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.

- 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'

Full name: Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou

School or Organisation: School of Education, University of Bristol

Role: Lecturer in Psychology in Education

Written evidence:

Summary:

- *Children with speech, language and communication needs consistently experience poorer educational and social outcomes.*

- *Research suggests school staff do not feel adequately skilled in supporting language needs.*

- *There is a lack of evidence-based approaches to supporting language at a universal level. Although there is evidence that universal interventions are an effective means of intervention, they require highly trained and well supported staff.*

- *Little is known about factors that influence the implementation of universal language interventions in schools and factors that influence the continued*

investment in the implementation of universal language interventions in schools.

- *Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom (SSLiC) is a knowledge exchange programme aimed to support school professionals to embed oracy education in their school's policy and practice. By fostering a good language learning environment, it provides support for literacy, support for learning and ultimately promote positive academic outcomes for all children in a primary setting.*

- *Key learning points from the SSLiC pilot (2017-2018) in 10 primary schools in London and South East and 5 primary schools in Bristol (2019-2021) were reported in the first written evidence provided for the Oracy APPG inquiry. Here we report on factors that influence the implementation of universal language interventions in schools and factors that affect the continued investment of such interventions.*

- *Factors that influence the implementation of universal language interventions in schools include: a) having language and communication high in schools' priorities b) being grounded in the local context and the school's socioeconomic demographics, c) having the support of a 'specialist coach' or facilitator who can support with the development and implementation of the intervention as well as the evaluation, d) collaborative working amongst key stakeholders is encouraged and e) professional development of school staff is prioritised.*

- *Factors that influence the continued investment in the implementation of universal language interventions in schools include: a) the perceived impact of the intervention, b) evidence informed decision-making and c) clear future directions.*

Introduction

1. Research consistently highlights the poorer outcomes, both in terms of academic attainment and socio-emotional functioning, associated with low language levels. Difficulties persist throughout primary and secondary school. Research also highlights the links between socio-economic deprivation and poorer language skills. Alongside these difficulties, children

with language difficulties are often at a double disadvantage as research suggests school staff do not feel adequately skilled in supporting language needs. This is further worrying considering that Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) are the most prevalent area of educational need in mainstream primary schools.

Current context

2. There has been significant interest in understanding and enhancing provision for children with language needs, for example through the development of evidence-based tools for evaluating language interventions. However, few of these support language needs at a **universal level**. Interventions tend to address specific needs once identified rather than being preventative and universal.

3. There is evidence to suggest that universal support of language difficulties is an effective means of improving language for children. Ebbels et al. (2019) argued that for universal interventions to be effective, it is <u>imperative that staff are highly trained and well-supported</u>.

4. Despite the identification of the need for a highly skilled workforce, research highlights a variability in practitioners' awareness of terminology and understanding of language needs. Furthermore, there are few measures that educational practitioners might use to identify language difficulties. An answer to this has been the call for more training however, many complex factors affect the translation of training into more effective practice.

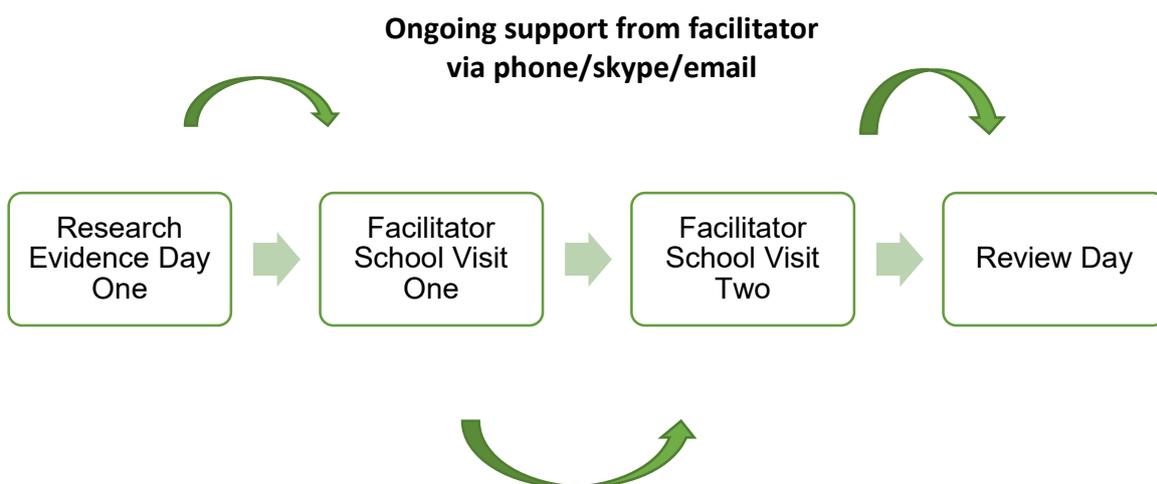*Developing educational practitioners' practice*

