance in schools of vernacular language has harmed those students who speak non-standard dialects. Wheeler suggests that a *contrastivist approach* is taken where pupil home language is seen as different, but not deficient, to school language. In this approach, children would be taught to be explicitly aware of the linguistic differences between dialects and use language appropriate to context.

## 1.3 Oracy and the Curriculum

There is a significant body of research suggesting that the status of oracy should be raised, not least in policy and the statutory curriculum. Jones (2017), for example, provides a review of policy initiatives with respect to oracy over time, illustrating the ways in which talk has been both promoted and side-lined in the statutory curriculum. Jones (2017) suggests that this instability had led to low-confidence and inconsistent practice in the teaching of oracy in schools. Similarly, Dockerell et al. (2015) noted a lack of knowledge within the teaching profession regarding the development or oracy. Jones (2017) proposed that the centrality of oracy in the primary curriculum has been downplayed in the most recent National Curriculum (2014).  Guidance given for Spoken Language is considerably less than that provided for 'Reading and Writing'.  Furthermore, Jones (2017; 506) points out 'traditional models including presentational talk, recitation of poetry and standard English are emphasized'.  Alongside the current high-stakes testing arrangements, focusing on Reading and Writing and therefore privileging written communication, it is unlikely that teachers will feel confident to spend time focusing on classroom talk. Whilst presentational talk is arguably an important area of focus, moving too quickly towards this goal may undermine the value and importance of exploratory talk where children can collectively share and capture emerging ideas. Exploratory talk is defined by Mercer (2002; 98) as follows:

> Exploratory talk is that in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas.  Relevant information is offered for joint consideration.  Proposals may be challenged and counter-challenged, but if so reasons are given and alternatives are offered.  Agreement is sought as a basis for joint progress.  Knowledge is made publically accountable and reasoning is visible in the talk.

## 2   What kinds of talk are seen as effective in enhancing pupil learning and what is their impact?

### 2.1 The quality teacher and pupil dialogue in classrooms

Talk plays a key role in learning (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). Studies have suggested that there is a relationship between the quality of classroom talk and pupil attainment in core subjects, for example in scientific understanding (Simon et al., 2008; Bennet et al., 2010). Oral language comprehension has been seen as a predictor of reading achievement (Lervag et al., 2018; Castles et al, 2018; Oakhill and Cain, 2012).  However, the extent to which talk can facilitate learning is highly contingent on the nature and quality of classroom talk. Teachers need to be skilled in making decisions about how best to promote talk between children (Littleton and Mercer, 2013) and conduct class discussion. The quality of teacher and pupil dialogue has been a topic of ongoing exploration and concern (see for example, Wells, 1985), particularly where this is teacher-dominated, includes very little child-initiated talk and is dominate by closed questions that may limit

higher-order thinking (Myhill, 2006). A prevalent pattern of teacher-pupil interactions, identified by Sinclair and Coulthard (1976) is *Initiation-Response-Feedback*. Where this pattern takes place, the teacher maintains control over the direction and content of the transaction, asking a (usually closed) question, gaining a short response, and providing a short evaluation of the child's answer. Indeed, the demands of managing interaction with large groups of children can lead to a focus on group attention, allocation of turn taking in speech and monitoring children's learning. The impact of over-reliance on this discourse pattern is that children fail to be engaged or stimulated in their thinking and extended exchanges that allow the joint construction of meaning, and therefore opportunity for pupil learning through talk, are limited.

## 2.1 Dialogic teaching

Research into oracy and its role in curriculum learning have continually emphasised the value of a dialogic approach. Drawing on analysis of classroom interactions in five countries, Alexander (2008) developed recommendations for 'dialogic teaching' that promote the use of teacher/pupil dialogue that is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful. For Alexander (2008, 104) a dialogic approach to classroom talk involves a classroom culture that is underpinned by five principles as follows:

- *collectivity* (teachers and children addressing learning tasks together rather than in isolation):
- *reciprocity* (teachers and children listening to each other, sharing ideas and considering alternative viewpoints);
- *support* (children articulating their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers and helping each other to reach common understanding);
- *cumulation* (teachers and children building on their own and each other's ideas and chaining them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry);
- *purposefulness* (teachers planning and facilitating dialogic teaching with particular educational goals in view).

Alexander (2008, 46) noted that a dialogic approach to pupil interaction had positive impact on children's oracy skills in that it helped them build on one another's ideas in an extended way, promoted attentive listening, facilitated the participation of all pupils as talk became less competitive, encouraged pupils to speak more readily and offer more detailed explanations and justification for their views. There is also evidence that children's reading and writing benefitted from a greater emphasis on dialogic talk. Classroom culture for talk is clearly a key feature of dialogic teaching. Boyd & Markarian (2011) suggest that teachers achieved a *dialogic stance* by showing genuine interest in what children have to say and cultivating a classroom ethos that encourages children and teachers to explore ideas together, where all children feel that their ideas will be respected.