5. Professional development (PD) for educational staff can include taught courses, attendance at conferences etc and there is significant variability in terms of duration, intensity and participation. However, there is limited evidence as to the effectiveness of some PD.

6. Research has tried to identify factors which lead to more effective outcomes with some studies highlighting the important role of coaching. Nueman and Cunningham (2009) identified that the inclusion of a coaching element to PD resulted in improved language and literacy practices for teachers.

The Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom (SSLiC) Programme

7. The Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom Programme (SSLiC) supports researchers and educational practitioners to work collaboratively over a sustained period to investigate how the evidence base related to oral language might be applied to individual schools. The aim of the programme is to explore how this knowledge might inform the wider community of 'what works' in schools for children. The SSLiC programme was developed by researchers at UCL Centre for Inclusive Education (Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou and Dr Joanna Vivash with the collaboration of Professor Julie Dockrell, Mrs Gill Brackenbury and Dr Karl Wall) and sought to provide a forum for knowledge exchange between practitioners and researchers by introducing practitioners to the evidence base available for supporting spoken language for all children in primary schools and providing evidence-informed tools to audit the practitioner school's current strengths and areas for development. In turn, the SSLiC Programme aimed to utilise the educational practitioners' knowledge to inform future research and further development of the SSLiC Programme.

8. The SSLiC Programme's activities are illustrated below:

Structure of the SSLiC Programme Across 9 months

Ongoing support from facilitator via phone/skype/email

| Research Evidence Day One | → | Facilitator School Visit One | → | Facilitator School Visit Two | → | Review Day |

9. To support this process, the SSLiC programme has identified five evidence-informed domains around which schools can focus professional development and learning. These include: a) Language Leadership, b) Staff Professional Development and Learning, c) Communication Supporting Classrooms, d) Identifying and Supporting Speech, Language and Communication Needs, e) Working with parents and external agencies.

10. 10 primary schools across London and the south east participated in the SSLiC programme across the 2017-2018 academic year. Each school had access to the most up to date research findings, a school self-assessment audit tool, an evidence-based classroom observation tool (Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool, BCRP) and received regular support from facilitators with research and school practitioner backgrounds.

Factors that influence the implementation of universal language interventions in schools

11. Our study identified four factors which influence the implementation of universal language interventions in educational settings. These included:

12. **A) Universal language interventions should be grounded in local context and supported by the school's strategy:**

   Having language and communication high in schools' priorities aided the success of the programme. Our participants frequently referred to language and communication being 'high priority' and part of the School Improvement Plan.

   Our study also points to the fact that school-based language related projects need to take into consideration the local context and issues of the school's socio-economic demographics, such as the number of children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND), those with English as an Additional Language (EAL), and socio-economic status of the students and their families the school caters for.

   Finally, an important factor appeared to be how schools could utilize the strengths and existing practice within their school systems to drive additional

language-related interventions. Building on existing whole school practice, participants in our study identified strengths within their own and others proactive that supported their rationale for implementing a universal language intervention in their school.

13. **B) Universal language interventions should include support from a 'specialist coach'/facilitator**:

The SSLiC facilitator was seen as a 'specialist coach' and was key in supporting schools in the creation, implementation and monitoring of their school's Action Plan, and was described as an ongoing resource for any issues or questions they had. Our participants particularly valued the facilitator's academic and practitioner experience and their ability to translate complex research literature into accessible and relevant materials for participants.

Participants also discussed the facilitator's key role in supporting schools with the evaluation and research element of the programme. Knowledge and understanding of research methodology and supporting schools to gather evidence of impact was considered a key element of the support received by the facilitator.