In the current educational climate a dialogic pedagogy may be difficult to achieve. Snell (2017) highlighted how pressures of curriculum coverage and high-stakes testing and teacher and pupil habitual behaviours can create tensions which make dialogic pedagogy hard to maintain. Furthermore, as pointed out by Snell (2017) prevalent ideology suggests that linguistic 'ability' is fixed and context-dependent and children's participation in rich and cognitively challenging classroom discourse is focused on those

who are bright and articulate.  Those whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from the dominant language of schooling are at risk of being side-lined.

## 2.2  What are the potential benefits of a dialogic approach? Two examples.

*Dialogic Teaching (EEF funded project)*
This Key Stage 2 project, underpinned by the principles of dialogic teaching and promoting cognitive challenge through classroom talk took place in Year 5.  An Educational Endowment Funded project showed positive evaluation.  The trial showed that children in Dialogic Teaching schools made two additional months' progress in English and Science and one additional months progress in maths (See Jay et al., 2017). In addition, a Dialogic Teaching approach had positive effects on pupil confidence and engagement and was highly valued by schools.

*Philosophy for Children*
Once a week philosophy classes for children aged nine and 10 have been seen to significantly impact on children's maths and literacy skills.  Gorad et al (2015) found that pupils using the approach made approximately tow additional months' progress in reading and maths. Teachers and pupils viewed that the project had positive influence on pupils' confidence to speak, their listening skills and self-esteem. Teachers found that a challenge to implementing the approach was that it did not directly address schools' literacy and numeracy targets and so was difficult to find time for.

## 2.3  Current practices that reflect dialogic principles for talk.

Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) recommend that early years practitioners engage in 'sustained shared thinking' where children are encouraged to extend their ideas and elaborate on their thinking, prompting them to make hypothesis and reason.  Philosophy for children (Lipman et al., 1980) involves shared thinking around a stimulus, and the teachers' role operates as a facilitator, enabling but also working to stimulate and deepen discussion.

## 3.  Talk in the Early Years

The prime area of Communication and Language in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, gives clear guidance on the importance of supporting young children's early communication and language. As a prime area, it is given its rightful status.  Early communication is seen as essential for the development of thinking and reasoning, self regulation, behaviour and access to education. As is clearly stated in the Early Years Foundation Stage practice guidance Development Matters, children learn at different rates and in different ways: It is also clear that differences in different domains of language and in different samples of children's language will exist as a normal distribution (See Letts et al, 2013).

A number of research studies have suggested a relationship between children's SES background and their linguistic competence. This relationship should be regarded with extreme caution. Law et al. (2017) noted that there are very large numbers of children in what are considered the most socially disadvantaged groups who do not experience language difficulties and there are those in what are considered socially advantaged groups that do (see Law et al, 2017).  In addition, Letts et al. (2013) claim that to generalise that large proportions of disadvantaged pupils entering school with language

difficulties is overstating the position. Letts et al. (2013) draw into question the usefulness of commonly used categories of language delay where children's language has been measured through formal standardised test procedures. Letts et al's (2013) overall findings suggested that the correlation between SES and language delay was lower than in other studies, highlighting a modest relationship between disadvantaged and language performance in young children. Letts et al. (2013) suggest that well-informed classroom teachers and well-informed classroom teaching activities could be successfully implemented that would mitigate the need for clinical therapy services beyond those designed for children with specific language or phonological difficulties. However, there is evidence to suggest that those children who would benefit from additional support with language are not yet receiving appropriate support (Bercow Review – 10 Years On), and that access to speech and language therapy is inconsistent.

## 4. Summary and recommendations

From the literature consulted, the following recommendations are made.

- The status of oracy needs to be raised in the National Curriculum, and in particular it should acknowledge of the role between language and thinking, the role of exploratory talk and recognise and celebrate linguistic diversity.
- Practices to enhance oracy teaching in schools should be built on principles that value and celebrate children's home and community language experiences and are respectful and sensitive to the diversity of children's backgrounds.
- The teaching and learning of oracy should be seen as valuable in its own right and at the centre of the curriculum. Whilst there is evidence that suggests that oracy supports other educational goals (such as reading comprehension, writing, scientific reasoning, mathematics), fundamental principles of teaching oracy should not be neglected in service to such goals.
- While use of standard English is a desirable goal, this should be taught in the context of children learning about the appropriate and effective use of oral language in a variety of situations and contexts. In order to facilitate this, teachers need a good understanding of language in order that they can teach Knowledge about Language to children. High quality CPD oracy programmes are needed. The profile or oracy in Initial Teacher Training could to be raised.
- Communication and Language is only formally assessed and monitored in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Statutory assessment processes beyond the EYFS privilege written communication, and this can impact negatively on the status of oracy in schools. We recommend that a comprehensive assessment framework for Oracy is developed to guide teachers and give due recognition to the role of language in thinking and the co-construction of meaning.
- Communication and language is clearly a central goal for the Early Years Foundation Stage. There is evidence to suggest that early diagnosis and timely support for those children with language difficulties may be paramount to their school experience and success and that this is inconsistent across settings and schools. Importantly however, as highlighted by Letts et al (2013), any measure of child language should be interpreted with caution and ensure that differing profiles of child language in different domains does not overstate relationships

between social, cultural and economic factors and child language. Such viewpoints can serve to perpetuate deficit views of linguistic diversity. High quality training for practitioners in conjunction with organisations such as the Communication Trust, is recommended.

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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?