14. **C) Collaborative working should be encouraged to support successful implementation of the universal language intervention:**

Collaborative working was emphasized by all participants as one of the key factors which affected the implementation of the SSLiC programme in their setting. A key example of collaborative working was the formation of a Communication Team which included key members of staff and whose role was to champion the importance of communication and prioritise actions related to the improvement of communication outcomes for children. Representation of school senior leaders in Communication Teams enabled better strategic planning within their setting by identifying communication priorities for the school development plan.

Collaborative working was also illustrated through examples of school staff working together across different levels or small working teams and provided them with opportunities to provide constructive feedback to identify areas for

personal and school development and address these in everyday teaching practice.

Collaborative working finally included work between school staff and parents and between school staff and external agencies (like Speech and Language Therapy Services, Educational Psychology Services).

15. **D) Universal language interventions need to prioritise school staff's professional development:**

Our study highlighted the benefits of school staff participating in a universal language intervention and accessing good quality professional development which was directly linked to their role in the setting. Different approaches of professional development were identified by programme participants: staff meetings and in house arranged INSET trainings were the most common form of professional development in participating schools. Some schools also used the model of mentoring between more experienced members of staff and newly qualified staff to develop practice. A lesson study approach was also used by one school to develop opportunities for collaborative talk.

Underpinning most SSLiC school-based projects has been the process of using a robust and repeatable observation tool (CSCOT) as a means of professional development with a focus on regular opportunities to provide peer feedback and subsequent goal setting. The use of such tools supported schools to make more evidenced-informed decisions.

Another approach to professional development was highlighted as a result of the final SSLiC Review Day held at the end of the SSLiC Programme. Programme participants reported that they found the SSLiC Review Day to be particularly beneficial in terms of practitioners learning about other schools' projects, taking ideas and sharing resources with other schools.

Factors that influence the continued investment in the implementation of universal language interventions in schools

16. **A) Perception of Impact**

Perceived impact or potential impact of the programme influenced decisions over continued investment. Participants described impacts across a range of systems including impacts on:

- individuals, for example outcomes on pupil literacy
- school teams, e.g. impact on staff's skills in supporting children's oral language
- external agencies; for example improved relationships between teachers and external agencies such as Speech and Language Therapists were noted and the perceived impact of the SSLiC programme on the school community was also discussed.

17.B) Evidenced Informed Decision Making

The role of evidence to inform decisions was a key component affecting continued implementation of universal language interventions. This included how participants discussed using research, the ways in which they gathered data at the start of their school's project and how this was used to subsequently evaluate the projects at the end.

Firstly, school staff valued research evidence when this is provided to them before implementing the SSLiC programme.

Schools used evidence-based tools provided as a means of informing the direction of their school's projects. Data gathering was repeated throughout each school's project as a means of adequately measuring the impact of the changes being implemented.

Despite this importance, schools reported that they needed support in how best to capture the impact which had occurred in order to support further investment in the SSLiC projects.

Further, it was noteworthy how important it was to the participants to share with other schools their findings in order to validate their approach and to also gain insights into what others have done. Arguably, it is this iterative process which promotes the continued investment in universal language interventions.

18. C) A planned future direction

There was a general theme that whilst the SSLiC Programme had come to an end, there was still more work that the participants wanted to undertake. Participants advocated taking an iterative approach to continuously improve on their work. The continued investment of implementing universal language interventions appears dependent on participants valuing what has been put in place and having a planned future direction so that change could be sustained and the momentum could be maintained.

Key publications

Bakopoulou, I., & Vivash, J. (in preparation). Learning from the Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom Programme pilot: What does it take to achieve whole school impact. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders.*

Bakopoulou, I., & Vivash, J. (2019). *Pilot of Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom Impact Case Studies 2017-2018.* Centre for Inclusive Education, UCL Institute of Education.

Dockrell, J., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 31(3),*

Ebbels, S.H., McCartney, E., Slomins, V., Dockrell, J.E., Frazier Norbury, C. (2019). Evidence-based pathways to intervention for children with language disorders. *International Journal in Language and Communication Disorders, 54 (1),* 3-19.

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?